

DEPUTIES REPORTS

(as mandated by Synod Baldivis 2015)

to the

2018 Synod

of the

Free Reformed Churches of Australia

to be held at

Southern River, Western Australia

June 2018

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General Secretary's Report

Activities

A number of correspondence items were received and forwarded on to all the churches for their attention. These all came via email and no items were received as a hard copy.

The Deputies reports to synod are being typeset by sr K van Duyn this year and will be printed in a similar format as for previous synods. The churches were requested to indicate the number of copies they required. A number of copies of the bound volume of the reports will be made available to the Free Reformed bookshops for sale at cost.

FRCA Web Site

The web site of the FRCA has been the responsibility of the General Deputies since 2003. Br M. Pot has been an able and diligent webmaster who has maintained the site. The website continues to be a central portal for a significant number of churches and church organisations, many churches use email aliases and email distribution lists at frca.org.au, and new material is added as required.

Investigations will continue into possible improvements.

Recommendations

Synod Bunbury discharges current deputies and reappoints new deputies with a renewed mandate:

- be responsible for the website of the FRCA
- acknowledge correspondence not applicable to deputies, and if necessary to pass it on to the churches
- collate all deputies reports (apart from that of the Treasurer) and have them printed in a bound format similar to that for the Acts. Deputies' reports are to be submitted in an appropriate format six months prior to the

General Secretary's Report

- next synod so that they can be printed and distributed to the churches as per the Rules of Synod.

J. den Boer

M. Pot

General Secretary Deputies

Deputies for Sister Church Relations (Canada, Netherlands, South Africa, South Korea)

Overall report to Synod Bunbury 2018

With thankfulness to the Lord your deputies were able to engage with the mandate given to us by Synod Baldivis 2015. Your deputies formally met ten times between September 2015 and December 2017. Of the deputies appointed by Synod, br. M. ten Haaf requested to be relieved from his task in March 2016 and he was replaced with the first alternate, br. P. Witten. Although br. Witten is from Albany and the other deputies from the Perth Metropolitan region, meetings could be scheduled around his relatively frequent trips to Perth and he was therefore able to fully participate as a deputy.

Over the last three years official visits were made to the General Synods/Assemblies of our sister churches in Canada, the Netherlands, South Africa and South Korea. In addition (and at no further cost to the churches) a visit could be made to the Synod of the URCNA as well as a separate visit to South Korea, primarily to investigate their missionary work (c.f. Acts of Synod Baldivis art. 71.) These visits, along with other face-to-face meetings with deputies from our sister churches and those we've been mandated to be in contact with were of critical importance to the manner in which we were able to fulfill our mandate.

A letter was received from the ICRC, dated July 14, 2016 inviting the FRCA to send observers to the 2017 meeting of the ICRC. Since this fell outside of our mandate we did not act on this letter. It is perhaps noteworthy that one of our deputies, Rev. 't Hart, attended a regional conference of the ICRC in Seoul in a non-representative, individual capacity (unfunded). This helped us gain a deeper understanding of the Reformed & Presbyterian churches in Korea, and he could also meet with delegates from our sister churches in Korea, Canada, Indonesia, New Zealand and the Netherlands.

Synod Baldivis, Article 131

Synod Baldivis requested “that the Deputies for Sister Churches consider the merits of separating the sister church deputyships.” We assume that this request is in light of the fact that the deputyships for the GGRI (and other Indonesian churches), RCNZ and FERC of Singapore are separate to the Deputies for Sister Churches and whether or not they should remain so.

The decision to keep our Indonesian sister churches as a separate deputyship has been a long-standing practice. We have had no interaction with the Indonesian deputies, but would recommend that this deputyship remains separate to the other sister churches.

With respect to the RCNZ and the FERC Singapore we recommend that these be absorbed into the one deputyship for sister church relations. Our reasons for this recommendation are:

1. In a larger deputyship, the various deputies can learn from one another and can give advice regarding questions that come up with respect to a specific sister church.
2. When attending the Synod of one sister church, it is normally possible to meet deputies from other sister churches.
3. With sufficient deputies, our deputyship is able to assume responsibility for more sister churches.
4. If there is just one deputyship for all sister churches (with the exception of Indonesia), the total number of deputies required is less than when we keep the RCNZ and the FERC Singapore separate. With the anticipated reduction in the work required with respect to the Netherlands, it should be possible to limit the number of deputies for sister churches to 8 brothers. [Work is divided up within the deputyship. A possible way to do this would be: i] North America – 2 deputies; ii] South

Africa & Netherlands – 2 deputies; iii] Singapore & Korea – 2 deputies; iv] New Zealand – 2 deputies.]

One of the potential downsides of having all sister churches (except Indonesia) in one deputyship is that we have regularly had our deputies selected from the one geographical location. One solution to this, however, is for the deputies to come from two separate geographical locations (e.g. the Perth metropolitan region & Albany) and have both combined and separate deputyship meetings. The use of file-sharing methods such as *Dropbox* and Skype conference calls can also mitigate the distance.

Conclusion

As deputies we could work harmoniously and well together throughout the last three years. Although we are saddened with the developments in the RCN it was, overall a joy to complete the work we were mandated to do. Of the six deputies, we note that brothers W. Pleiter and W. Spyker have completed three terms (of three years). Their wisdom and dedication to this work has been highly valued by the other deputies.

Respectfully submitted,

W. Pleiter (deputy since 2009)

W. Spyker (deputy since 2009)

R.D. Anderson (deputy since 2012)

S. 't Hart (deputy since 2012)

A. Hagg (deputy since 2015)

P. Witten (deputy since 2016)

Relations Churches Abroad

Abbreviations

CanRC Canadian Reformed Churches

DGK De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland

FERC First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

FRCA Free Reformed Churches of Australia

FRCSA Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

Deputies for Sister Church Relations

GGRC Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvin
GGRI Gereja Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia
KPCK Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea
GKN Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland, formerly Voorlopig
Kerkverband.
NGK Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken
OPC Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA)
RCN Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
RCNZ Reformed Churches of New Zealand
URCNA United Reformed Churches of North America

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

Decision and Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 128) decided the following with respect to the FRCSA:

1. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. coordinate responses to any requests for support received from the Deputies for Needy Churches in South Africa, and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate;
 - c. keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta;
 - d. send two delegates to the next FRCSA Synod in 2017.
2. Synod appreciates the clarification given by the delegates from the FRCSA and the DGK that the DGK did not require the FRSCA to sever the relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches as a precondition for closer relations.

Grounds

1. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

3. Our South African sister churches request ongoing financial support. Such support should be coordinated and the churches kept informed. Financial accountability of the support provided is important.

Execution of mandate

Mandate (1) – Needy churches support

Deputies have continued to coordinate requests for support received from the Deputies Needy Churches (DNC) in South Africa. We may thankfully report that, over the past 3 years, each of the local FRCA congregations have contributed to such requests. Deputies have kept all the FRCA Consistories updated by way of an annual letter and cashflow statement.

Payments are remitted to the South African deputies every 6 months. Over the past 3 years (1 July 2014 to 30 June 2017), a total of AUD \$126,927.64 was remitted. Our own account balance (of reserve funds) as at 30 June 2017 was AUD \$39,784.72.

Due to the Bethal congregation being dissolved and a higher number of vacancies, the number of needy churches in South Africa has gone down to just one (1) and so the need for financial support for needy churches has decreased from 1.2 million rand six years ago to between 200,000 and 500,000 rand today. (10 rand is approximately AU\$1.) On the one hand that is reason for great thankfulness; on the other hand the number of vacancies in the FRCSA is reason for concern.

As a result of these vacancies, the focus in our South African sister churches has in recent times become theological training and mentorship. In 2015, the church in Pretoria, in liaison with Deputies Curators, called Rev. Breytenbach as a missionary with special tasks in the fields of theological training, training of pastors and elders, and services to mission churches, including to mentor theological students. Funding for this is being provided partially by the Mission Deputies of South Africa, and partially by the Deputies Needy Churches.

This has been somewhat of a quandary for your deputies as well as for Deputies Art. 11 (needy churches) of South Africa. Our mandate specifically states that your deputies are to “coordinate responses to any requests for support received from the *Deputies for Needy Churches* in South Africa, and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate.” (Acts of Synod Baldivis, art. 128, adopted proposal 3b.) It is evident, however, that the more recent need is not “Needy Churches” per se, but rather for the purpose of mission and theological training.

We remain satisfied that the financial needs among our sister churches is real, and that they are seeking to address their internal needs in the best possible way. We were willing to continue to collect funds and send them to South Africa on the basis that a) the theological training and mentorship was fulfilling a much needed role in the FRCSA and that the FRCSA itself did not have sufficient funds to support this work; b) the “spirit” of the support given to the FRCSA is that we, out of love for our sister, want their lack to be filled by the abundance the Lord has given us.

The need in this area is ongoing. The most recent Synod Soshanguve could foresee the need for financial support for their ramped-up theological training program. In a letter to your deputies dated October 17, 2017, the South African deputies for Needy Churches wrote, “We would therefore request that the Australian Needy Churches deputies request the Australian Synod on extending the mandate not to only “South African needy Churches” but to “South African Needy Churches and Training.”

There is also the possibility that in the future there will be a need for the FRCSA to seek alternative funding for some of their mission work. Accordingly, if Synod Bunbury decides to mandate your deputies to continue to coordinate responses to any requests for financial help from within the FRCSA, we request that there be sufficient flexibility in that mandate to include support for ministers appointed as missionaries or theological teachers. We would only propose, however, to deal

with official requests as may come from FRCSA Synod appointed deputies.

Mandate (2) – Keep churches informed

As was done in previous years, various letters were written to Consistories, keeping the churches informed of the requests for support and of the amount of support requested. The churches responded generously to all requests for support.

A visit to Synod Soshanguve was published in Una Sancta for the benefit of the members of the FRCA.

Mandate (3) – Synod Soshanguve 2017

Deputies sent Rev. A. Hagg and S. 't Hart to attend Synod Soshanguve of the FRCSA, which was held from August 7-11, 2017. This Synod was addressed, with the speech being **Attachment 1**. A report of the visit is found at **Attachment 2**.

During the visit to Synod Soshanguve, the deputies also had the opportunity to visit various churches of the FRCSA in the Pretoria region. The ever-strengthening bonds between the FRCSA and the FRCA were very evident, and there is broad appreciation in South Africa for the meaningful sister church relationship we enjoy.

Conclusion

The Deputies continue to be thankful for the mutual support and encouragement that we may give to and receive from the FRCSA. The FRCSA is grateful for our prayers as well as financial support. They were also grateful for the support given by Rev. Dr. R.D Anderson, minister of the FRC Rockingham, who spent some time in 2015 giving support in training theological students. Further, our attendance at and contribution to the FRCSA Synod was appreciated. Although the specific request to financially support needy churches within the FRCSA is no longer pressing, there is a growing need to financially support the training of students within South Africa. This includes the current mentoring of theological students by Rev. Breytenbach. The FRCSA is small in number and faced with various challenges, but they continue to demonstrate a

strong desire to hold fast to the Word of God and to preach and teach the truth of this Word in their churches and to others in South Africa and beyond. Deputies recommend that sister-church relations be maintained and that deputies continue to coordinate official requests for assistance.

Recommendations

1. To continue sister relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa according to the established rules.
2. To appoint the Deputies Auditor for Synod Treasurer to audit the financial records of the support provided and report to the next Synod.
3. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. send two delegates to the next FRCSA synod in 2021;
 - c. coordinate responses to any requests for support from Deputies within the FRCSA (including either Needy Churches or Theological Training) and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate;
 - d. keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta.

Grounds

1. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.

Reformed Churches of South Africa

2. Our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.
3. Our South African churches request ongoing financial support as they continue on a road to self-sustainability. Whereas in the past this support was required for needy churches, due to the increase in vacancies the need for support has shifted to include theological training. Such support should be coordinated and the churches kept informed and financial accountability of the support provided is important.

Appendix 1 – FRCA Speech for FRCSA Synod

FRCA speech to FRCSA Synod commencing 7 August 2017

Brother Chairman, delegates, brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ:

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, it is our privilege to offer you heartfelt greetings. We thank you for your kind invitation to attend your Synod Soshanguve North.

Joy

Your invitation mentioned that Synod will convene at the “Pure Joy Lodge and Conference Centre.” It is our hope and prayer that our interaction and fellowship at this Synod may reflect this name, that it may result in an experience of “pure joy” as we seek to assist and encourage one another.

The Scriptures speak often of Joy. Many of the Psalms refer to how we as God’s people may “shout for joy and be glad” as we reflect on His goodness and grace toward us. Indeed, what greater happiness can we have than to dwell in God’s presence. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that we may experience in our lives at all times, even in times of trouble. For we may even count it joy when we fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance. Indeed, we may rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory as we believe in our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We thank God for the close contact that we may continue to enjoy as sister-churches. We have a common heritage that goes back many years, not only to the post-war migration from the Netherlands and the establishment of our respective churches in the 1950’s, but in this year 2017 we may also reflect on the 500 years since God in His grace brought His people and church back to His Word, Sola Scriptura. May we as fellow churches stand side by side as we support each other in remaining faithful as churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May we, in the unity of true faith, use our ongoing relationship to our mutual benefit, that we may assist and encourage one another to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3)

Thank you for sending br Hans Moes as your delegate to our most recent Synod Baldivis. It was good to welcome this brother, to receive his input into our discussions, and to become better acquainted with your churches. Face-to-face interaction certainly helps to promote a deeper understanding of your church situation and also serves to strengthen the harmonious relationship that exists between us.

Over the years we have been able to reflect on the increasing contact between our two church federations. Largely this has been the result of migration from South Africa to Australia – your loss has been our gain. And indeed the connections continue to grow closer, as for the first time we may now send a delegate who is South African born.

FRCA developments

Over the past 3 years our federation has remained stable with 16 congregations and a steady growth in total membership to around 4,750. There has continued to be movement in the ministerial ranks, with the retirement of Revs vanderJagt and VanDelden. Indeed, our federation is now blessed with a number of emeritus ministers, who continue to be actively involved in many ways in church life. Among their number we may now also count your own retired Rev Kleijn.

Many of our incoming ministers continue to be sourced from our sister-churches in Canada. Over the past 3 years we have received 5 in total, with Rev W Bredenhof in Launceston, Rev D Winkel in Bunbury, Rev R Bredenhof in Mt Nasura, Rev A Souman in Kelmscott and just recently Rev R Eikelboom in Byford. In addition we have also received Rev R deJonge as missionary in Papua New Guinea, at around the same time as Rev I Wildeboer left the field after many years of faithful service. Sadly, we also had the painful experience of one minister being deposed from office. In total, our federation now experiences just two vacancies.

All in all, we are greatly blessed by the provision of ministers from our Canadian sister-churches. We also continue to make use of their federational seminary, the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. In this regard, however, our last Synod Baldivis did appoint deputies to investigate the feasibility of establishing our own Australian Theological Seminary. The grounds for this study are that it may become practically necessary for us to engage in our own theological training should the use of the CRTS become unavailable to us, and further that the Church Order provides that the churches shall, if possible, maintain an institution for the training of the ministry. We note that this item also features prominently on your Synod agenda, and hope that we may benefit from your discussions in this regard.

Our Synod Baldivis 2015 also made a number of significant decisions with respect to inter-church relations. With great thankfulness to the Lord, we were able to extend an offer of sister-church relations to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and also the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Synod also mandated our deputies to provide the URCNA with information about our churches, to take up contact with the URCNA and to provide our next Synod with a recommendation on how to proceed. With sadness, however, our Synod Baldivis decided to suspend our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). This decision was made with deep sorrow, and was based upon the ongoing toleration of Scriptural and Confessional deviation evident within this federation. Unfortunately, the recent decisions of Synod Ede have not alleviated any of our concerns and give further evidence of this deviation. We regularly pray that God may in His grace awaken a new faithfulness within our Dutch sister-churches and cause them to repent and return to Him.

This time of sadness can also provide cause for serious reflection for our own churches and church federations. Are we being influenced by the trends and philosophy of the world around us? Are we compromising the gospel message to remove the rock of offense? Are we pushing the envelope of

our confessions to be seen as more relevant to our culture and palatable to our members? Our prayer for greater faithfulness in the RCN requires that we too, are ever watchful for the attacks of the evil one in the life and doctrine of our church members.

Needy Churches

We have over the past 3 years continued to enjoy regular contact with your deputies for needy churches. Our most recent Synod again mandated our deputies to coordinate responses to any requests for support received from your deputies for needy churches. Our churches have happily responded to such requests and we have willingly assisted you, recognising the Lord's abundant blessings to us.

We wish to point out, however, that our support is only to be used towards needy churches. In this regard, we have indicated on a number of occasions that our support is not to be seen as for an individual project or minister, but rather as a general contribution towards the fund of your Deputies for Needy Churches (Art 11). In the event that your Needy Churches Fund does not require further funding, then our support will cease.

Conclusion

Brothers, it is good to be here to share warm greetings from your sister across the ocean. May we say again that we are very thankful for your invitation to attend at this Synod and for this opportunity to address you. May God bless your deliberations and decisions, to the praise of His glory and for the benefit of His church.

In conclusion we may jointly encourage each other with the words of Hebrews 12:1,2: *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

With Christian greetings,
Revs A Hagg and S 'tHart
Deputies for Sister-Church Relations

Appendix 2 – Report on visit to South Africa: August 2017

Synod Baldivis (Art. 128) continued sister-church relations with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) and mandated deputies to send two delegates to their next General Synod. This decision was grounded on the observation that the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order and also that our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

To this end, the undersigned attended Synod Soshanguve, which was held over 5 days from Mon, 7 to Friday 11 August. Your deputies were in South Africa from August 5, giving them the opportunity to attend church services in Pretoria, Pretoria-Maranatha and Johannesburg, as well as the Prayer Service for Synod in Soshanguve. This, in addition to many personal conversations enabled us to gain a deeper appreciation for our South African sister churches, for the blessings they experience and the challenges they face.

Synod Soshanguve

Synod was convened by the Free Reformed Church of Soshanguve. This church is the result of local mission work, and is currently vacant. The prayer service was led by Dr. Arjan de Visser, the first missionary to Soshanguve and now professor at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. The service had a strong African flavour and was in both English and Sotho.

Elected as moderamen were Rev P Boon as chairman, br. H. Pouwels as vice-chairman, and Br E Bijker as clerk.

Foreign delegates were present from the Canadian Reformed Churches (Dr. A. de Visser & Br. O. Bouwman), Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Rev. J. Schreuder & Br. A. Pedro) and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (Rev. A. Hagg & Rev. S. 't Hart). As delegates we were welcomed not only as delegates but also “advisors”, and we were invited to participate freely in Synod deliberations.

Contact with Churches in South Africa

In contrast to our relative isolation, the FRCSA maintain various levels of contact with a number of church federations in South Africa. The most meaningful contact continues to be with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (also known as the Dopper Churches and, in Afrikaans, the GKSA). On a local level the Free Reformed Churches of Pretoria recognize the Reformed Churches of Kandelaar, Totiusdal and Oost Moot as true and faithful churches and there is close contact and cooperation between them. On a federation level however, the relationship has been cooler, due to the diversity found in the Dopper churches. The Deputies' report highlighted a number of concerns, focusing on the relationship between the RCSA and the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, the acceptance of women to the office of deacon within the RCSA (although the deacons are not received as part of the consistory and the RCSA has recently decided against the ordination of women to the office of minister and elder), and the new versification of the Psalms accepted for use in the RCSA that the FRCSA finds theologically unacceptable. Although in their report the deputies were somewhat pessimistic about growing closer with the RCSA to the point of unification, the feeling at Synod was more positive and they decided to continue their discussions in the hope of greater unity between the two federations. This was also the plea made by representatives of the Dopper Churches in their address to Synod Soshanguve.

Synod Soshanguve also received greetings from Dr. Andries Hoffman on behalf of the Dutch Reformed Church of Africa. This relatively small bond of churches is to be distinguished from the larger and more liberal Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa. Synod decided to become better acquainted with these churches in order to support each other in maintaining the true faith. Opportunities for cooperation were seen especially with respect to the training for the ministry.

Synod also repeated the decision of previous synods to mandate deputies to maintain contacts with English speaking churches with whom there is cooperation in matters such as

theological training. Synod also encouraged the local churches to establish contact with churches using other languages in their vicinity, who show evidence of being faithful to Scripture in doctrine and life.

Contact with the FRCA

Greetings from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia were given and we assured the Synod of our ongoing support for the FRCSA and for the strengthening of their churches. The FRCSA feel very small, marginalized and lacking in resources and they therefore deeply appreciate the support they have received from us and are greatly encouraged by it. Following a positive report on the FRCA by their deputies, Synod adopted the following decision regarding their relationship with the FRCA:

1. To continue the sister church relation with the FRCA according to the adopted rules.
2. To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Bunbury mid-2018 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

Grounds

1. The FRCA give evidence of continued faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
2. Personal visits are an effective means of developing, maintaining and building good sister church relations.
3. Both the FRCA and the FRCSA are small church federations with a similar background and some similar challenges. By maintaining good contacts and by learning from each other, both church federations will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of Christ in a secular world.

Contact with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands

The RCN sent two delegates to the FRCSA Synod, Rev. Joop Schreuder and br. Alexander Pedro. These brothers

represented the RCN, explaining their churches' position and defending the RCN's interests. In his address to Synod, br. Alexander Pedro pleaded with the FRCSA that they don't be hasty in their reaction to the recent decision of the RCN Synod to allow women to be ordained in all ecclesiastical offices. In following discussions, the FRCSA were urged to stand with the many faithful members of the RCN who want to see this decision appealed at the next Synod. The benefits the FRCSA continue to receive from the RCN were also emphasised. The Press Release from Synod Soshanguve summarized the discussion and decision regarding the RCN as follows:

This synod decision of our sister churches lead to long deliberations on how to proceed with the relationship in future. At the one hand there is gratitude that these churches want to remain Reformed, support us as FRCSA in prayers, access to Reformed literature and the huge support in mission and other projects. On the other hand there is concern and sadness about the direction these churches took with the allowance of women in office. It is evident that previous calls not to follow the new hermeneutic approach (a new way of using Scripture which undermines the infallibility and clarity of Scripture), were not listened to. Also the Scriptural arguments against opening the offices were not taken seriously.

To a question whether we as FRCSA could have done more to warn the RCN and call against opening the offices, the Dutch deputies BBK who attended our synod answered that we had done everything possible.

A decision was taken that our synod will write a letter to the next RCN synod in 2020, enquiring what synod (and deputies BBK) had done with our arguments.

A consequences of this change in the RCN is that the ecclesiastical fellowship will be partially limited: members from the RCN who want to partake in the Lord's Supper, will only be admitted after having talked about the issues that concern us with regards to the RCN. Also pastors of the RCN will only be allowed on a FRCSA pulpit, after

having talked on their viewpoint regarding amongst others women and the ecclesiastical offices. Furthermore a local church can only proceed to call a pastor from the RCN, after concurring advice of classis. In this way the Lord's table and the pulpit will be guarded against what is in conflict with Scripture and confession. Synod expressed the ardent hope that the RCN will come back from their decisions with regards to women in office, and the reunion with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, since a sister church relationship will otherwise become untenable.

Your FRCA deputies observed that the ties between the FRCSA and the RCN appear stronger than between the FRCA and the RCN. Reasons for that would include closer family connections between the two church federations, more use of Dutch ministers and missionaries and the substantial mission work being done by the RCN in South Africa.

With respect to the DGK and the GKN in the Netherlands, Synod upheld the previous decision not to work towards entering an ecclesiastical relationship with either church federation at this time, but they will continue to investigate the GKN. Members of the DGK or the GKN would be received to the Lord's Supper in a church of the FRCSA, but only after an official discussion with such a member.

Contact with other Churches outside of South Africa

In their greetings to the South African churches the Canadian delegates reflected on their churches in Canada and their strong relationship with the FRCSA. The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary is also offering substantial support for the training for the ministry of South African students. The Canadian delegates also expressed their deep concern with the RCN liberated and their decision to open all special offices to women. Synod Soshanguve decided to continue the sister-church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, being particularly thankful for the help being offered by the CanRC with respect to the training for the ministry.

With respect to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, Synod was asked by the church of Maranatha, Pretoria, to investigate the possibilities of entering a sister-church relationship with them. Synod decided not to enter into such a relationship at this time due to a lack of manpower, but they mandated their deputies to stay informed about the RCNZ via their sister churches.

It was decided to continue their membership with the International Conference of the Reformed Churches (ICRC). The Synod Press released noted that “Appreciation was expressed for how this conference guarded the Reformed doctrine, as proved by suspending the membership of the RCN due to their opening of the ecclesiastical offices for women.”

Bible translation, worship and sacraments

A new literal translation of the Bible into Afrikaans is underway. The FRCSA are following this work with keen interest since the last literal translation was done in 1933 and the language has changed significantly since then. The work done on this translation thus far has been positively received; the churches will await the publication of this new translation before deciding whether or not to adopt it for use in the churches.

With respect to liturgical music, 10 new hymns were approved for use in the church services, but a decision to approve a further 29 Canticles was postponed to a future Synod. Work is also ongoing with respect to producing a number of new form prayers.

A request was forwarded on to Synod for the administration of the Lord’s Supper in the homes of those who cannot attend the church services due to terminal illness. It was recognised that this would only be done in exceptional cases. It was also recognised that administering the Lord’s Supper at home can be problematic and it does, in certain circumstances, encourage a superstitious view of the sacrament. Synod decided that the simultaneous celebration of the Lord’s Supper in two places (the local church and in a home via audio/video link) was

acceptable, provided it was done within the parameters of the Church Order.

Mission

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands provide about 95% of the approximately \$650,000 annual funding required for the substantial amount of mission work being undertaken in South Africa. The way in which this support is now given has changed and it is anticipated that this support will continue even if the relationship with the RCN is cut. Your Australian (and the Canadian) deputies expressed some concern regarding the heavy reliance on funding from the Dutch Churches for their mission work. Although it is understood that the South African churches direct mission policy, it is important to note that the definition of Mission has changed in the Netherlands. Whereas we have traditionally understood mission as “the proclamation of the gospel in word and deed, where the Word has priority, and the deed supports the preaching of the Word”, a more modern way of thinking is that Word and Deed are equal. “God is building His kingdom in this world,” it is said, “and we are called to join in doing that.” Here, the proclamation of the gospel and social work are equally seen as important, with the result being a social gospel. This can be found in the new Agreement of Cooperation that the FRCSA synod were required to sign with the Dutch, where *missional* was defined to mean “Glorifying and proclaiming the name of our Lord on earth, in the unity of evangelism, hence in word and deed, worldwide.” The Synod decided to tell their Dutch supporters that they would continue to maintain a classical understanding of the word *Missional*, which is, “the proclamation of the gospel in Word and deed with the goal that unbelievers come to repentance, the church be planted and God’s name be glorified.”

Theological Training

The FRCSA face significant challenges when it comes to both training and attracting ministers of the Word. Due to immigration and visa constraints, it is extremely difficult for them to call a non South African to be a minister in their churches.

Another challenge they have is that different theological students come with vastly different educational backgrounds and it isn't possible for all students to be accepted at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton. It is the stated intention, however, that as much as possible, all theological students be trained to the same level. To achieve this, it is necessary to provide theological teaching in South Africa itself. The CRTS is willing to support this by means of recorded lectures and class notes, as well as yearly visits from CRTS professors. More resources are needed to make this work, however, and so Synod agreed to the need for an "anchor theologian" who would present and facilitate the program. The South African churches do look to their sister churches in Canada (particularly) and Australia to assist them in this. In the future financial support may also be requested.

Needy Churches

Due to the Bethal congregation being dissolved and a higher number of vacancies, the number of needy churches in South Africa has gone down to just one and so the need for financial support for needy churches has decreased from 1.2 million rand six years ago to between 200,000 and 500,000 rand today. (10 rand is approximately AU\$1.) On the one hand that is reason for great thankfulness; on the other hand the number of vacancies in the FRCSA is reason for concern. The financial support received from Australia as of late has gone to a church in Pretoria for the support of Rev. Breytenbach, who is called to mentor theological students and support the training for the ministry. This has been somewhat of a quandary for the Australian deputies as well as the South African Deputies Art. 11 as it stretches the definition of what a "needy church" is and technically falls outside of the mandate of the FRCSA deputies for needy churches. Synod decided to instruct the South African Deputies Art. 11 to write to our Synod explaining their current need for financial assistance and to appoint Deputies Art. 11 to continue to coordinate whatever assistance is received from us.

Conclusion

Synod Soshanguve was completed within a week, but it was a long week with weighty discussions on a number of matters. What was abundantly evident throughout the Synod, however, was a mutual submission to the Word of God as confessed in the Reformed confessions and a united desire to serve the churches for their good and for God's glory. The FRCSA clearly value their relationship with us and this is a sister church relationship that is of great benefit to both federations. May the Lord continue to bless our relationship with them.

Rev. Axel Hagg & Rev. Stephen 't Hart.

Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Decision and Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 96) decided the following with respect to the CanRC:

Decision

1. To continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. Monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
 - b. Stay informed on the developments concerning the potential merger between the CanRC and the URCNA, including changes to the Church Order, Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayer Forms;
 - c. Stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ);
 - d. Send two (2) delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Dunnville, Ontario during 2016, pending finances; and
 - e. To liaise with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN.

Grounds

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. We need to foster mutual understanding and support regarding matters that our respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America.

3. Rules for sister relations state that “in cases of substantial changes or additions to the confessions, Church Order, or liturgical forms” our preference is that “as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached.”
4. We value our bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and personal contact at the Synodical level reinforces our contact with them.
5. Since the FRCA have suspended our relationship with the RCN, it would be appropriate to monitor what our sister church is doing in this respect.

Execution of mandate

The work completed by the Deputies, while centred on the mandate provided by Synod Baldivis 2015, followed three main lines. First, the Deputies carefully reviewed of the Acts of Synod Dunnville (2016), plus the ‘Synod Report’, which had been submitted to Synod Dunnville by the ‘Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad’ (CRCA-CanRC). The ‘Synod Report’ (CRCA) highlighted the key elements of our sister church relations and gave evidence of a well-established relationship. Second, the Deputies attended Synod Dunnville engaging in-depth face-to-face discussions with other delegates, both on a formal and informal level. During Synod Dunnville, Deputies were given full access and opportunity to contribute to the plenary and committee sessions. Our sister church in Canada *‘wanted to hear from us’*, and especially so, in regards to the discussions about the RCN. Much prayer was offered to the Lord, seeking his blessing and guidance in this work. Third, when it was possible, the Deputies met with sister church deputies and maintained an active level of correspondence. The deputies were encouraged by this correspondence, realising the goal to mutually support and assist our sister churches.

In regards to the review of the Acts of Synod Dunnville (2016), the deputies noted a carefully detailed and consistent format in use. Each decision involved four fixed sections, namely, 1)

Materials, items sent to and received by synod; 2) Observations, information obtained via the 'materials' section; 3) Considerations, opinions or reflections obtained from the 'observations'; and 4) Recommendations, the proposed decision(s) regarding each matter. The benefits of such a carefully structured reporting format were not limited to the review of the Acts of Synod. Also, the reports that were submitted to Synod Dunnville had a precise and consistent format. Deputies commend the thorough manner in which our sister church (CanRC) conducts its work and welcomed the decision of Synod Dunnville regarding the FRCA.

Synod Dunnville 2016 adopted the following decision

- 4.1 To continue the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCA under the adopted rules.
- 4.2 To express thankfulness and appreciation for the FRCA's ongoing support for and interest in the Theological Seminary, including their financial support.
- 4.3 To mandate the CRCA:
 - a) to maintain close contact with the various deputyships of the FRCA in matters of relations with sister churches abroad and informing the FRCA of changes or developments in third party relationships.
 - b) to invite the various deputyships of the FRCA to seek direct contact with the corresponding CanRC committee (e.g. our SCBP, subcommittee RCN, our in charge of reviewing the liturgical forms, Committee on Bible Translations, and perhaps others in areas of mutual interest where the CRCA's mandate does not reach.
 - c) to send a delegation to the Synod FRCA of 2018.

(Article 21, pages 8-14)

Deputies were privileged to attend the Prayer Service that was held for Synod Dunnville, on the evening of Monday the 9th of

May. On the subsequent days of synod, up to and including Wednesday, the 18th of May, deputies attended each session and many 'synod committee' meetings. The deputies also held formal and informal meetings with foreign delegates of churches that have contact or relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

In particular, Deputies held several meetings with the delegates of the United Reformed Church of North America (see also URCNA Report), the General Secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions – Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the delegate Pastor of the First Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the delegate Pastor of the Reformed Church of the United States. During these meeting, deputies provided the foreign delegates with a description of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, inquired about their church situation and discuss church relations. Regrettably, due to ill health, the delegate of the Reformed Church of New Zealand was unable to attend this synod.

Deputies were thankful for the warm reception they received at Synod Dunnville. The face-to-face interaction at Synod served to establish a deeper understanding of the CanRC and this helped to avoid any potential misunderstandings. For example, in the matter of sister church relations with the RCN, deputies provided synod with specific details regarding the FRCA's letter, which was sent to the RCN. Similarly, in regards to the support provided by the CRTS, for the theological training of young men in South Africa, the deputies received clarity regarding the nature of that support.

Specific Mandate

As it relates to the specific mandate provided by Synod Baldivis 2015, deputies can report on the following:

1. **Developments within the CanRC**
 - a. Monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed.

The membership of the CanRC stands currently at approximately 18,679, split fairly evenly between the eastern (9,549) and western (9,130) regions. The federation has 56 churches, which are spread across eight separate classes and are served by some 50 ministers, not including those ministers who are missionaries, faculty of the theological seminary or those retired from active service. The CanRC Churches conduct foreign mission work in Brazil, China, Indonesia, PNG, Mexico, the Middle East and the Philippines. In addition, several churches also support mission work within their own local communities and cities. A recently instituted church, the 'Blessings Christian Church', states it this way on their website: "*Committed to reaching out to those in Hamilton who do not know him as their Lord & Saviour.*"

In regards to the Blessings Christian Church, the deputies understand from classical documents, that Blessing recently removed themselves from one classis without mutual consent and joined a neighbouring classis. (cf Classis Ontario West, September 2017). Further, we note that Blessings Christian Church has no defined church boundary or catchment area, and additionally specifies its members to give evidence of a commitment to mission/outreach. Deputies question how such developments function within the CanRC and whether they are consistent with the plain reading of the agreed Church Order.

Although it was Synod Carman (2013) that had approved the 'new' (CanRC, 2014) Book of Praise, it was Synod Dunnville that officially acknowledged and celebrating this very special milestone. Following years of intensive work, the CanRC now rejoice in sharing a common 'song-book' for worship. During Synod Dunnville, while attending the worship services of the CanRC, the deputies noticed how this 'Book of Praise' had strengthened the ties between our sister churches; *'everyone singing from the same page!*'. Deputies also expressed gratitude for Synod Dunnville's decision to mandate their Standing Committee for the Book of Praise, to continue working with the FRCA Deputies for Book of Praise. Our sister churches realise the significance of this a work and are prepared to assist.

In addition to the report received from the Deputies of the Committee for Bible Translations (CBT), a number of CanRChurches had sent letters to Synod Dunnville, dealing with the use of the NIV2011. These CanRChurches were primarily wanting to continue to use the NIV2011 within the public worship services. Synod Dunnville considered whether this matter should be left within church's 'freedom to decide'. Deputes informed Synod Dunnville about Synod Baldivis' concern that, *"The continued use of the NIV 1984 may cause confusion, and, inadvertently, lead to the 2011 version being used in error."* Synod Dunnville decided, *"To acknowledge that while it may not be possible to recommend the NIV2011, a general synod may not forbid churches to use it if they so desire."* (Art. 111)

Sixteen letters of appeal were issued to Synod Dunnville regarding the matter of 'women's voting'. Whereas previously Synod Burlington (2010) had decided to approve women's voting and had left this matter in the freedom of the churches, Synod Carman (2013) ruled that Synod Burlington had erred and that the churches should return to the voting practice of male communicant members only. Synod Dunnville sustained the appeals and decided that Synod Carman had erred in overturning the decision of Synod Burlington (Art. 176 rec. 4.3). "That any arrangement for the election of office bearers that goes beyond what has been agreed upon by the churches in Article 3 CO is a matter of the local regulations, adopted for that purpose by the consistory with the deacons." Deputies anticipate that this matter may continue to cause some unrest within our sister CanRC noting that not all of the churches have implemented women's voting within their congregations.

2. Stay informed on the developments concerning the potential merger between the CanRC and the URCNA, including changes to the Church Order, Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayer Forms

Contact between the CanRC and URCNA, which dates back to Synods Neerlandia and Escondido in 2001, has experienced progress and setbacks. Currently, there are some 120

UCRNA churches, with over 24,000 members. One third of those churches are located in Canada, mostly in areas near the CanRC. The Ecclesiastical Fellowship (sister church relations) between these churches includes, but is not limited to, pulpit exchanges, acceptance of attestations, joint mission project and study opportunities. Although much work has already been completed, e.g. a Proposed Joint Church Order, the URCNA has made recent decisions which may delay the final merger of these churches. It would appear that while the Canadian URCNA churches are quite close to the CanRC, the American-side URCNA is unfamiliar with CanRC, and this has led to some reservation about a final merger. Consequently, the URCNA Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) proposed that for at least the next six years, no recommendations will be made towards a final merger. During Synod Dunnville, deputies met with members of the URCNA; (see URCNA Report)

3. Stay informed of the sister-church developments in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ)

Synod Dunnville 2016 decided to continue the CanRC's relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (sister-churches) with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), Reformed Churches of the United States (RCUS), Reformed Church of Brazil, and the Reformed Churches in Quebec (ERQ). Deputies from most of these churches attended Synod Dunnville and presented a formal greeting to the CanRC. In regards to the discussion of differences in matters of doctrine and practice, Synod Dunnville emphasised 'Rule 1' of Ecclesiastical Fellowship which states that, "the churches shall assist each other in the maintenance, defence and promotion of the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy, and be watchful for deviations." Deputies noting the close working relationship fostered between these churches via their collective participation within the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC). Synod Dunnville therefore also decided to continue to have a CanRC presence at NAPARC. Discussions between fraternal delegates of churches in EF with CanRC were usually

scheduled to coincide with NAPARC meetings. Our CanRC brothers are well acquainted with their North American sister-churches.

In regards to the OPC, which is located primarily in the United States, with a total membership of just over 31,000, a joint OPC-URCNA Psalter-Hymnal project was approved at their 2014 Synod. The new 'Trinity Psalter Hymnal', as it is known, includes some 428 hymns, and should it be approved by the next OPC General Assembly, it may form another hurdle in the effort to reach final unity between the CanRC and URCNA. It is unlikely that the new CanRC 'Book of Praise' will soon be replaced by another 'Psaltery'.

Although the CanRC Committee for Contact for Churches in North America (CCCNA) had recommended that an offer of Ecclesiastical Fellowship be made to the Reformed Presbyterian Churches in North America, Synod Dunnville decided that such a church relationship was not possible. The practice of ordaining women as deacons was considered to be a significant departure from teachings of Scripture; one point highlighting that 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibits women from teaching or having authority over men in the church.

4. To liaise with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN

In their 'Greetings Message' to Synod Dunnville 2016, deputies expressed a serious concern regarding the ongoing toleration of Scriptural and Confessional deviation within the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. Hence, we also voiced this desire to the CanRC; "We cherish the expectation that together we may be united in our call for these churches to repent." Deputies both encouraged and advised Synod Dunnville on the work completed during Synod Baldivis. Deputies noted the following decisions by Synod Dunnville;

That Synod decide:

- 4.1 To express thankfulness for the Subcommittee for Contact with the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (SRCN) for their work;

- 4.2 To express thankfulness and joy to the Lord for much faithfulness in the RCN as well as grief and disquiet over tolerance of deviations from Scripture and confession;
- 4.3 To continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship (sister-churches) with the RCN with the temporary suspension of the operation of EF rules 4 and 5;
- 4.4 To express by letter our brotherly concerns to the next RCN Synod and each local RCN consistory;
- 4.5 To mandate the sub-committee of the CRCA:
 - 4.5.1 To maintain contact with the BBK of the RCN and represent the CanRC at the next RCN Synod of the RCN;
 - 4.5.2 To inform the RCN via the BBK of our decision;
 - 4.5.3 To monitor the work of the committee “M/F and Office” as well as the decisions of the next RCN regarding this matter;
 - 4.5.4 To monitor the ongoing discussions between the RCN and the NGK;
 - 4.5.5 To continue to observe developments at the TUK;
 - 4.5.6 To monitor the results of the RCN’s involvement with the National Synod;
 - 4.5.7 To work in consultation with the deputies of our other sister churches;
 - 4.5.8 To report to the churches six months prior to the next Synod 2019 giving special attention to the question whether or not we continue in EF.

Conclusion

The Lord has continued to bless the strong sister-church relationship between the FRCA and the Canadian Reformed Churches. There is a sense of familiarity and commonality between our two federations. Many FRCA churches have ministers who were trained at the Canadian Reformed

Theological Seminary in Hamilton. Most have also served within the CanR Churches. We know each other by name and share a deep commitment to assist each other wherever possible.

Our sister-churches in Canada are faithful in their service to the Lord. They are active church federation and eager to preserve the Word of God! As a result, the Deputies recommend the following to Synod Bunbury 2018:

Recommendation

1. Continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. Monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed.
 - b. Stay informed on the developments concerning the discussions between the CanRC and the URNA.
 - c. Send two (2) delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled in Edmonton-Immanuel during May, 2019.

Grounds

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. We need to foster mutual understanding and support regarding matters that our respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America.
3. Rules for sister relations state that “in cases of substantial changes or additions to the Confessions, Church Order, or liturgical forms” our preference is that “as much consultation as possible can take place before a final

4. We value our bond with the Canadian Reformed Churches and the personal contact at the synodical level, which reinforces our contact with them.

Appendix 1: Address to Synod Dunnville 2016 - Br. P. Witten

Esteemed Brethren in our Lord Jesus Christ,

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, it is our special privilege to extend to you, warm greetings from Australia. The Lord, the shepherd of our lives, the head of the church, stirs within us a true brotherly love for you! We are thrilled to be here. My fellow delegate, Rev. Stephen 't Hart and I thank you for this opportunity! Australia may seem like a faraway distant land, but, within the unity of true faith, we are your nearby neighbour. Thank you for your kind friendship and generous hospitality.

Thank you, also, for sending Brs. Otto Bouwman and Jake vanLaar, as your delegates to our most recent Synod, held last year at the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis. It was good to welcome these brothers, and to receive their input into our discussions. We enjoyed hearing news from Canada, and this face-to-face interaction not only helps to promote a deeper understanding of your church situation, but it also helps to avoid potential misunderstandings. It serves to strengthen the harmonious relationship that exists between our two church federations. We hope that you too, will also accept our invitation to send delegates to our next synod to be held, the Lord willing, in 2018, in the beautiful coastal city of Bunbury, WA. Your input on such synod matters as; the review of Bible translations, inter-church relations, the training of young men for the ministry, and, what we in Australia still refer to as, 'the Book of Praise', is considered as truly supportive.

Bible Translations

Work dealing with the review of Bible translations continues to be a matter of great importance at our synods. We are concerned about the possible use of the NIV 2011, within the public worship services. The danger of egalitarianism within the NIV 2011 is worrisome. And this danger, as also highlighted in your Committee for Bible Translations' report to this synod, caused Synod Baldivis to phase out the use of the NIV 1984, by

July 2018. Synod Baldivis stated the following; *“The continued use of the NIV 1984 may cause confusion, and, inadvertently, lead to the 2011 version being used in error.”* Synod Baldivis also reviewed and has thus recommended, the English Standard Version as a trustworthy bible translation, opening the way for its use within the public worship services. Thankful use was made of the report on the ESV to your last synod.

Church Relations

In the full acknowledgement of the Lord's providence and blessings, we share with you news regarding our church relations. Australia has a new sister church in Singapore. The First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore is a congregation of some 307 members. Their pastor is Chong, Nam Tuck, he is someone you might remember as a former CRTS student in Hamilton. In the midst of past doctrinal struggles, the Lord has preserved this church. It is a single church federation, located not that far from the coast of WA. The First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, which is known to you, through the work of Rev. Berends, Van Spronsen, Dr. Van Dam and Dr. Visscher and other Canadians who have travelled to Singapore, is also busy with bringing God's word to the country of Malaysia. We rejoice that the Lord is gathering his church in a part of the world, that is heavily dominated by the religion of Islam.

Similarly, with much joy we share that a new sister church relationship has been extended to the Reformed Church of New Zealand. Following many years of dialogue, progress towards a sister church relationship was made possible, when the barrier of the sister church relationship between them and the Christian Reformed Church of Australia was discontinued. Through the 'rules for sister church relations', our deputies will seek to encourage and support our brothers and sisters in New Zealand.

Whilst the joy of having two new sister church relations brings much happiness, the same cannot be said in regards to our relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Deep sorrow is felt with the decision to suspend this sister

church relationship, resulting in the loss of certain sister church privileges. What were previously open pulpits and an open Lord's Supper table, for the visiting RCN ministers, brothers and sisters, has now become a situation of careful review and restrictions. The ongoing toleration of Scriptural and Confessional deviation has threatened, what was once a beautiful sister church relation. We know that you too, brothers, are saddened by these concerns. May the Lord hear our prayers for His grace to awaken new faithfulness within the RCN. We cherish the expectation that together we may be united in our call for these churches to repent.

This time of sadness can also provide cause for serious reflection for our own churches and church federations. Are we being influenced by the trends and philosophy of the world around us? Are we compromising the gospel message to remove the rock of offense? Are we pushing the envelope of our confessions or stretching the boundaries of the church order to be seen as more relevant to our culture and palatable to our members? The prayer for greater faithfulness in the RCN (lib) requires that we too, are ever watchful for the attacks of the evil one in the life and doctrine of our church members.

Mentioning a prayer for greater faithfulness, then also ties into news regarding the De Gereformeerde Kerken (formerly called the RCN restored) and the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. Deputies have asked, "Will these churches continue to grow? And, will the Lord bless them as they struggle to find each other?" In Australia, the discussions with the DGK and GKN are welcomed, although we have no formal relationship with them. Since 2006, a delegate from the DGK has attended our synods in Australia, and they continue to receive the opportunity to address our Synods and deputies about their church situation.

Australia has maintained sister church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, and the Reformed Church of Indonesia (GGRI). Support is given for the work of the Theological Seminary in Sumba. Synod Baldivis also requested the church of

Mundijong to make their minister available for lectures at the seminary. And, like you, Australia has continued to encourage greater unity talks between the GGRI and Calvin Reformed Church (GGRC). Synod Baldivis suggested that a possible time frame be sought towards the goal of federal unity between these two church federations in Indonesia.

In 2014, shortly following Synod Carman, our deputies received a letter of introduction from the United Reformed Church of North America. This letter did not surprise us, as our delegates had also spoken with the URCNA delegates during Synod Carman. Likewise, we were aware of the Ecclesiastical Fellowship which exists between you and the URCNA. In response to URCNA's letter of introduction, Synod Baldivis has mandated our deputies to provide the URCNA with information about our churches, to take up contact with the URCNA and to report to the next Synod. We do welcome this opportunity and look forward to meeting the URCNA delegates.

Theological Seminary

In regards to theological training of young Australian brother, you might ask this question. What was Synod Baldivis doing when it commissioned its deputies to survey the FRCA churches regarding the desirability of establishing an Australian Seminary?

In order to address that question, we ought first to say that Australians still treasure the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary! And, we still consider it, 'our seminary'. We are very aware of the rich blessings that Australia enjoys through the work of the CRTS. Many of our ministers are CRTS graduates! Our support for the seminary remains ever so strong! Therefore, Synod Baldivis also decided to increase and match your annual per communicant member contribution for the CRTS, to \$82.00. Further, we have also understood and have accepted the Board of Governors' decision to not endorse a remote Australian training program for first year students in Australia. Finally, each time that a CRTS professor visits Australia, we as churches feel truly connected to the CRTS and enriched by their in-depth Scriptural knowledge!

At the same time, with a desire to follow the instruction of Art 19 of the Church Order, which highlights the call to maintain an institution for the training of the ministry, we do not restrain discussions about working towards an Australian Theological Seminary. Such discussions are stimulating and acknowledge a wonderful zeal in the promotion of the ministry, particularly in encouraging young men to pursue this special calling. Indeed, it may be possible that in the future, unfavourable government policies and a restriction on the opportunity to travel overseas, could result in the disruption of our current situation. However, whatever the future might hold, please be assured that our theological seminary discussions will be held in cooperation with the CRTS. Again, please note our gratitude to you and our thankfulness to the Lord's for the work of the CRTS!

Book of Praise

Work in regards to an Australian Book of Praise has also continued to receive our attention. And, once again, the ties with you here in Canada are strong. We thank you for mandating your Standing Committee for the Book of Praise deputies *"to continue contact with the Australian Deputies for the Book of Praise in order to assist the FRCA's pursuit of a possible Australian version of the Book of Praise."* We too, have mandated our Book of Praise Deputies to seek your guiding assistance. We realise that the adoption of a common Book of Praise is a labour intensive process, requiring much wisdom and perseverance. Currently, we are in what could be described as a 'transitional' Book of Praise stage. Synod Baldivis has encouraged the churches to use the 2014 Canadian Psalter Hymnal for the interim, as we seek to adapt your Book of Praise into an Australia Book of Praise!

Concluding Remarks

Brothers, no Australian greeting should conclude, nor would seem complete, without some comment regarding the emigrational patterns that exists between our two church federations. We happily share with you that several young Australian brothers have expressed an interest in coming to Canada in order to take up their studies at the CRTS. Two of

them will, the Lord willing soon arrive in Hamilton. And, we can tell you, that our joy in this matter is quite influenced by those ministers who have decided to immigrate to Australia. The churches of Launceston and Mt. Nasura have joyfully welcomed their new pastors, Dr. Wes Bredenhof and Dr. Reuben Bredenhof. In 2014, Rev. Dirk Poppe accepted the call to serve in the Free Reformed Church of Southern River. The Lord willing, we look forward to the safe arrival of Candidate David Winkel and his family for the church of Bunbury. And, Rev. Antoon Souman, from the church at Willoughby Heights for the Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott. And, just a few weeks ago, we thanked the Lord, in guiding Rev. Ryan de Jonge to accept the call extended to him by the Church of Armadale, for mission work in Lae, PNG.

In all of these things, brothers, we see evidence of the Lord's care for his church in Australia. And, we see the rich blessings of a sister church relationship that is alive and well. We thus then, also pray that the Lord will continue to be with you and that he will continue to bless the Canadian Reformed Churches. May he grant you the strength and wisdom needed to complete the work of this synod. All praise and glory belong to our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Appendix 2. Response to Synodical Address by Rev. R. Vermeulen

It's my pleasure and joy as a fellow Australian who has, together with my family made Canada our home, to respond briefly to your words. First of all we thank you for taking the time to come to our synod. That you've done that, is to us a clear expression of the commitment you have to our relationship. We wish you a blessed time among us and we look forward to your interaction and input throughout this time that we have together.

It was wonderful as a delegate to this Synod to read our CRCA Committee's report on the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Its contents make clear that the relationship that we share is treasured by both our federations. Your words this evening have underscored that reality.

In so many ways we're blessed to lean on each other and learn from each other. What you have shared this evening has made that clear. The faith that we share, the history that we share, means that by the gracious working of the Spirit, we trust each other to be firm in our commitment to the truths of God's Word even as we work and labour in our different contexts.

One of the visible expressions of our unity is of course the way that you support our seminary. At the same time we acknowledge your decision at Synod Baldivis to survey the churches about the desirability for an Australian Seminary. And yet we're blessed by your prayerful and financial support... and we're also blessed by the fact that over years there is a steady stream of aussie men (sometimes with their families) coming to study at the seminary. Please be assured that we express this gratitude not just as a mere formality... we truly are grateful for your support.

Thank you too, br. Witten, for sharing with us some of the things that are happening in the Australian churches. We rejoice with you in that the King of the church has so lead things that you now have extended a sister church relationship to the Reformed Church of New Zealand.

As you said that is reason for joy. But you also noted that there is reason for sadness. As you know from reading the report of our CRCA report – sub-committee Netherlands, we very much share your concerns regarding the RCN – Reformed Church Netherlands. The status of our relationship with them is on our agenda this synod. We continue to covet your prayers that we might make decisions that are for the upbuilding of Christ's Catholic Church and above all for the glory of His name. Together with you we confess that He is King of the church and will continue to gather and defend it until He returns on the clouds of heaven.

That's a good note to finish on... it is our prayer that you too will continue to experience, under His blessing, the growth of your churches, both in faith and numerically. May you too as churches be a light on a hill, shedding the wonderful light of the gospel in the land Down Under.

Brs. Witten and 'tHart enjoy your time among us... take the greetings of our churches back with you and may Christ our King continue to bless the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 39) mandated the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad to provide the URCNA with information about our churches, to take up contact with them, and to report to the next Synod with:

- a. information about these churches;
- b. a recommendation about how to proceed.

Grounds

1. The URCNA are an English-speaking confessionally-Reformed federation of churches with a history, principles, and practices similar to our own.
2. Our sister churches in Canada are in a close relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with these churches and pursuing federative unity with them. The CanRC Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity strongly encourage us to establish this contact, noting that "it will also join in wonderfully with the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity in which the CanRC and URCNA are engaged."
3. There are people from the URCNA who visit our churches and members of our churches who visit them.
4. The URCNA produce numerous resources and also have experience in church planting that we could potentially benefit from.
5. The URCNA is involved in mission work in the Asia region, notably the Philippines.
6. Due to the fact that we share a common language and similar culture, should a sister church relationship develop this would mutually benefit our federations in the areas of mission work, the calling of ministers from our

respective federations and the use of sermons in our respective services.

7. While Synod 1990 art. 58 decided to concentrate on relations and contact with churches that are geographically closer to us, the above grounds are compelling reasons to pursue this relationship.

Deputies Report

Introduction

In response to the mandate provided by Synod Baldivis 2015, the Deputies pursued direct contact, on two separate occasions, with members of the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) of the URCNA. First, during the CanRC Synod Dunnville (2016) deputies spoke with URCNA delegates attending that synod. The URCNA delegates, Rev. Ray Sikkema and Rev. Steven Swets, provided detailed information regarding the URCNA. This direct contact proved very useful and gained our acquaintance with the URCNA. During Synod Dunnville, deputies closely observed the discussions regarding a potential merger between the CanRC and the URCNA (see also CanRC Report). Second, four weeks after Synod Dunnville, one deputy was able to attend the URCNA, Synod Wyoming. The deputy was able to meet with the CECCA, and delivered a prepared greeting (see also Greetings to URCNA) by the deputies. We highlight the good trust and cooperation enjoyed during these contacts with URCNA members, and specifically with CECCA.

Further to the direct contacts made by the deputies, deputies conducted a careful review of URCNA home website; www.urcna.org. The documents posted on the URCNA website were current and extensive, e.g. Acts (Minutes) of Synods, Church Order, Mission Reports, etc. This good access to these URCNA documents assisted deputies in completing their mandate.

Specific Mandate

a. History of the URCNA

The immediate history of the URCNA dates back to the mid 1990's. At that time, members severed ties with the Christian Reformed Church, responding to unscriptural doctrinal views and practices. Initially, some 36 churches formed a federation, making use of the 1914 Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church. At their first synod, Synod Lynwood 1996, they adopted the name United Reformed Churches in North America. Subsequently, they have continued as a federation of some 120 churches, with over 24,000 members. The federation is broken down into 8 separate classes, and each church attends (i.e. sends two delegates) to a bi-annual synod.

The URCNA has two phases of ecumenical relations: one, ecclesiastical contact (EC) and, two, ecclesiastical fellowship (EF). The former is intended to lead to the latter. Synod Wyoming increased its ecumenical relationship with churches abroad by establishing Ecumenical Fellowship with the Calvinistic Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT), the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC) and the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA). In addition, they have maintained EF with the Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ) and the United Reformed Churches in Congo (URCC).

Synod Wyoming 2016, adopted the recommendation to establish EF relations with the Reformed Church of South Africa (GKSA) on the observation and grounds that the previous GKSA Synod, in January 2016, had confirmed that women may not participate in the governing body of the church, prohibiting them of holding the office of Elder and Minister.

The URCNA has continued its EC relations with such churches as the Evangelical Reformed Church of Latvia (ERCL), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – Liberated (RCN), and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA).

Contact between the URCNA and the CanRC dates back to 2001. Much work has transpired towards gaining complete federative unity between these two church federations. For

example, a new Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) was completed in committee (Revised Church Order Committee) discussions with representatives from both churches. However, Synod Wyoming also received several proposals to revise the PJCO. Further, the URC Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) recommended that a six year moratorium be placed on any recommendations aimed to achieve complete federative unity between the CanRC and URCNA. It would appear that while the Canadian URCNA churches are quite close to the CanRC, the American-side URCNA is unfamiliar with CanRC. This situation has thus led to some reservation about a final merger.

Meanwhile, the EF relationship between the URCNA and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPA) was strengthened by means of a new common psalter hymnal, known as the “Trinity Psalter Hymnal”. Synod Wyoming 2016 approved this church song book with the inclusion of the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms adopted by the OPC. Further, evidence of this close EF relations between these two churches is noticed in the decision to schedule and locate the 2018 URCNA Synod in Wheaton College, Illinois, coinciding with the next OPC Synod.

The URCNA is active in many countries with various mission projects and church planting programmes. Mission has been divided into three main streams, i.e. Domestic Mission, Foreign Mission and Extraordinary Missions. Fourteen mission projects are currently supported within North America. And, foreign missions have been established in Central America, India, Romania and the Philippines. Extraordinary missions includes the support of Chaplains serving within the US Army and the Miami International Seminary (MINTS). During the Wyoming Synod, a special two hour presentation detailed the work of many missionaries. Cooperation between and with various church federations characterised much of the UCRNA mission work in bringing the Gospel to others.

Conclusion

It has been a blessing and privilege for deputies to investigate, what is still a young, English-speaking confessionally-Reformed federation of churches. The mandate for deputies resulted in an opportunity to witness the Lord's church-gathering work! The URCNA is a determined church federation wanting to uphold the truth of God of Word and the confessions of the Church.

Although the deputies enjoyed good progress in their work, more remains to be completed. In particular, the on-going CanRC and UCRNA unity discussions will directly affect the Ecclesiastical Fellowship relations between the FRCA and the CanRC. Noting the pulpit exchanges, acceptance of attestations between the CanRc and URCNA, deputies anticipate the subsequent need for further review of the URCNA's request (Jan. 2014) for contact with the FRCA.

During contact made with the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA), deputies became aware of foreign (UCRNA) mission projects within the Asia region. However, this information is incomplete and deputies acknowledge that this information is incomplete and have only just begun.

As a result, the Deputies recommend the following to Synod Bunbury 2018:

Recommendation

1. To continue to liaise with the UCRNA with a view to providing a recommendation to Synod 2021 on how to proceed.
2. To acknowledge the report submitted by the Deputies and thank them for their work.
3. To discharge the deputies and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. To stay informed or monitor the discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA.

- b. To continue informal discussions with the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) of the URCNA.
- c. To provide submit a report of work completed, six months prior to the next synod.

Grounds

1. The URCNA is an English-speaking confessionally Reformed federation of churches with close ties to our sister churches in Canada.
2. Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity (CanRC) have encouraged the FRCA to continue its introductory discussions with the URCNA and gain further insight into this potential church relationship.
3. The on-going discussions between the CanRC and URCNA may indirectly affect the FRCA.
4. Contact between the URCNA and FRSA has continued via members who visit our churches and members of our churches who visit them.
5. Due to the fact that we share a common language and similar culture, should a sister church relationship develop this would mutually benefit our federations in the areas of mission work, the calling of ministers from our respective federations and the use of sermons in our respective services.
6. While Synod 1990 art. 58 decided to concentrate on relations and contact with churches that are geographically closer to us, the above grounds are compelling reasons to pursue this relationship.

Appendix 1: Address to CECCA, Wyoming Synod 2016 - Br. P. Witten

Beloved Brothers of our Lord Jesus Christ,

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, it is a very special privilege to pass along to you, warm greetings from Australia. All praise be to the Lord, the shepherd of our lives; We are thrilled to be with you and to share the faith which unites brothers and sisters, regardless of any distances that might exist between two nations.

Thank you for sending to our churches, a letter of introduction. You informed us about your earlier decision 'to explore the possibility of entering into Ecclesiastic Contact, with a view to entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship' with the Free Reformed Church of Australia. It is a pleasure to share with you, that your letter of introduction was received with much joy and enthusiasm! At our most recent Synod, held last year at the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis, synod supported a discussion between our two church federations. Our deputies for relations with churches abroad were mandated to provide you with information about our churches and to take up contact with you. It is our hope and prayer that the Lord will grant his blessings upon this work.

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia are a federation of some four and a half thousand members, spread across 16 churches. Fourteen of the churches are located in Western Australia, two in Tasmania, and there is newly formed congregation located in the city of Cairns, Queensland. Our founding members were the Dutch post-World War Two immigrants who hoped to find a better life in the new down-under country. Formerly members of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated), we subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity: the Canons of Dort, Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and we have together agreed to follow the instructions of the Church Order of Dort.

In many respects, our church's history mirrors the experiences of the Canadian Reformed Churches. And, there is a strong

sister church relationship between our two church federations. This includes the use of a common worship and liturgy book, a theological training centre in Hamilton, Ontario and an ongoing emigrational pattern that sees many former Canadians enjoying the benefits of an Australian citizenship. In fact, most of our ministers are former students and graduates of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton.

Currently, Australia delights in its sister church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, the Reformed Church of New Zealand and the Reformed Church of Indonesia (GGRI).

On the mission field, Australia is active in Indonesia, PNG, West Timor, China, India and the Philippines. How blessed are we to be instrumental in bringing the Gospel to a part of the world that is heavily weighed down by the religion of Islam. Perhaps here is opportunity where the benefits of church relations can grow and lend support.

Brothers, thank you again, for this opportunity to greet you! Thank you for your generous hospitality! May the Lord bless you with his wisdom and strength; with the words of Zephaniah 3:17 we conclude: *The LORD your God is in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness; He will quiet you with his love; He will rejoice over you with singing.*

Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCK)

Decision and Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 71) decided the following with respect to the KPCK:

Decision

1. To continue sister-church relations with the KPCK according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules.
 - b. send two delegates, including (if possible) one Korean speaking delegate, to the KPCK General Assembly in 2016;
 - c. further investigate the model and the mode of missionary work being undertaken by the KPCK in order to assist the local churches of the FRCA to determine whether and how they might cooperate together in their missionary calling.

Grounds

1. The Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea as far as can be known, shows faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions.
2. The attendance of two delegates on official visits is preferable (cf. 2 Cor 13:1). The inclusion of a Korean speaking delegate has proved beneficial.
3. It is helpful for us to have a clear understanding of the mission work undertaken by the KPCK for our instruction and to determine if and how cooperation is possible where we are working in the same geographical locations.

Execution of mandate

Deputies sent brs DW Oh and W Spyker to attend the General Assembly of the KPCK held from 20 - 23 September 2016 in CheonAhn, South Korea. The General Assembly was addressed, with the speech being **Appendix 1**. A detailed report of the visit is found at **Appendix 2**.

Deputies have also had ongoing and increasing practical expressions of our sister-church relationship on a local level. In our report to Synod 2013, deputies related contact that had been established by KPCK missionary Rev Hun Chae Chung. This contact has been ongoing and has resulted in:

1. A number of FRCA members being involved in weekly outreach English language and Bible study meetings organised by Rev Chung amongst Korean speaking students in Perth.
2. Enjoying fellowship with a group of some 20 KPCK members who visited Rev Chung from his supporting church in Ulsan, South Korea.
3. The institution of the Grace Kosin Church in the centre of Perth (Aberdeen St) on 3 June 2017. Rev S 'tHart was given opportunity to convey congratulations on behalf of the FRCA. Also in attendance from Korea were the Chairman (Rev Goeng Ho (Paul) Bae) and General Secretary (Rev JaWoo Koo) of the last General Assembly.
4. Since this institution, instruction by FRCA members to attendees of the Grace Kosin Church.

Deputies were also able to enjoy the company of Rev Myung Bae Park, minister of the Hanaro Presbyterian Church in Sydney, NSW (www.ihanaro.org) who visited Perth in May 2017. We had met Rev Park at the General Assembly in Korea, and upon hearing of us her was interested in learning of our Reformed life and in particular the Reformed schooling. He met with teachers within the Office of Reformed Education and also with various ministers.

Reformed Churches of Korea (RCK) & others (IRCK/IRPCK)

As noted under Appendix 2, we met with various representatives of the RCK when in South Korea in September 2016. The RCK had written to us as deputies in May 2016, extending an offer of ecclesiastical fellowship to the FRCA. As we have no mandate in relation to the RCK, this letter was forwarded by the General Deputy to all FRCA consistories for consideration.

In response to this letter, deputies received a letter from the FRC of Busselton, requesting that we report to the next Synod that the RCK be encouraged to seek and maintain unity within their own churches in a spirit of humility and repentance, and also to seek ecclesiastical fellowship with faithful Reformed churches in their own country. The letter then requested that the FRCA instead pursue contact with the Independent Reformed Church in Korea and the Independent Reformed Presbyterian Church in Korea.

These matters remain outside our mandate as deputies, and so we have taken no action in this regard. We note in passing, however, that the IRCK did host the ICRC regional mission conference in September 2015, which was attended by many Reformed Churches in the region.

Relevance of ongoing contact with the KPCK

At times the query is raised whether it remains of practical benefit to maintain contact with the KPCK given the language barrier and distance between our respective countries and church federations. The question is valid, given that ongoing contact needs to be relevant to our federation of churches and members.

In answer to a question from the FRC Mt Nasura in November 2016 as to how we see the rules for sister church relations being exercised with the KPCK, deputies offered a written response, which is found under **Appendix 3**.

Deputies have queried whether we are, as federation of churches, being consistent when we maintain a sister-church

relationship with the KPCK but are not seeking to establish a similar relationship within our own country with the KPCK Oceania or, indeed, with other Presbyterian churches in Australia. Whilst this question goes beyond the scope of our mandate and this report, it is one which requires some introspection and an honest answer.

Model and mode of mission work

Deputies were mandated to further investigate the model and the mode of missionary work being undertaken by the KPCK in order to assist the local churches of the FRCA to determine whether and how they might cooperate together in their missionary calling.

The Kosin Churches are blessed with a large, multi-storey Presbyterian Mission complex in the city of Daejeon, about halfway between Seoul and Busan. This complex consists of offices, classrooms, a large chapel, prayer rooms, housing for students and housing for missionaries on furlough. These are beautiful facilities with striking murals and art work found throughout the complex. At a meeting held on October 13, 2015, with Rev. Hoo-Soo Nam, director of the Kosin Mission Training Institute and Rev. Cho Deng Je, director of the mission department of the Kosin Presbyterian Mission, the following information was given.

- The first Kosin foreign missionary was sent out in 1955 to Taiwan. A second field (Japan) was established in 1981. The first missionaries went to Indonesia in 1983 and to the Philippines in 1988.
- Kosin foreign mission work received a huge boost after 1988, when the country transitioned to a democracy and Koreans could freely travel overseas.
- In September 2015 the KPCK had 432 missionaries, comprising of 230 different family units. 87% of these are directly supervised by the Kosin Presbyterian mission.

Country/Geographic region	Number of family units dispatched
Eastern Mediterranean	10
Western Mediterranean	13
East & West Africa	9
South Africa	8
Central America	2
South America (Peru)	3
Paraguay	5
Brazil	5
Japan	16
China	28
Philippines	11
Indonesia	9
Vietnam	6
Cambodia	10
Mekong	7
Malaysia	4
South West Asia	13
Central Asia	10
Russia	7
Oceania	3
Korea	2
Head Quarters	5
Others	5

- The stated goal of the Kosin Presbyterian Mission is to establish new Reformed Churches in the places where they are working.
- The missionaries are mostly involved in: church planting (40%), Christian education and theological education.
- The Kosin vision is to deploy at least 60% of their missionaries to the areas least reached by the gospel, often referred to as the 10/40 window. One part of this includes Southwest China, the Indochina peninsular and the Moslem islands of Indonesia. The second area includes central Asia, the Middle East and Northern Africa. It is to be noted that many Kosin missionaries are working in closed, dangerous and/or isolated areas.
- Kosin missionaries are expected to visit the various Kosin Korean churches to raise their own support. They are, however, always answerable to both their regional mission groups and also the Kosin Mission Department.
- The Kosin Presbyterian Mission is run by a board appointed by the General Assembly. They in turn supervise the central office, which is responsible for the day-to-day running of the Kosin mission work.
- The Central office consists of various departments that oversee: the training & recruitment of missionaries, missionary care, receiving and acting on missionary reports, office administration, financial administration, I.T and public relations. The directors of both the Kosin Presbyterian Mission and the Central Office are foreign missionaries themselves, appointed to these tasks for 3 years after which they return back to their field of service.
- One striking element of the Korean mission work is their emphasis on prayer. For an hour every afternoon all staff members are expected to come together for at least an hour to pray for the Kosin mission work and for the specific needs and situations of the missionaries in the

field. A special room at the mission centre is set aside for this.

With respect to opportunities for cooperation with the Kosin missionaries, some suggestions given were: a) Kosin missionaries have asked for volunteers from our churches to come on a short term basis to teach English. One opportunity to do this is in Changmai, Thailand. B) Where their missionaries are working in the same location as we are, contact can be made with the intention to share resources and experiences. C) There are plans to establish an English-speaking Asia Reformed Seminary in the Philippines. The plan behind this seminary is that suitable students from the Asia-Pacific region could come to this seminary to receive a Master's degree. Should this plan proceed, it may be part of the answer for a need for increased Reformed theological teaching in the Asia region, and some cooperation with the FRCA should be possible. D) There are clear possibilities to assist with reaching out to non-Christian Koreans living in Perth. Of these opportunities for cooperation, the request for English teachers as well as opportunities for reaching out to Koreans closer to home were areas that our Korean brothers were more excited about.

At the same time your deputies also see challenges in working closely with the Kosin Presbyterian Mission in other countries. These challenges not only include differences of language and culture, but also of missiological practice. One example of this is how the Kosin missionaries work closely with other (non-Kosin) Presbyterian missionaries from Korea, as well as with various local churches in the countries where they work. Although on the one hand this promotes church unity, it also runs the danger of a weakening of the Reformed character of the missionary work being done. Your deputies have reason to conclude that at least in some circumstances this is the case.

Conclusion

Deputies remain thankful that contact with the KPCK has been able to be maintained over the past 3 years, and has led to increasing contact at a local level. In this sense, whilst

attendance at the KPCK General Assembly might be considered to be of limited benefit (unless accompanied by e.g. a lecture tour or further interaction with churches and ministries in the KPCK), the ongoing contact has been blessed in practical outworking for our local FRCA members.

From what we have been able to observe through our increased contact with the KPCK, the KPCK demonstrate a love for the Lord and His Word, and strive to faithfully fulfil their task where they are placed within God's kingdom. They continue to take a strong stand against Scripture critical theories and have exhorted the RCN on issues similar to those addressed by us. They exhibit the marks of the true church as we confess these in BC art 29. Deputies recommend that sister-church relations be maintained.

Recommendations

1. To continue sister-church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCK) according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. send two delegates, including (if possible) one Korean speaking delegate, to the KPCK General Assembly in 2019.

Grounds

1. The Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea shows faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions.
2. The inclusion of a Korean speaking delegate has proved beneficial.

Appendix 1 – FRCA Speech for 2016 KPCK General Assembly

Brother Chairman, delegates, brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ:

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, it is our special privilege to extend to you warm greetings from your sister-churches in Australia. We thank you for your kind invitation to attend this your 66th General Assembly, and it is our joy to be present, enjoy your fellowship and receive your generous hospitality.

Although as countries we are far apart, as fellow believers in our Lord Jesus Christ we may, in the unity of true faith, be your nearby neighbour. It is our prayer that our ongoing relationship may continue to be mutual benefit, that we may assist and encourage one another to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3)

Last year we were thankful to host the Chairman of your Fraternal Relations Committee, Dr Kwon, at our Synod Baldivis. He could inform us about your history and also how your church life is developing. We rejoice to see how God continues to gather, defend and preserve His church in South Korea.

We also wish to share with you some information regarding the history of the FRCA, and recent developments in our federation. The first of our churches were instituted in 1951, so we have now been in existence for some 65 years. Many early members were Dutch migrants, with church services held in the Dutch language. This eventually changed to English, and with the blessing of the Lord we now have church members from many nationalities, including a growing number of Koreans.

Our federation has 16 congregations with a total membership of around 4,500. Many of our ministers are sourced from our sister-churches in Canada, being the Canadian Reformed Churches. We also continue to make use of their federational seminary, the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, for the purposes of training of men for the ministry of the gospel.

Our Synod Baldivis 2015 made a number of significant decisions with respect to inter-church relations. With great thankfulness to the Lord, we were able to extend an offer of sister-church relations to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and also the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. With sadness, however, our Synod Baldivis decided to suspend our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). This decision was made with deep sorrow, and was based upon the ongoing toleration of Scriptural and Confessional deviation evident within this federation. We regularly pray that God may in His grace awaken a new faithfulness within our Dutch sister-churches and cause them to repent and return to Him.

This time of sadness can also provide cause for serious reflection for our own churches and church federations. Are we being influenced by the trends and philosophy of the world around us? Are we compromising the gospel message to remove the rock of offense? Are we pushing the envelope of our confessions to be seen as more relevant to our culture and palatable to our members? Our prayer for greater faithfulness in the RCN requires that we too, are ever watchful for the attacks of the evil one in the life and doctrine of our church members.

In this regard, we are thankful to read of the following in relation to recent decisions of your past General Assemblies and also proposals on your present Agenda:

1. The decision in 2015 to reaffirm that the special offices within the Christian church are reserved for men, and that there is no Biblical basis for women's ordination. We rejoice in how you have affirmed the clear Scriptural teaching on this topic.
2. Your faithful affirmation that God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and your continued awareness of the danger of any alternative theories including theistic evolution. We encourage you to remain steadfast in plainly confessing what God teaches us in His Word in this regard.

3. Your plans to celebrate the Reformation 500 next year, including your decision to build up your churches by way of publishing relevant materials and holding conferences. We may share a common heritage in the Great Reformation of 1517, and we rejoice to see how you wish to keep the truth of God's Word as was rediscovered at this time alive within your churches.
4. The proposal to promote the singing of Psalms within your churches. As Free Reformed Churches of Australia, we make grateful use of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter. The singing of the 150 Psalms are a central feature of our worship both in church, at school and also in our homes. We encourage you in recognizing and promoting the great blessing of Psalm singing.
5. The proposal to address the decreasing size of families within your federation. Children are indeed a "heritage from the Lord" (Psalm 127:3) and we encourage you in promoting this understanding among your members. Our churches in Australia are blessed with many children, and the Lord has also blessed us in the development of covenant, Reformed schooling for the children. We humbly suggest that you may also experience many blessed fruits in promoting this, as each generation in turn is taught in the fear of the LORD.

We are thankful that over the past years we have been able to promote increasing contact with your churches, especially in the context of mission work. The FRCA continue to be actively involved in the work of mission in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, China and the Philippines. We know that your churches have a long history of active mission work. We wish to further understand your model and way of doing mission work, to learn from your experience and knowledge that you have gained over the years, and to determine whether and how we may cooperate in our missionary calling.

We have also been able to enjoy local contact in Perth, Western Australia, with your missionary, Rev Chung, and also the Kosin congregations there. The cooperation has included teaching

English classes and Bible studies to Koreans in Perth. We note with thankfulness that our contact is growing and we feel that we are getting to know one another better. We pray that this contact may continue to develop as a tangible expression of unity, to the honour and praise of our Heavenly Father.

May we say again that we are very thankful for your invitation to attend at this General Assembly and for this opportunity to address you. May God bless your deliberations and decisions, that all things might be done to the praise of His glory and for the benefit of His church.

With Christian greetings,

Br. W Spyker & Br. DW Oh

Appendix 2 – Report on visit to South Korea, September 2016

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 71) continued sister-church relations with the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK) and mandated deputies to send two delegates, including (if possible) one Korean speaking delegate, to the KPCK General Assembly (GA) in 2016. To that end, deputies were grateful that Br DongWoo Oh was willing to be delegated together with Br W Spyker to attend the GA.

General Assembly

The 66th General Assembly of the KPCK was held over 3 days (Sept 20-23, 2016) at the grounds of the Korea Theological Seminary (KTS) in CheonAhn, around 2 hours south of Seoul. The grounds include dormitory accommodation, and all delegates (including us) stayed on site. This encouraged fellowship between delegates, with all meals shared together.

The Assembly commenced with a prayer service, which included a meditation on 2 Kings 18:1-8, dealing with Hezekiah's faithful reformation. In the pattern of Hezekiah, delegates were encouraged to also trust in and hold fast to God, be obedient to His commandments, as then we may also expect God's blessing. Singing was led by a large church choir from Busan, with various recognized songs (Amazing Grace and A Mighty Fortress) being sung in Korean and English. The service concluded with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Voting resulted in Rev Goeng Ho Bae being appointed as chairman and moderator of the General Assembly for the next year.

In 2015, the KPCK merged with the PCK Goryeo, a bond of churches with whom they had split some 40 years ago concerning a difference of opinion regarding the matter lawsuits between fellow believers. The Goryeo churches comprised some 200 congregations. Accordingly, post-merger the KPCK now have some 2,100 churches with around 550,000 members.

The federation is divided into 40 presbyteries, and the total number of delegates at the General Assembly were 504 (252

ministers + 252 elders). Also in attendance were faculty of the KTS, foreign delegates, local and foreign missionaries, members of various committees, and all past chairmen/moderators of the GA (who attend in an advisory capacity). All in all, it makes for a sizeable group, each of whom need to be housed and fed. As such, the KTS facilities serve well.

On the morning of 21 Sept we were given opportunity to provide greetings on behalf of the FRCA (see Attachment 1). Dr Sungho Lee, a member of the KPCK Fraternal Committee, had kindly translated our speech into Korean and it was displayed on a large screen at the front of the auditorium, enabling all delegates to follow it.

Various other foreign delegates also spoke, including Dr Kees Haak from the RCN (GKv). Dr Haak is an emeritus professor from Kampen who is presently a lecturer in missiology and ecumenics at the KTS. All other foreign delegates were from the Kosin “daughter” federations in Oceania, Europe, North America and Taiwan.

Unlike last time in 2013, there was no responsive speech given. Further, also unlike in 2013, although we enjoyed a lunch with various members of the Fraternal Committee, no formal meeting with us as foreign delegates had been arranged. Accordingly, following our speech and the lunch, we were essentially left to ourselves.

Upon our request, we ultimately met with Dr Sungho Lee and were able to discuss the following:

1. Whether and how we are able to obtain the Acts/Decisions of the GA. Dr Lee indicated that these may be available from the General Secretary following the conclusion of the GA.
2. The merger with the PCK Goryeo in 2015. Dr Lee confirmed that this has indeed taken place, adding some 200 small congregations to the KPCK. Whilst there were previous unity talks with the PCK Hapsin, these have stalled and there are presently no other unity discussions

on foot. Nonetheless, pursuit of unity remains a focus with numerous (we understand more than 100) different PCK federations across South Korea.

3. Whether and how we could foster closer contact between the KPCK and the FRCA, including possibly by way of sharing of written materials or speakers. Dr Lee indicated that he was unsure how this could be advanced. He noted that there were some English speaking professors (including himself, having completed his doctorate at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids). Whilst numerous books and other study materials were published out of the KPCK, these were all in Korean.
4. The topic of women in office. Dr Lee confirmed that the KPCK had repeatedly affirmed that no women may be ordained to the offices of deacon, elder or minister. He noted that whilst there were non-ordained deaconesses, their function was limited to works of help and assistance (eg. meals, caring for others, Sunday school). He noted that, traditionally, the minister's wife functioned as a "mother" to the females in the congregation, and it was common for older women to also take on this role.
5. The proposal regarding Psalm singing. Dr Lee produced for us a recently published version of the Korean Psalter, being a translation of the modern Scottish Psalter and comprising all 150 psalms, some with various alternate tunes and including some 45 Genevan tunes. He advised that efforts were being made to promote Psalm singing within the KPCK.
6. Catechism teaching and preaching. Dr Lee produced a workbook on the Heidelberg Catechism that he had written recently, targeted to the youth of the church. He indicated that whilst many KPCK did not have a practice of regular catechism preaching or catechism instruction, efforts were being made to promote it, also in connection with the Refo500 celebrations in which increased attention was being given to the importance of the reformed doctrines as rediscovered in the 1500s.

Dr Lee also showed us around the KTS facilities, explaining that the seminary presently has some 450 students across its 3 year course. It is compulsory for those students to live "on-site" within the multi-storey dormitory complex. The professors and other faculty also reside within the KTS grounds. The student dormitory is serviced by a large dining hall and kitchen which was able to feed no less than 600 people within the hour allocated for meals.

We also viewed the various lecture halls, library (containing many English books) and the Kosin History Museum. The latter was a wonderful facility, displaying in a vivid way the history of the gospel in Korea, including the persecution and martyrdom of many faithful Christians during the Japanese occupation.

GA agenda items

From our reading of the Agenda materials, our attendance at the GA, and our review of the Decisions/Minutes, it would appear that some of the more relevant matters (including those noted within our speech) are as follows:

1. How to address the female workers in the churches. They are not ordained but they are essential in the Korean church life. Thus, the KPCK endeavor to find the right terminology which reflects a proper biblical characteristic of the female workers in the churches, whilst affirming that the special offices within the Christian church are reserved for men, and that there is no Biblical basis for women's ordination.
2. Rejection of Scripture critical theories such as theistic evolution. The General Assembly admonished the SFC (Student for Christ) to be more careful in selecting future speakers (concerning an issue about theistic evolution).
3. The General Assembly approved the proposal by the committee to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation: in addition to publishing several books around the main doctrines of the Reformation, they also intend to establish a church to celebrate the Reformation.

4. Promoting the singing of psalms. The GS adopted the proposal to recommend psalm singing, although leaving it up to each respective church whether the psalms will be sung or not.
5. The necessity to divide the Presbyteries after the merger with the PCK Goryeo.
6. Whether a minister of a needy church can be a chairman of the Classis (Presbytery), and whether a congregation of less than 50 members may have a voice within the presbytery, including being entitled to vote.

The last matter reveals two aspects of the Korean churches' ecclesiastical life. Firstly, numbers are considered important, and it is commonly believed in Korea that a bigger church can have a bigger voice. Secondly, to be chairman of the Presbytery is regarded as a kind of honour.

Connections with Australia

We were able to enjoy fellowship with a number of attendees at the General Assembly who had connections with Australia, including the following:

1. Dr HaeMoo Yoo, a professor at the KTS who has attended a number of our FRCA Synods on behalf of the KPCK.
2. Rev Dae Hyun Kim, whom we had met the previous week in Perth, Australia. His congregation in Ulsan supports Rev Chung, a missionary of whom we had made mention in our greetings. Rev Kim had attended in Perth together with some 20 members of his congregation to familiarize themselves with the work of Rev Chung and also to support and encourage him.
3. Rev Sung Joo Kim, a minister from Sydney. He is the moderator of the General Assembly of Korean Presbyterian Church in Oceania (Kosin). Rev Kim advised that the Oceania federation comprises around 50 congregations, the largest being in Auckland with around 2000 members. These churches were started in around

1980, with their first GA in 1990. They have no other sister church relationships except for the other Korean (Kosin) federations. The Kosin Oceania federation comprises churches in Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Indonesia, Vietnam, Phillipines, India and Thailand. They hold their General Assembly in June of each year. All church services, and the proceedings of the GA, are conducted in Korean.

4. Rev Myung Bae Park, minister of the Hanaro Presbyterian Church in Sydney, NSW (www.ihanaro.org). He had been a minister in Sydney for some 16 years. He advised that there are some 17 Kosin congregations within NSW. In each of these the Korean tradition was very strong, both with respect to the language and culture. In this respect, he noted that they retain an immigrant mentality, but that over time may have to transition to English. Rev Park spoke of a desire to begin a reformed primary school for the youth of his church, and we agreed to provide him with relevant contact details of people within our school association who may be able to provide him with further assistance. Rev Park advised that his congregation had been planning for a Refo500 forum to be held in Sydney next year at which various KTS faculty will be invited to attend as speakers.

Other visits

Following our attendance at the GA, we travelled south to Busan and then Ulsan.

In Busan, we visited the Kosin University, which is this year celebrating its 70th anniversary. Its stated educational purpose is to be *“a Christian university, which seeks to equip students to understand and be equipped to engage cultures in a reformational manner that celebrates the Lordship of Jesus Christ over all of reality.”*

On invitation, we also met with various members of the Reformed Churches in Korea (RCK). The RCK had written to us as deputies in May 2016, extending an offer of ecclesiastical

fellowship to the FRCA. Their letter had stated: *“We are very thankful to the Lord for His providential guidance of churches in Korea. In Korea there were various denominations of Presbyterian Churches but no Reformed Churches. But the Lord is now creating a new history in Korea by establishing a reformed group of churches. We are very thankful for that. We will grow in the reformed faith and life. For this we need the ecclesiastical fellowship with faithful reformed churches in the world, especially, in this time of secularization and apostasy.”*

During our meeting, we advised that we had no capacity or mandate to respond to their request, but would relay the letter to our local FRCA churches who may choose to place it on the agenda of our next Synod. The RCK advised that they had suffered a break within their small bond of churches during the past year, with the congregation of Rev DongSup Song (who attended our Synod Baldivis 2015) having been suspended from the federation. The RCK now comprises 3 churches with a total membership of around 150. Having met separately with Rev Song, we encouraged the brothers to seek to maintain unity in a spirit of humility and repentance. We also had opportunity to meet with Rev Dr SG Hur (formerly a minister of the FRC Kelmscott), who continues to provide assistance to and maintain close contact with the RCK.

On Sunday we worshipped at the Ulsan Presbyterian Church (www.upcweb.net), a Kosin congregation of some 4000 members. A live English translation of the service was provided and a communal lunch enjoyed with congregation members following the morning service. We were able to enjoy a day of fellowship with a family from the congregation, together with Rev Jae Woo Hyun, the minister of a nearby congregation (who has spent some years ministering to a Korean congregation in Johannesburg).

Observations

With thankfulness to the Lord we were able to discharge our mandate of attending the KPCK General Assembly, delivering greetings on behalf of the FRCA, and enjoying a fellowship with our Korean brothers and sisters. We did, however, find it

challenging to develop a deeper level of contact with our Korean sister churches on a more practical level.

In this regard, we offer some observations, not in a spirit of criticism but rather that we may better appreciate each other and the level of contact that we may expect into the future.

Firstly, the KPCK remain very “Korea centric”. This is perhaps expected as concern the churches in Korea, yet somewhat surprising when considering those overseas. In this regard, the KPCK daughter federations in Oceania, Europe and North America are entirely Korean in membership, language and contacts. Correspondingly, the KPCK enjoys its closest overseas contacts with these daughter federations, including within Australia. Their relationship with the FRCA needs to be understood in this context. A parallel observation may be that we as the FRCA will always enjoy our closest, or perhaps most practical, relationships with our English speaking sister-churches.

Secondly, the sharing of theology, whether by way of written materials (blogs, journal articles or books) or lecture/speaking tours, will always remain limited given the vast language barrier between our respective federations. Over time it appears that, particularly amongst the young generation, there is increasing familiarity with the English language. The present reality, however, remains that the KPCK produce limited material in English. A parallel observation is that the FRCA produce even less material in Korean.

Thirdly, the development of closer personal contacts, even on a fraternal committee level, will always remain limited. The KPCK Fraternal Committee changes composition on almost an annual basis, and most of their members cannot speak English. Having said that, it has been of benefit for us to send a Korean speaking delegate to attend the General Assembly, and this has increased the level of contact we may have, including understanding what is being discussed at the GA and the decisions made.

Fourthly, there is little opportunity for foreign delegates to have substantive input into the proceedings of the GA (unlike, for example, Canada or South Africa where we are encouraged to have input into the Synod discussions). Indeed, aside from presenting greetings, foreign attendees primarily attend to enjoy fellowship and re-establish connections. In this regard, the GA appears to have as major side benefit the gathering of Korean delegates from across the country, together with numerous Korean missionaries and ministers from around the world, to enjoy a time of community and encouragement. Plentiful time was allocated for singing, devotion and private discussion. In this way, the annual GA is a central feature of Kosin church life. As to these aspects, non-Kosin foreign delegates have limited participation.

Accordingly, we may expect that our relationship with the KPCK will always have more limited practical relevance than our relationship with our other, particularly English speaking, sister-churches. Having said that, we do note the following:

1. We were able to re-establish links with various past contacts and also establish several new contacts, some of which have Australian connections.
2. We would do well to seek to assist the Kosin churches or missionaries within Australia, given that these are close to home for us, and may be expected to transition over time to becoming English speaking. Presently, this includes outreach opportunities to Korean speaking people within our own communities.
3. We may continue to encourage those within the KPCK who seek to maintain a strong reformed theology. This Reformed section seeks to promote an increased attention to sound doctrine, a focus on catechism teaching and preaching, and the introduction of psalm-singing in the churches. Yet they remain within a diverse federation where at times these aspects are lacking.
4. It remains enriching to have a sister-church relationship with a federation different to us in culture and

background, from whom we may learn much and in whom we may appreciate our Lord's worldwide church gathering work.

Respectfully submitted

DW Oh & W Spyker
31 October 2016

Appendix 3 – Letter to FRC Mt Nasura

March 23, 2017

Att: Secretary
Consistory of the FRC Mt Nasura

Esteemed Brothers,

Thank you for the letter you sent us dated November 1, 2016 regarding the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCCK). This letter was tabled and discussed at our Deputies' meeting of February 8, 2017.

In your letter you noted that we were "appointed with a mandate to maintain the sister church relations with KPCCK according to the adopted rules" and you wrote of "the continuing practical difficulties in maintaining sister church relations with a bond of churches which is very large and where the members speak a different language." You then asked us to explain how we see the rules for sister church relationships being exercised with the KPCCK.

We will endeavour to answer your question by making a few general comments regarding language and communication and then going through the "Rules for Sister Church Relations" as adopted by Synod Bedfordale 1992 to explain how we are seeking to maintain our relationship with the KPCCK according to those rules. We will then offer some concluding remarks.

General observations regarding language and communication

Although the FRCA has enjoyed a sister church relationship with the KPCCK for over 30 years it is undeniable that our relationship with them is not as strong as with other sister churches, particularly those with whom we share the same history. We feel that this has much to do with the fact that Korea as a nation is still very mono-cultural and mono-lingual. In recent South Korean history, up until the late 1980s the number of South Koreans who were able to travel overseas was minimal and the nation was relatively isolated from the rest of the Western world. It wasn't until 1988, following the Seoul

Olympic games and the transition to democracy that this began to change. Since 1988 the number of Koreans travelling and living abroad has increased dramatically. This has also led to more people of the KPCK to travel overseas as migrants, for a secular education, for higher theological studies and to go as missionaries. (In September 2015 the KPCK had 432 missionaries sent throughout the world, comprising of 230 different family units.) This is no doubt having an impact on South Korea as a whole and also on the KPCK. From our observation there has been an increase in the number of Koreans conversant in English and communication is improving. At the same time we note that the KPCK remains very “Korean” and that most of their migrant churches, also here in Perth are exclusively Korean in language & culture. Therefore, although we believe we have things to share and to learn from one another, we can expect our relationship with the KPCK to be less intense than, for example, our relationship with the churches in North America, New Zealand and even Singapore.

Rules for Sister Church Relations & the KPCK

In answer to your question as to how we see the rules for sister church relationships being exercised with the KPCK, we offer the following:

- a) Sister relations shall be used to mutually assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world

Response: At the deputyship level this is typically done in person when we visit one another’s synods as well as meet at Synods or conferences etc. hosted by other sister churches. We have taken it upon ourselves increase our contact and understanding of the KPCK over the last number of years and we are getting to know one another better. As deputies we have felt that since Synods are not always the most conducive to “mutually assisting, encouraging and exhorting one another” we have talked with our Korean sisters of the possibilities of exchanging speakers to give lectures on matters of mutual interest. We note, however, that we have no instructions from Synod regarding this.

On occasion there is also the opportunity for our church members to give this mutual encouragement on a more personal level. One of our deputies for South Korea, Rev. 't Hart, took it upon himself to travel to South Korea in 2015 where, among other things, he heard Prof. Dr. Yoo HaeMoo of the KPCK (who has visited the FRCA and with whom we have established a good relationship over the years) give a lecture entitled "How should we celebrate the Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace?" Another example of mutual assistance and encouragement is the developing between a missionary minister of the KPCK, Rev. Hun Chae Chung, who lives in Perth, and a few of our church members. Rev. Chung is reaching out to Koreans living in inner-city Perth, mostly those who are living here on a short term visa and is receiving assistance from some FRCA members in giving English lessons to those he has contact with. In another case of mutual encouragement and exhortation, our two "Korean" deputies (Rev S.'t Hart & br W Spyker), could meet with members of one of the Kosin churches in Perth when they came to visit Western Australia for a few days last year.

From our side, learning about the growth of Christ's Church in Korea is of great encouragement. The translation of Rev. Dr. Hur's short autobiography as well as his book on the history of the KPCK have been well received by some of our members. Learning about their mission work and also their commitment to prayer is also an encouragement to us.

- b) The churches shall mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy

Response: As deputies we have inquired about matters such as the KPCK's stance on women in office, the use of the Reformed confessions, the singing of psalms and the fencing of the Lord's Table. We have also been quite frank in sharing our concerns about our Dutch Sister Churches with them. Some of this information can be found in the Deputies' Report on the visit to South Korea in September 2016. We will attach that report to this letter for your information.

- c) The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or their Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to their respective churches (if possible in translation)

Getting information from the KPCK regarding the General Assembly (Synod) decisions has not always been easy and so concerted efforts have been made to rectify this over the past number of years. For the last two visits to the KPCK General Assembly we've taken a Korean speaking brother with us to help advise us as to what is being discussed at the General Assembly and we have sought English summaries of the major decisions being made. Good progress has been made with respect to this part of our mandate, but we are still working on this.

We have a renewed commitment with Canada (and to a lesser extent the Netherlands) to share information and reports concerning the KPCK: this is of benefit to all of us.

- d) The churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties

Response: We have informed the KPCK of the sister church relationships we have established with the churches in Singapore and New Zealand, as well as our changed relationship with the churches in the Netherlands. The KPCK has informed us of their merger with the PCK Goryeo, a group of churches who had split off from them about 40 years ago. We are also learning more about the KPCK's Korean-speaking sister churches in the Oceania region, including Western Australia. We note, however, that we don't have a specific mandate from the FRCA Synod to investigate these Korean churches that are geographically closer to us, and so our contact with them is limited.

- e) The churches shall accept one another's attestations, which also means admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of these attestations

Response: We have had a few members going back and forth between the KPCK and the FRCA. Learning more about the KPCK and also about the number of Koreans who come to a place such as Western Australia to learn English, perhaps there are ways that we could host more short term visitors from the KPCK, sharing our faith, language and culture with them.

- f) The churches shall in principle open their pulpits to each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted by the respective church federations. Also the churches agree in principle to the possibility of calling each others ministers, while the churches reserve for themselves the right to maintain their own rules in connection with the extension and approval of calls

Response: Although we've had a minister from the KPCK in the past, the difference in language and culture does limit this aspect of our sister church relationship.

- g) In cases of substantial changes or additions to the confession, church order or liturgical forms this intention shall be brought to the special attention of the sister churches, so that as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached

Response: We have not paid much attention to this matter with respect to the KPCK up until this point of time.

- h) The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as advisers, as much as possible

Response: The KPCK has their General Assembly every year and it is of a substantially different character to our synods. Whereas our synods are of a deliberative nature, the Korean Assemblies give much less room for discussion on the floor and we are not able to meaningfully participate in the decisions made at their assemblies on the floor of Synod except through our official greetings. (When you read our Greetings to their 2016 General Assembly you will see that we interacted with five matters they had been or were still busy with.) Feedback we have received from Korean deputies who have attended our

last Synods is that they have appreciated the opportunity to be at our Synods and have spoken highly of what they experienced.

Concluding Remarks

We appreciate the questions you have raised concerning our relationship with the KPCK and trust that our response is helpful. You may also find the “Observations” made in the attached “Report on visit to South Korea September 2016” to be helpful.

Indeed, may the Lord bless our relationship with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea in such a way that we might be a blessing to one another to the praise of God’s Glory.

With Christian Greetings,

On behalf of Deputies,

Br. Wayne Pleiter
Corresponding Clerk

Rev. S ‘t Hart
Chairman

The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (DGK) and the Reformed Churches Netherlands (GKN)

Decision and Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 115) decided the following with respect to the DGK and GKN:

Decision

- d. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - to continue to monitor developments in both the DGK (De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland) and GKN (Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland),
 - to work in close contact with the CanRC deputies regarding these developments;
 - to exhort all those who have left the RCN to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith;
 - to maintain contact, and
 - to report back to the next Synod.

Grounds

2. To recognise the situation in the Netherlands is in a state of flux.
3. There are members, ministers and churches within the RCN who continue to express serious objections and grave concerns about the developments taking place among them, and still need time to consider how to respond.
4. The DGK and the GKN both recognised the need to separate themselves from the false teachings and subsequent practices in the RCN. Given our own

concerns with developments within the RCN it is wise to monitor developments in these church federations.

5. Any proposal for continuing contact with these newly formed churches should follow the normal church orderly route, that is by way of the minor assembly (CO art 30).
6. The deputies' report makes it clear that for the GKN, a formal relationship with the FRCA is presently not feasible.
7. Synod 2012 and the deputies' report notes that the DGK have decided not to entertain sister church relations with the FRCA, whilst the FRCA have sister church relations with the RCN.
8. This is consistent with the mandate to the deputies in 2012.
9. We decided in Article 96 re: CanRC 2.e. to liaise with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN.
10. The LORD calls us to pursue unity with all faithful believers.

Execution of mandate

1. *Monitoring developments*

1.1 *In the GKN*

With regards to the mandate to monitor developments in the GKN, the deputies executed this mandate by reviewing the monthly magazine of the GKN called "Weerklank", as well as keeping up to date via their website: www.gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl.

Noted here is that the GKN held their first official Synod on 12th March 2016. Because of the small amount of six churches in this bond of churches, they are not meeting in Classes yet, but only in consistory and Synod meetings. This resulted in following Synods which were held on 1st October 2016 as well as on 18th March 2017. All Synod meetings took place in Ede.

During these Synods reports were made with regards to the contact between the GKN and DGK. To be noted here is a mutual press release that has been published by delegates of both the GKN and DGK federations after their meeting on 17th February 2017. In this press release the delegates reflect on recent deliberations. They have met since 2016 and correspondence followed, some resulting in communication difficulties. The GKN delegates expressed their difficulties with the agenda points published online by the DGK delegates and the correspondence that followed. One point of discussion was whether Church order, church polity decisions and church history are part of the foundation of the church. The meeting concluded that the foundation of the church is nothing other than the Scriptures and the confessions.

Furthermore it is noted that the different articles of the acts of the DGK were meant to be agenda points for discussion rather than to express judgment on the GKN or function as requirements for further deliberations. Both parties expressed their gratitude for the positive contact and both will report to their own Synods.

The GKN Synod also decided on its meeting on 12th March 2016 not to adhere to the request of the RCN (GKv) to complete a questionnaire with regard to women in office. This questionnaire does not serve to help the RCN to come to a Biblical conclusion, but only reflects on current developments/situations in the RCN churches.

This Synod also decided to send brotherly greetings to the CanRC 2016 Synod held in Dunnville.

1.2 In the DGK

With regards to the mandate to monitor developments in the DGK, the deputies executed this mandate by reviewing the bi-annual magazine of the DGK called "ReformedContinua", available digitally via the DGK-website: www.gereformeerde-kerken-hersteld.nl.

Since Synod Baldivis 2015, the main developments within the DGK relate to the contact with the GKN (see 1.1), as well as the

correspondence between the DGK and the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA) in Canada.

2. *Work in close contact with the CanRC deputies regarding these developments*

Regretfully this part of the mandate did not receive sufficient input. This is due to the fact that the contact with the CanRC deputies was mostly consumed by the focus on the developments within the RCN. There have been informal talks with the CanRC deputies during the RCN Synod Meppel about the mutual meetings with deputies from both the DGK and GKN.

3. *Exhort all those who have left the RCN to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith*

This appeared to be the hardest part of the mandate to execute, due to the complexity of the background of those who have left the RCN. Both ministers and church members left the RCN for different reasons, in different circumstances and on different times and locations since 2003. The historical background and developments of those who left the RCN are not only based on negative developments within the RCN, but also concern (sensitive) personal circumstances. This is caused and/or often resulted in damaged relationships and apparently barely restored contacts and mutual cooperation. Sending letters of exhortation to both the GKN and DGK under the current sensitive stage of contact would have caused more harm than good. We can also add that most of those who have left the RCN do not lack any information about alternative churches to join. Within the compact Dutch society with a high level of internet connection, contact with those who love the Word and the Reformed faith is easily made.

4. *Maintain contact*

Most of the contacts remained informal and on a personal level during the second half of 2015 and 2016. However, we could meet in person before the RCN Synod in Meppel in April 2017, which resulted in positive contact and deliberations.

4.1 Contact with deputies DGK

The meeting on 3rd April in Ermelo with the DGK-deputies took place in a more positive atmosphere than in 2013. The delegates presented themselves in a brotherly way. However, most of the questions by the DGK deputies (**Appendix 1**) were quite critical of nature towards the FRCA and was experienced by one deputy in a 'one-way' interrogation fashion. The minutes of this meeting reflect this too. (**Appendix 2**). The scheduled time was too limited to complete the proposed agenda. However, the DGK deputies did provide us with an extract from their 2014-15 Synod Acts about their local ecclesiastical relations. Their synodical discussion and decisions show that while there is a desire to continue discussions with the GKN looking towards unity, there is still a long way to go before any formal recognition may be reached.

4.2 Contact with deputies GKN

The meeting on 3rd April in Wezep with the GKN deputies took place in a brotherly and upbuilding way. The GKN deputies highlighted the fact that the RCN has so far become another "pond" and no longer forms a logical source from which the GKN try to win members. There are some groups who on their own initiative have requested to join the GKN. The most recent example is a group of about 20 people from Harderwijk. However, no 'big' movement is expected from the RCN in the near future. Also the picture that the GKN is just a break-away group from the RCN is incorrect. Not all GKN-members are from RCN background and the GKN has no contact with the RCN.

With regard to the relation between the FRCA and the GKN, it was stated that the GKN will request a sister relationship in due time via an official request.

The GKN deputies requested the minutes of the meeting to be kept confidential.

1. Recommendation in regards GKN

1. To consider the mandate with respect to the GKN to be completed.

Grounds:

1. The current mandate had been established with the background of our relationship with the RCN. The GKN have established themselves as a distinct church federation and do not wish to be viewed as ex-RCN people.
2. Any request for a sister-church relationship must come to the table of synod from one of the churches.

2. Recommendation in regards DGK

1. To consider the mandate with respect to the DGK to be completed.

Grounds:

1. The current mandate had been established with the background of our relationship with the RCN. With the proposal for termination of this relationship, the current mandate ends.
2. Synod Legana 2009, art. 75 already decided against entering into a sister church relationship with the DGK on the grounds that they are not to be recognised as the continuation of the RCN.
3. The sister-relationship between the DGK and the seceded church of Abbotsford prevents any form of ecclesiastical relationship between the FRCA and the DGK.
4. The ongoing critical approach from the DGK towards the FRCA causes no current need for ecclesiastical contact.

Appendix 1

Agenda meeting DGK and FRCA

Date Monday, April 3, 2017

Location: Our Home. Address: Zeeweg 100, Ermelo.

Start at 13.00 - 15.00

Expected attendees

On behalf of Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of
Australia:

Ds. R.D. Anderson and Rev. A. Hagg.

On behalf of Deputies of the Reformed Churches:

Br. Joh. Houweling, Rev. C. Koster, Rev. S. de Marie and Br. A.
van der Net.

1. Opening (by DGK)
 - a. Presentation and adoption agenda
2. DGK's discussion points towards FRCA
 - A. What message do you have for the RCN regarding the decision to be taken on women in office? Can you maintain a sister relationship if the RCN will postpone this decision?
 - B. What is your view on the RCN?
 - C. The sister-church relationship of the RCNZ with the CRCA has been transformed into an Ecumenical Fellowship. The FRCA has therefore decided (Synod Baldivis 2015) that there was room for a sister-church relationship with the RCNZ. Could you explain why this change between RCNZ and CRCA means that there is now room for a sister relationship with FRCA with RCNZ?
 - D. You have a sister relationship with the RCNZ, while the RCNZ holds an Ecumenical Fellowship

with CRCA. At the same time, the FRCA seems to be having trouble with DGK, because of our sister-church relationship with LRCA. Therefore, we ask ourselves if there would be room for the FRCA to engage in any sister relationship with DGK, despite the fact that DGK maintains its sister relationship with LRCA?

- E. You have a strong connection with your sister churches, the CanRC. There are family ties and a common language. Your ministers will be trained there. Pastors are recruited again and again. We can imagine that you are grateful for it. At the same time, we ask ourselves, are there any issues you may have with the (internal developments of) CanRC?
- F. How, for example, is the CanRC associated with NAPARC?
- G. FRCA Synod Legana 2009 gave the following assignment to your deputies:

Firstly: "Monitor developments within the CanRC for the mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed".

Secondly: "Seek clarification about and discuss the changing manner in which they deal with significant differences with other church federations in their unity discussions".

The reasons for this decision were:

"The changing way in dealing with significant differences in inter-church relations is substantial and worthy of discussion (e.g., Confessional Membership, Fencing of the Lord's Supper, etc.)" (Acts Art. 40). (See also Acta GS Armadale Art 59)

At the same time, we see that your synod Armadale of 2012 stated that the information you received from LRCA was inadmissible. Is it not

possible to approach the LRCA as an independent church and also to engage with them, just as your churches do with the deputies of DGK, while there is another sister relationship between FRCA and the RCN?

- H. Have you been able to further study the release of the brothers and sisters of the LRCA?

Is our sister-church relationship still an "impediment" for the FRCA to enter into a sister-church relationship with us, DGK?

- I. How are the FRCA contacts with the URCNA?
- J. The Australian churches at that time entered into a sister-church relationship with the Korean churches (KPC, Kosin). We realise that it is difficult to understand the church situation and developments in countries like Korea. Also, as far as we can see, in Presbyterian churches, there is another policy regarding the Holy Supper than we have as reformed churches. How do you handle this?
- K. What is the exact status of the PCK migrants in Perth, who have formed their own presbytery and have made contact with the PCA.

3. FRCA directions to DGK
4. General business
5. Closure (by FRCA)

Appendix 2

Minutes of deputies BBK on Monday, April 3, 2017

Our House, Zeeweg 100 in Ermelo, 1pm

Opening, welcome and setting of agenda

Ds. S. de Marie opens the meeting in a Christian manner. We read Rev. 3: 7-13, sing Psalm 125: 1, 2 and the chairman starts in prayer. A brief description of the reading is given.

Present deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia: Dr. R.D. Anderson and Rev. A. Hagg. Present deputies of the Reformed Churches: br. Joh. Houweling, Rev. C. Koster, Dr. S. de Marie and Br. A. van der Net. In a short round, the attendees introduce themselves. The previous meeting was in 2014, then in a slightly different composition.

Conversation points

The discussion points have been forwarded to the deputies of FRCA in advance by the deputies of DGK. The deputies of FRCA had no questions. Therefore, DGK's questions are used as the basis for the discussion. Below are the questions from the deputies of DGK sent to FRCA. Below is the discussion that followed following the question.

What message do you have for the RCN regarding the decision to be taken on women in office? Can you maintain a sister relationship if the RCN would postpone this decision?

Explanation of DGK Deputies. DGK will monitor the course of the RCN intensively. DGK claim to be the continuation of the RCN and therefore DGK is also pleased with the serious and profound warnings that come from the foreign churches to the RCN.

Answer from FRCA deputies. The FRCA has suspended the relationship with the RCN. The reason for the suspension is not just how they think about women in office, but the concerns are much broader. Therefore, the synod of FRCA said: If there is no

repentance, then the church relationship with the RCN cannot be maintained. What the RCN decide specifically about women in office does not really matter in that regard.

The FRCA deputies cannot address the synod in the coming week. They had to put their findings in writing and send it to the delegates. In addition, there are three speakers that will speak on Thursday about women in office. One of the speakers is also an FRCA deputy. Hopefully, this gives opportunity to an in-depth discussion about the troubling course the RCN is following. But the impression of the FRCA deputies is that they are not really open to a different sound than is currently governed by the RCN.

The churches of the FRCA and RCN have really grown apart. The FRCA deputies see it as their task to call the RCN to return.

DGK Deputies. DGK deputies recognise the picture that FRCA deputies paint of the RCN. In the RCN, the reformed course has been openly let go of. An example of 'reformed 2.0' is mentioned as an article in which a professor has a new view of the confession, in which the direct binding to the confession is let go of.

FRCA deputies. The difference between RCN and FRCA may also be affected by the fact that the members of FRCA feel less connected with the Netherlands. More and more people cannot understand or read the Dutch language. High school students are still taught about the 1944 liberation, for example. But that does not happen at catechism level. It lives less with the youth. It is also less relevant for the youth in the Australian context. In the Netherlands, that is different, in the Netherlands, church history is very up to date because you have different church connections in one village or city. Then you need to know what your church identity is. But not so in Australia. For example, catechism extends to the Australian churches and their past. Of course, the basic elements of church and church order are taught, but not exactly the precise historical circumstances of, for example, 1944. The Reformed Continua (a DGK deputies magazine) is not read much in Australia.

DGK Deputies: How does the FRCA see the connection with churches in the Netherlands in the future?

FRCA Deputies: Reference is made to the proposal on FRCA's last synod regarding contact with Brazil. You cannot have a sister relationship with all true churches in the world. A new sister-church relationship in the Netherlands is not impossible, but also not self-evident. That will be judged by the usefulness: how useful is such a relationship? What is the motivation for entering into such a relationship? How possible is it also in practical terms? For example, actual support may be a good reason. However, two thirds of the preachers in FRCA cannot speak Dutch. So understanding the Dutch situation requires a lot of explanation and time. That's a big difference to 20 - 30 years ago.

DGK Deputies: Why did you formulate ground 4 of your decision 115 of the last synod? If there is to be an ecclesiastical contact between FRCA and DGK, must it come from the local churches through all the church orderly ways onto the synod table? The contact between deputies of DGK and FRCA is already there?

FRCA Deputies: Formally, the contact between FRCA and DGK (and also with GKN) is based on an Australian Synod Decree, as these groups and churches (GKN and DGK) originated from the RCN. As far as FRCA was concerned, it was in this context, in order to gain a better understanding of the RCN itself. All contacts with DGK and GKN are based on this. The FRCA sees a new formal contact with DGK as something new, which via the ecclesiastical route ad art. 30 KO will be discussed.

DGK Deputies: DGK has already raised the question of a sister relationship with FRCA synod. The synod of Armadale and Baldivis voted on this. The judgment was then postponed. Then is it already on the synod table? Why still the church orderly way, starting with the local congregation?

FRCA Deputies: Yet, such a request must start again at the local church. That is different in the Netherlands than in Australia. Australian churches are very strict on this point. For

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example, it also was this way with the URCNA. All local churches received a request from the URCNA to engage in a sister relationship with these churches. The synod of the FRCA then said: First, look at what CanRC has said about these churches and how the URCNA deals with it. In such a case, FRCA can also be advised by CanRC.

Moreover, a church federation can write to the deputies of the FRCA. Those deputies will send such a letter to the general secretary. Who then sends it back to all local churches. The local churches must then send the wish for a sister relationship to the classis. And the classis brings it to the synod.

What is your view on the GKN?

FRCA Deputies: This question has already been answered. The contact with GKN has been grafted on the contact between FRCA and RCN. The FRCA would appreciate a good description of the current situation in the Netherlands and the conversation between GKN and DGK.

DGK Deputies: The DGK deputies give a brief sketch of the history of DGK and GKN. The GKN is partly members from DGK, partly directly from the GKV. In the past, there has been contact at local level between DGK and GKN. DGK's GS Groningen 2014-2015 has decided to also have contact at national level. March 18, 2017, the GKN Synod noted that for DGK the foundation of the church is only Scripture and Confession, and they have the boldness to engage in substantive conversation with DGK.

FRCA Deputies: In Australia people who are unaware of the Dutch situation are delighted DGK and GKN are meeting to seek to come together. Such contact between DGK and GKN also helps FRCA to seek ecclesiastical contact with the Netherlands. It is difficult for outsiders to see everything. Up to the abbreviations, it is difficult to understand and appreciate everything.

The sister church relationship of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) has changed into an Ecclesiastical

Fellowship (EF). The FRCA has therefore decided (Synod Baldivis 2015) that there was room for a sister-church relationship with the RCNZ. Could you explain why this change between RCNZ and CRCA means that there is now room for a sister relationship with FRCA with RCNZ?

DGK Deputies: The background to this question is that this decision of the FRCA Synod raises questions. It seems that only the name of the relationship has changed, but the relationship itself is continued like before. And that change has only been done to establish a relationship with the RCNZ.

FRCA Deputies: The FRCA Synod has understood from RCNZ that the EC between RCNZ and CRCA is in the context of discontinuing contact with the CRCA. The EF is there to have some practical contact so that the RCNZ can make it clear what it's all about. There was some confusion in the Australian churches about that step of the FRCA because the CRCA reported RCNZ's step to CRCA's own synod as if nothing really changed: the contact would have been continued on an ongoing basis. However, the RCNZ made it very clear that CRCA deputies' report on their own synod is not correct. The deputies of the CRCA had softened what RCNZ actually meant as a disciplinary measure of RCNZ towards CRCA. In addition, this decision did not fall well with everybody in the FRCA. At the next synod a request for revision will be tabled.

DGK Deputies: Is the answer of FRCA deputies true to the actual content of the EF? An EF provides the opportunity to sit at each other's Holy supper tables and to preach on each other's pulpits. So at EF, there is really a substantive, ecclesiastical relationship.

FRCA Deputies: Whether there is actually pulpit swap between RCNZ and CRCA, the FRCA deputies do not know at the moment. The FRCA deputies do not have the RCNZ in their mandate. The contact with RCNZ falls under its own, separate deputyship in Albany, where Rev. Pot and Rev. Alkema are involved. It is true that within the EC, one can go to a RCNZ church from CRCA. But then they must have a conversation with the church consistory. Such a conversation is similar to a

conversation in the Netherlands, if someone wishes to become a member of the church.

The RCNZ, in contrast to the FRCA, has variation in its churches. The RCNZ also has a different history of origin. If you look at the people who move from New Zealand (and are members of RCNZ) to Australia, half go to the CRCA, the other half to the FRCA. Those people joining the FRCA are often more conservative, so that in the FRCA a specific image of the RCNZ is created, which is based only on members of the conservative part of the RCNZ. Besides, the RCNZ is moving within the bandwidth of the reformed confession, though it is somewhat broader than we are used to. These churches can be seen as faithful churches. For example, they do not tolerate Scriptural criticism. The CRCA does not know the deputies. The CRCA is not in the picture within the FRCA. This is not discussed in churches or classes.

You have a sister-church relationship with the RCNZ, while the RCNZ holds an EF with CRCA. At the same time, the FRCA seems to be having trouble with DGK, because of our sister-church relationship with LRCA. Therefore, we ask ourselves if there would be room for FRCA to engage in any sister relationship with DGK, despite the fact that DGK maintains its sister relationship with LRCA?

FRCA Deputies: The relationship between DGK and LRCA is to be considered as an ordinary sister relationship, which does not involve any reduction or concern. Because DGK is still in discussions with CanRC, it is obvious that the FRCA is awaiting the development of that relationship between DGK and CanRC. Because the relationship between FRCA and CanRC is not under pressure. The relationship between DGK and LRCA is therefore a potential hindrance if the DGK and FRCA were to approach each other.

About the questions concerning the creation of the LRCA, the CanRC will have to make their point of view clear. The LRCA has sent a letter to all FRCA churches, but that did not cause any tension in the relationship between FRCA and CanRC. Therefore, the local situation and the origin of the LRCA does

not directly affect the FRCA. The synod of FRCA does not involve itself on this point. This issue must also arise from local churches. In this way it could be discussed at the level of the classis or synod. In addition, the agenda of the FRCA Synod was already full with the relationship with the RCN and with the contact with RCNZ and Indonesia. But in reality, the situation of LRCA does not play a big role in the churches of FRCA.

DGK Deputies: The Synod of Armadale (Armadale) has said (Art 59 KO): The letter of LRCA is inadmissible. The synod did not want to talk about it. But should the FRCA synod not really say: the LRCA is the result of the CanRC, we need to think about it?

FRCA Deputies: The FRCA is deeply concerned about RCN. That's why FRCA has contact with DGK and the GKN. But that's not the case with the CanRC. There are no major concerns about the CanRC, so the FRCA does not get in the middle of a local, internal affair in CanRC.

DGK Deputies: The LRCA is not just a local affair, but it is a national affair. It is about the relationship between CanRC and other foreign churches, such as the OPC, the URCNA. And it matters, such as the celebration of the Holy Supper, the pluralism, the covenant. In the OPC, Baptists are allowed to attend the Holy Supper. If we raise these subjects with the CanRC, the CanRC deputies are not shocked about it at all. Does the FRCA not fear that these important elements of our confession are at stake? The operation of the OPC also has an impact on the CanRC, as OPC members can participate in the CanRC Holy Supper celebration. In the OPC there is a general admonition from the pulpit, but no real protection of the Holy Supper table. This is referred to as a matter of historical background of the OPC, as less important matters. But are they indeed less important matters? In this way, do you keep the sacrament holy?

FRCA deputies: the FRCA are not shocked by this. It is not FRCA's practice to allow Baptists to attend the Holy Supper. The sister churches in Korea do much more than the OPC in this regard. But the CanRC can be seen as faithful, reformed

churches. For example, they did not continue the ecclesiastical contact with the PCEA, because there is a preacher in the PCEA who promotes the evolutionary theory. The PCEA did not want to admonish that minister, so the CanRC has not continued the sister-church relationship with the PCEA. That is a clear sign that they have fought for the authority of Scripture and against error and Scriptural criticism.

What we should not forget is that the distance in Australia is also really a determining factor for contacts between churches. In the Netherlands we know everything from each other and we have an opinion about it. In Australia, that is different. One does not know everything from each other. That plays a role in the culture of the churches.

DGK Deputies: There are many links between CanRC and FRCA. Therefore, the worrying developments within CanRC do have everything to do with FRCA. In Presbyterian churches, there is generally a different view on the church and the pluralism in the church. The church uses the image of a tree with branches. All these branches are different churches, all belonging to that one tree. See, for example, Williamson: who even says that a closed supper is unbiblical. How do FRCA deputies interact with Presbyterian churches? Are we talking about modalities, or do we speak in accordance with Art. 29 NGB.

FRCA Deputies: You have to test all ecclesiastical contacts to the three forms of unity. But not all churches have these three forms. So, as a church, you have to make choices. In Australia or Rockingham, that is different from Katwijk. In Katwijk, there are many reformed churches in one place, which are very closely related. You therefore have your hands full to maintain yourself by saying: this is who we are, you must defend and explain your existence to your youth and your church. In Rockingham, that is very different: you are the only church in the city that is reformed. There is no danger that people will switch to another reformed church because they disagree with you at a certain minor point. This is not possible in FRCA. Perhaps you can go to an Anglican church or to Baptists, but

that temptation is generally not that big. That's another situation, you live in a different context than in the Netherlands. That other context is also a wealth and a task. You should also teach about church and being a church. The Australian churches are islands. There are growing contacts, first informal with Singapore and New Zealand. That grows, through contact from both sides, recognising each other as brothers and sisters. That leads to a sister-church relationship, and so you come together. For example, this has also happened with the Kosin churches in Korea. It developed and in that process you try to find ways to fulfil the recognition and commitment that exists in Christ.

DGK Deputies: Surely it is mainly about adherence to Scripture? There is a practice in another country that you would judge in the Netherlands as unscriptural. How can you accept abroad what you would reject in the Netherlands? For example, when it comes to the practice surrounding attending the Holy Supper.

FRCA deputies: why is there so much criticism on your part?? Would you like a sister-church relationship with the FRCA? Or is that, given the choices made by FRCA, an impossibility for DGK? How FRCA looks at the Holy Supper in other cultures is as follows. The Holy Supper practice, as we know, is good and even better than the Presbyterian way. But the Holy Supper practice in the churches with whom FRCA has contact is not in violation of Scripture or confession. The Presbyterian churches originated from another culture and another history. Therefore, you can and must accept another practice, while you can say: one wants to sincerely keep those sacred sacraments in those churches, as the Scripture demands of us. Only the way we keep the Lord's table holy, is filled in differently.

DGK Deputies: With regard to the critical questions: DGK sincerely seeks the unity with FRCA, that is why we ask these questions. We want to be reformed in a Catholic way. But it's a struggle to give concrete meaning to the norm of God's Word in dealing with churches from other countries and cultures. Also the preaching in Australia is being seen as very positive by

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DGK deputies who have themselves heard Australian preachers. At the same time there are concerns, points to talk about. And we have to give that shape in this conversation.

There were still other questions on the agenda, but they could not be discussed for the sake of time. Dr. R.D. Anderson prays and the chairman closes the meeting.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN)

Decision and Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 75) decided the following with respect to the RCN:

Decision

To discharge deputies, to thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:

- a. to interact with the deputies BBK;
- b. to monitor and analyse responses by the RCN;
- c. to interact with the request of Synod Ede for advice with respect to the role of men and women in the church, and present the clear biblical teaching on this matter;
- d. to send to the consistories of the RCN, a copy of the first and second letter sent to the next Synod of the RCN in 2017;
- e. to send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCN;
- f. to report to the next Synod.

Grounds

1. The RCN acknowledge that they have changed (see decision in response to admonitions 2.a.3.), but deny any Scriptural or Confessional deviation, and consequently feel no need for repentance and return.
2. There is ample evidence of the toleration of the use of a hermeneutic among them which allows man to transgress God's commandments and invalidates the Word of God.
3. As sister churches we have promised to 'exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world... and to mutually care for each other that they do not depart from

the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.’ (Rules for sister churches).

4. The RCN have clearly communicated to us that concerns and objections are to be addressed directly to their Synod. Synod Ede has asked that objections are to be addressed directly to their Synod. Synod Ede has specifically asked for advice from sister churches regarding the role of men and women in the church.
5. By suspending the sister church relationship, our call for obedience and submission to the clear meaning of Scripture may yet be heard and acted upon by many in the RCN.
6. Because of the grave concerns we have for our sister in The Netherlands, the churches should bring this matter regularly in prayer before the LORD.

Execution of mandate

The work completed by the Deputies, centred on the mandate provided by Synod Baldivis 2015 as outlined above.

Re: Mandate a: interact with the deputies BBK

The following interaction took place with the deputies BBK:

1. A letter was sent to BBK to inform them of the decisions taken at Synod Baldivis 2015. These included the suspension of our relationship with the RCN and the decision to notify the next Dutch synod of ‘our deep sadness at the response of Synod Ede to our letter of admonition sent by Synod Armadale’. In addition ‘to declare that the FRCA’s sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if the next Synod of the RCN in 2017 does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of the Synod of Armadale 2012 to the Synod of Ede 2014.’
2. A letter was received from BBK to notify us of their action to inform the RCN congregations of the decisions made by Synod Baldivis 2015 with regards to the relationship

with the RCN, as well as an English translation of a document produced on behalf of Synod Ede 2014 which gives a basic overview of responsibilities with respect to the Theological University, this in answer to concerns which had been raised by deputies to Synod Baldivis 2015 concerning the oversight of the University. Given that Synod Baldivis did not formally mention these concerns in its decisions, we refrain from reporting further on this matter here.

3. A letter was received from BBK objecting to our sending of letters to all the RCN congregations, according to instruction d. of the mandate. In reply a letter was sent to BBK to inform them that we were bound to our mandate by Synod Baldivis and that there had been opportunity for their delegate to Synod Baldivis to object to this decision at that time, which he did not do.
4. Invitation to Synod Meppel 2017

Re: Mandate b: monitor and analyse responses by the RCN

1. This was accomplished by monitoring regular updates on the RCN website www.gkv.nl as well as reflections on these developments through church magazines such as 'Nader Bekeken' and 'Onderweg' and the newspapers 'Nederlands Dagblad' and 'Reformatorisch Dagblad'.
2. During the Dutch synod a letter was received from the advisory committee 'Man, woman and office' (MVeA) of RCN General Synod Meppel 2017 requesting a written response to certain extended (and rather leading) exegetical questions on the issue of women in office. There was, however, insufficient time available to respond to this request. In addition, your delegates had already spent several hours discussing these matters with the committee and felt that little further was to be gained from such a response. Our position had also been made clear by the letter of deputies to BBK of 7 March 2016 which included the publication of Rev. Anderson on 'God's Word and the Woman in Office' (Appendix 2).

3. Letter from Synod Meppel to inform the FRCA that it has decided to maintain the sister relationship between the RCN and the FRCA, as well as an appendix on the decisions made by Synod Meppel 2017 with regards to women in office (Appendix 1).
4. An analysis of the current discussion of women in office at the time of the synod was published in *Una Sancta* (Appendix 5).

Re: Mandate c: interact with the request of Synod Ede for advice

1. A letter was sent, interacting with the RCN giving them advice on the Biblical principles with respect to the role of men and women in the church. (Appendix 2)

Re: Mandate d: send letters from Synod to the local consistories of the RCN

1. A copy of the first (prepared at Synod Armadale) and second letter (prepared at Synod Baldivis) to the next Synod of the RCN in 2017 were send to the consistories of the RCN (Appendix 3)

Re: Mandate e: send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCN

1. Reverendi Hagg and Anderson attended the Synod on behalf of the deputies and engaged in discussions with BBK, the advisory committee on women in office as well as many Dutch delegates. Several hours at a time were spent in meetings and there were also many informal discussions. It was gratifying to acknowledge that there were at least a *few* Dutch delegates sympathetic to our position. There was also much support from other foreign delegates, not limited to those from our sister churches. Greetings to Synod were not permitted to be given verbally, but were published in a booklet to the Synod (Appendix 4). Out of all the foreign delegates, only three were invited to address synod on the question of women in office, among whom was Rev. Anderson. For

reflections on the delegates' visit to Synod Meppel 2017
see the article published in *Una Sancta* (Appendix 5).

Re: Mandate f: Report to Synod Bunbury

On balance, instead of repentance and a move back toward a more Scriptural approach to being church, the RCN have driven their train even harder upon the rails already established. There has been no specific response to the admonitions given in either the letter of Synod Armadale 2012 or Synod Baldivis 2015. Instead of repentance, there has been the repeated patronising assertion that the new hermeneutical approach and its results are the only way forward in a modern world. The pleas of virtually all the delegates from foreign churches present at Synod were politely heard only to be set aside completely. Synod Baldivis had with a heavy heart concluded:

‘that the FRCA’s sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if the next Synod of the RCN in 2017 does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of the Synod of Armadale 2012 to the Synod of Ede 2014.’

Conclusion

It is with sadness that we as delegates are forced to conclude that the relationship indeed has become untenable. While historical ties mean that such a decision is difficult to take and brings much emotion with it, ultimately the decision to terminate the relationship must be made with a view toward the honour of Jesus Christ Himself and the edification of his churches. In practice, such a termination is the result of the new and unscriptural course consciously taken by the RCN. They have knowingly brought this impasse in our relationship upon themselves.

Recommendation

For the FRCA with sadness to terminate the sister relationship with the RCN.

Grounds

1. The relationship with the RCN has become untenable due to her decision to allow women to the office of deacon, elder and minister.
2. Due to her use of 'New Hermeneutics' –principles, allowing the current cultural context to play a determining role in explaining Scripture, the RCN has turned away from the clear instructions in God's Word and has shown unfaithfulness by lack of submission to that Word.
3. There has been no adequate response, let alone repentance, to earlier admonitions.

Appendices

Ad b:

Appendix 1

Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland
Meppel 2017
Postadres: Postbus 770
3800 AT Amersfoort

Bezoekadres: Conferentiecentrum
Mennorode
Apeldoornseweg 185
8075 RJ Elspeet
Telefoon: 06 31 684 729
E-mail: synode@gkv.nl
Internet: www.gkv.nl

To the Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Dep. Contact Sister Churches
Br. Wayne Pleiter
per email: waynepleiter@bigpond.com; sthart@iinet.net.au;
andersonharpichords@gmail.com; axelhagg@hotmail.com
Almelo, 12 September 2017
Kenmerk: 53-BBK-170912-FRCA

Esteemed brothers and sisters in our Lord,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with his precious blood has purchased for Himself a people spread all over the world to worship the name of the triune God. To Him be glory for ever!

The Reformed Churches (liberated) in The Netherlands met during the course of 2017 together in general synod. By means

of this letter we wish to relay its decision concerning our relationship with you.

The decision taken reads as follows:

To instruct deputies BBK to maintain the relationship with the sister churches listed below in accordance with the general rules and according to the appointments made with each of these churches separately, with a view to learning from each other, supporting each other, and praising Christ's name together.

You are listed as one of these sister churches. Our deputies for Relations with Foreign Churches (BBK) will inform you of relevant decisions taken by our synod as these become available in translation. Should you be able to read Dutch, these may already be accessed via www.synode.gkv.nl.

Let's learn from each other, support each other and praise Christ's name together. May the Lord bless our relationship!

In unity through Christ,

On behalf of the Synod,

Ds. Frans Wisselink,
Scriba II

Appendix

Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland
Meppel 2017

Postadres: Postbus 770
3800 AT Amersfoort

Bezoekadres: Conferentiecentrum
Mennorode
Apeldoornseweg 185
8075 RJ Elspeet
Telefoon: 06 31 684 729

E-mail: synode@gkv.nl

Internet: www.gkv.nl

To all the church councils and all the classes of the Reformed Churches

Almelo, July 4, 2017

Concerns: Decisions Male/Female and office

Mark: 25-MVEA-170704

Dear brothers and sisters,

Synod has requested its moderamen to explain and provide information concerning its decisions in relation to Male/Female and the Office in the letter below.

In this letter we would like to tell you something about the background to the decisions that were taken. We also describe the decision-making process that we as General Synod have followed. Finally, we make it clear that it is for the churches to make the next move. We express the hope that we may, with the help of God, find our way together in this matter.

The Background

In 2005, at the General Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, the matter 'Women in the Church' first found its way onto the table of Synod. The immediate cause of this was a letter sent by the church council of the GKv of Voorthuizen-Barneveld. In it, the council raised the issue that in our contact with the Netherlands Reformed Churches the matter of 'women and office' brought with it questions that "could not be addressed in a simple manner by Biblical answers". Furthermore, the council pointed out that "we are dealing with a gradually growing practice of sisters who are deploying their gifts within the congregation in the absence of a clear Biblical rationale. Upon closer study, complex exegetical and hermeneutical questions quickly come to the surface; this is a task that goes beyond our capacity to deal with. What is more, we believe that this matter transcends local significance."

The General Synod, upon a proposal by the Regional Synod of Gelderland, instituted Deputies for 'Women in the Church', with the following mandate:

- To investigate, by means of a problem analysis, chiefly on the basis of empirical research, and in collaboration with the Theological University, the questions and problems the churches have identified around the subject of 'women in the church';
- To develop an approach that sets out in which way we may come to sound, Scripturally founded answers to the questions and problems that this investigation brings to the fore.

That was the beginning of the process that led to the decisions we have now made, in the year 2017.

We briefly outline the intermediate steps that followed:

- In 2008 the first report of Deputies was released; it contained a great deal of basic information. On the basis of a review of literature and empirical research the deputies observed that several different lines of argument played out in this matter, and that a range of views existed within the church around it. At that time, the Deputies proposed to keep this matter on the churches' agenda, by undertaking a theoretical study, and also by engaging in a dialogue within the churches.
- The Deputies that followed (2011) published a set of guidelines, and reported on how they were used in the churches. In addition, the book *Als vrouwen het woord doen* (When women speak) by Myriam Klinkerde Klerk (2011) saw publication: this theoretical study was carried out at the request of the Deputies. New Deputies were appointed, who were to prepare a pathway providing directions for the decision-making process.
- In 2014 the majority of Deputies presented the conclusion that "The position that besides men, women also may serve in the offices of the church, as described

in this report, fits within the breadth of what can be affirmed as Biblical and Reformed”. The discussion that ensued at Synod centred especially on culture, hermeneutics and the offices. Synod did not agree with the supporting arguments to the Deputies’ conclusion, but at the same time did decide that “the view that beside men women may also serve in the ecclesiastical offices must be open for free debate, provided that arguments are based on Scripture.” Synod appointed two new deputyships, one to conduct discussions within the churches, and the other to focus on a study of the matter.

- In 2016 the study Deputies (Male/Female and the Office) released a preliminary report, in which the sore points in the discussion were identified, and in which the two lines that can be seen in Scripture were explicitly explored: one line can be discerned that curtails the contribution of women, while the other line clearly acknowledges such a contribution. Do we do an injustice to Scripture if we do not give this room to women, or rather if we do? With this report, the Deputies aimed to encourage the churches to begin a spiritual process of finding a shared course in addressing this problem. This was done in collaboration with the Deputies Male/Female in the Church, who had made an inventory of the current role of women in the local churches, and who had guided the process in the churches through local and regional discussion evenings.
- In their final report, “Serving Together”, the Deputies Male/Female and the Office articulated their findings about: what the Bible says about women; what the Bible says about the offices; the historical development of the offices; the practice in our churches; and the insights of sister churches within our own country and abroad.

Why is this a currently relevant issue?

In its discussions, the General Synod of Meppel (2017) has been continually and especially mindful of the urgency of this matter, which had been on the table of Synods since 2005. This

urgency was highlighted in 2016 by the Deputies Male/Female in the Church.

A practice has grown of increasing deployment of our sisters and their gifts in all kinds of tasks in the congregations. Sisters perform pastoral, leadership and instructional tasks that in the past had only been carried out by office-bearers. This sets up a tension between our doctrine of the office and congregational practice. What is the Biblical underpinning and justification of the deployment of women in the Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland Meppel 2017 congregation?

At the same time, the delegates to Synod were constantly confronted with the differences of view that exist concerning this matter. That is the situation in which we as churches find ourselves: we tasted it in the variety of letters that were sent to us from the churches; we encountered it in the meetings we had with sister churches throughout the world during Synod's "days for churches abroad". And in our meeting sessions at Synod we wrestled with the same differences in insight.

Inside and outside the meetings at Synod we spoke to each other about the doctrine of the office, hermeneutics, the texts requiring women to be silent, and the different roles of men and women.

We considered alternative proposals: for example, we considered the possibility of opening the office of deacon to women, and at the same time to broaden our view of this office beyond our current practice; similarly, giving women permission to preach, while the office of elder (incorporating the final responsibility for the congregation) would then be reserved for men.

The decisions of Synod

First of all, Synod decided to encourage the churches to make careful arrangements with regard to the appointment of men and women in various kinds of service that do not belong to the offices. See decision 2.

This decision gives expression to our appreciation for and recognition of the possibilities the Spirit has given to women, gifts that they deploy in the congregation.

Further, Synod declared that there are Scriptural grounds to call, next to men, also women to the office of deacon, elder and minister. The text of the decisions articulates that next to the view that (certain) offices are to be reserved for men, there is also room for the view that these offices may be filled by women. (See decision 3). We did not easily resign ourselves to the difference in interpretation of the relevant texts. A careful weighing of the content of what Scripture says preceded these decisions, and this is reflected in the grounds provided. See decisions 3, 4 and 5.

We were able, on a number of points, to come to agreement; at the same time differences of insight remained, especially in relation to the calling of women to the offices of elder or minister. These differences in insight mirror the situation that exists within the churches.

The next move: up to the churches

Next, Synod decided to leave room for the local churches to decide for themselves whether, if so in what manner, and when they want to act in line with these decisions. See decision 7.

It is now up to each of the churches to discuss the decisions of Synod, and to address what lives in their own congregations. What is the level of support in the congregation for opening the offices to sisters? Do female members of the congregation feel called to an office? How ought we to deal with this in practice from here? It is vital that reflection and discussion about this matter does not come to a halt. That is what Synod has tried to establish in decision 8.

In order to facilitate this process of reflection, discussion and decision-making, Synod decided to appoint new Deputies Male/Female in the Church, in order to provide support to congregations and classes, to investigate what lives in the churches following on from the decisions that have been made, and to report to the next Synod. See decision 10.

Our Prayer

Synod is well aware that the decisions it has taken concerning the fulfilling of the offices by women will be received in different ways. For years already, differences of view have existed within the churches. This could easily hinder a genuine conversation between brothers and sisters.

That is why Synod issues an urgent plea to the churches and its members to carefully consider, with an open Bible, and before the face of God, the decisions it has taken and the grounds presented in support of them.

In the meantime, Synod is also cognizant of the fact that this approach to its decisions will not automatically lead to agreement concerning the opening of the offices to women. As a result, there will be growing differences in practice, from congregation to congregation, in relation to the filling of the offices.

Mindful of this, Synod makes an appeal to the churches and its members, even when there is difference of opinion on this point, to keep accepting one another (Romans 15:7). Let us heed the appeal of the apostle Paul to be eager to maintain the unity that the Spirit gives us in Christ in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

Let us realize that for now we see in a mirror dimly, and only know in part (1 Corinthians 13:12). And may we have strength to comprehend, together with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:18,19). Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

“Peace be to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible”. (Ephesians 6:23,24)

In unity through Christ,
On behalf of the Synod,
Ds. Frans Wisselink,
Scriba II

Supplement: decisions of Synod MF and office

Supplement: Decisions MFAO

Materials

1. Preliminary Report of Deputies Male/ Female and Office – The Sore Points (08-07-2016);
2. Final Report of Deputies Male/Female and Office – Serving Together (01-11-2016);
3. Letter from GK Brunssum-Treebeek (23-12-2016), indicating it is pleased with the report Serving Together, and expressing heartfelt agreement with draft decision 4;
4. Letter from GK Sint Jansklooster-Kadoelen (13-01-2017), interacting with the report Serving Together: taking the starting point in the creation of man and women is good; however, only the man was created in the image of God, not the woman; the ‘four layers’ model is incorrect; it is desirable that women are optimally deployed in the church, but that the differences between man and woman are not glossed over;
5. Letter from GK Kantens (23-01-2017), interacting with the report Samen Dienen: the manner in which chapter 2 gives attention to the historical contours provides valuable insights; however, it seems that the concept of equality between man and woman figures too prominently; chapter 3 seems to aim at providing room for women within the current structures of the office; broadening the office of deacons and (later) opening the office of deacons to women would be a good option; this matter ought not to be left in the freedom of the churches;

6. Letter from GK Bussum-Huizen (24-01-2107), providing an analysis of the report *Samen Dienen*: the report arrives at a different stance concerning the position of women in the congregation than has hitherto been taught in the churches; its discussion concerning the texts requiring women to be silent is too sketchy;
7. Letter from GK Emmeloord (26-01-2017), requesting that Synod limits itself to a declaration that 'women in office' is not in conflict with the Word of God, and that it leaves till the next Synod a decision to actually open the offices to sisters;
8. Supplementary report of Deputies Male/Female in Office' (31-01-2017): supplement to chapter 5 of the report *Samen Dienen*;
9. Letter from the Canadian Reformed Church (24-10-2017), interacting with chapter 2 of the report *Samen Dienen*: the manner in which the 'four layers' are described shows that 'culture' has determined the direction of the report; it is clear from I Corinthians 14:33b-35 and I Timothy 2:11-14 that the Bible leaves no grounds for the ordination of women; the report does not offer a clear description of what the Bible means with 'prophesying'; man and women have equal value, but according to Ephesians 5:22 women are to recognize the authority of their husband, and in this context the reference to I Corinthians 7:4b is inappropriate; the report falls short in failing to pay attention to I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6;
10. Letter from GK Capelle a/d IJssel-Noord (10-02-2017): asserting that the report *Samen Dienen* fails to do justice to the Word of God: in Chapter 2 the deputies wrongly state that Paul's interpretation of Genesis 1-3 is not to be regarded as normative; hence, the deputies have not done proper justice to the 'line of authority'; in Chapter 3 the difference between the ruling office and all kinds of service within the church has been watered down;

11. Letter from GK Spakenburg-Noord (24-01-2017): requesting not to go beyond decisions-in-principle at this stage, and only implementing these decisions if the next Synod agrees to do so with a great majority; 12. Letter from GK Veenendaal-Oost (27-01-2017): asserting that the line the Bible gives concerning Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland Meppel 2017 leadership of the congregation points to the man's role; in its view, insufficient weight has been given to the fact that at the Fall it was Adam who bore ultimate responsibility, and that Jesus appointed 12 male disciples; expressing objections against the deputies' reformulation of their mandate; and making a plea for option e., possibly to be extended by opening the office of deacons to sisters;
13. Letter from Deputies BBK (Deputies for relations with churches abroad)(15-05-2017): Advice not to proceed further at this point than the conclusion that in the light of Scripture it can be justified to open the offices to sisters, and to leave the decision to actually open the offices to the General Synod of 2020 at the earliest;
14. From the VGKSA (22-05-2017): written response to questions sent by the Synod Committee M/F and Office: under the influence of the 'new hermeneutic', present-day culture has become dominant in the report Samen Dienen; Genesis 3:16 is in itself not a curse; rather, the curse lies in the manner in which it functions after the Fall; hence, it is an artifice for the report to place this text in the after-the-Fall layer.

Decision 1

To discharge the Deputies Male/Female and Office

Ground

The Deputies Male/Female and Office have properly carried out the mandate given to them by the General Synod of Ede.

Decision 2

To encourage the churches:

- a. to make grateful use, in instruction, pastorate and diaconate, of all the gifts that the Lord gives to both men and women.
- b. to make careful arrangements with regard to the appointment of men and women in various kinds of service that do not belong to the offices.

Grounds

1. Next to men, women are also active at all levels in the congregation, without having been ordained to the office of minister, elder or deacon. They participate in the liturgy, in catechesis, and in committees and other positions (sometimes those of leadership). In recent years, this participation has become increasingly intensive, and that is a good thing.
2. Those who, serving in a special office, bear broad responsibility for the congregation must believe that they are called to this office, possess the necessary gifts, and by means of election and ordination are authorized by Jesus Christ to dedicate themselves to this task. This affords protection, both to the office-bearer and to the congregation. This protection is also important in relation to positions of service that do not belong to the offices.

Decision 3

To declare that there are Scriptural grounds to provide ample room for the deployment of the gifts of women in task areas such as preaching, instruction, pastorate and diaconate.

Grounds

1. Under the Old Covenant, men fulfilled all the regular offices in the church, those of prophet, priest and king. They were anointed to these offices, as a sign of having been appointed to and equipped for them.

It was also men who served in numerous extraordinary functions of leadership in the church, such as the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua and the Judges. Finally, men fulfilled the roles of elders in the community. The few exceptional cases where women occupied leadership (Deborah, Judges 4:4; Miriam, Micah 6:4) or prophetic roles (Deborah, Judges 4:4; Hannah, I Samuel 2:1-10; Huldah, II Kings 22:14; Mary, Luke 1:46- 55; Anna, Luke 2:36), confirms this rule under the Old Covenant.

2. At the same time, in the story of the Old Covenant, the pivotal roles are portrayed that women have fulfilled among God's people in the course of the history of salvation (Eve, Genesis 3:15; Sarah, Genesis 17:15,16; Tamar, Genesis 38:13ff; Jochebed, Exodus 1:22-2:10; Rahab, Joshua 2:2-7; Deborah, Judges 4 and 5; Ruth, Ruth 1:16,17; Esther, Esther 4:15,16; Mary, Luke 1:38). We also read the story of the woman in Revelation 12:1-6, who courageously endured the threats of the dragon. This story stands in stark contrast to the failures of men (Abraham, Genesis 12:12,13; Genesis 20:2; Judah, Genesis 38:24; Aaron, Exodus 32:2-6; Eli, I Samuel 1:14; David, II Samuel 11 and 12; Solomon, I Kings 11:1-8). In Matthew 1:17 the Lord reviews this history, holding it up as a mirror to the male leaders of the church of that time and of all ages, and as a warning to them.
3. Among those who lived under the Old Covenant, there was a yearning for the coming of the New. The New Testament reveals the fulfilment of that longing. In the coming of the God's unique Anointed One, our Lord Jesus Christ, thanks to his official ministry, and thanks to the anointing with his Spirit, God's people might truly be what they since the covenant of Mount Sinai had already been called, a 'royal priesthood' (Exodus 19:6; I Peter 2:9). For all of His people, His coming is at the same time the coming of and the anointing with the Spirit of prophecy (Acts 1:8,14 and 2:4), for which Moses had been hoping (Numbers 11:29), and of which the prophets spoke (Joel 3:1,2). It is the perspective of their freedom in

Christ, in which there is no longer any difference between male and female (Galatians 3:28). All will be prophets, priests and kings. In the New Covenant, the law carved in stone, the law of commandments and regulations, has been set aside (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ephesians 2:15-17; II Corinthians 3:6) because it, also and especially in relation to the ordering of the Old Testament offices, had proved to be ineffective (Hebrews 8:8) and declared to be obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). The New Covenant, characterized by equality, has replaced it. All will know the Lord, from the least of them to the greatest. (Jeremiah 31:34; Acts 2:17,18; I John 2:20,27).

4. For the Christian church, this revelation of the Old and New Testament gives cause for continuing reflection. Throughout the ages, until Christ's return, the church will have to critically examine itself: the ordering of its church life, the functions that according to Scripture are to be carried out in it, the roles that all its members, male and female, from the least to the greatest, are to fulfil in it. In this way it will be continually exhorted, with a view to the organization of the offices, to critically examine its own understanding of Scripture.
5. In response to this calling, Synod has come to the conclusion that the witness of Scripture gives the congregation every reason to allow men and women to serve equally in all prophetic, priestly and royal tasks in the church, tasks which their shared name as Christians addresses equally (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 12). Synod has further come to the conclusion that those places in which Scripture speaks of an apostolic command to keep silent, or a prohibition against women teaching or exercising authority, do not, in themselves, supply indisputable grounds to categorically exclude, in our time and circumstances, women from teaching and ruling offices in the church, since the exegesis of these texts is too greatly in dispute.

6. Within these offices, next to this equality there will also be distinctiveness, and men and women are called to mutual acceptance of each other in the place and manner in which they serve, in accordance with the various and distinctive talents they have been given.

Decision 4

To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, next to men, also to call women to the ministry of mercy and therefore to the office of deacon.

Grounds

1. According to the testimony of Scripture, in apostolic times women shared in the office of the deacons (I Timothy 3:11, 5:9), and they too were called 'deacons' (Romans 16:1-2).
2. The office of deaconess was also known in the early Christian church. In a number of Reformed churches this office still continues.

Decision 5

To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, next to men, also to call women to the ministry of oversight, pastorate and instruction, and therefore to the office of elder.

Grounds

1. Women such as Miriam and Deborah portray women in the Old Testament who, in collaboration with men, acted as rulers and judges.
2. They could also be called to this service by God Himself, as is evident from Micah 6:4, where the Lord teaches Israel: "I sent before you ... Miriam".
3. While the New Testament refers to men as elders, older women are also called to exemplary and pastoral tasks (Titus 2:3-5).

4. Paul's reference to Junia and her husband Andronicus as highly regarded apostles (Romans 16:7), and to other married couples as his fellow workers (Romans 16:3), and his mention of married couples and of a brother and sister, at whose home a church meets (Romans 16:5,15), create the impression that men and women, from a position of equality, together gave leadership in Christ's congregations.

Decision 6

- a. To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, that next to men, women also, who have received the necessary gifts, may be given permission to preach; and hence to delete the word 'male' from Article 1 of the general regulations governing permission to preach.
- b. To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, next to men, also to call women to the ministry of preaching and instruction, and therefore to the office of minister.

Grounds

1. The Old Testament already makes mention of prophetesses (Exodus 15:20,21; Judges 4:4-7; II Kings 22:14), or of prophetic activity by women (I Samuel 2:1-10). In the New Testament also, already before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we read about prophetic activity by women. We note Mary and her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). We also read of Anna, who prophesied together with Simeon on the occasion of the infant Jesus' presentation in the temple, and who served the Lord day night and day in the temple (Luke 2:36-38).
2. The fulfilment of the promise of Pentecost (Joel 3:1-2; Acts 2:17-18) is that sons and daughters, young and old, will share in the gift of prophecy. The New Testament displays that reality. On the day of Pentecost the apostles, together with other disciples, among whom possibly women (Acts 1:14), anointed by the Holy Spirit, acted as Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8; 2:4-8). Other places,

too, make mention of women who prophesied (Acts 21:8; I Corinthians 11:4-5).

3. The meaning of Scripture is that “the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (I Corinthians 14:3). This manner of prophesying applies to both men and women.
4. New Testament prophecy, as to its content, has always been understood within the Reformed tradition as the explanation of Holy Scripture, and a Spirit-guided application to the present day, specifically in the preaching.
5. While there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the precise interpretation of the apostolic command to ‘be silent’, comparative examination of I Corinthians 14:34 and I Corinthians 11:5 and 14:26 shows that in any case this prescription cannot be understood as an absolute prohibition to speak (or preach) in the worship service.

Decision 7

To leave room to the local churches to determine for themselves whether, if so in what manner, and when they want to act in line with these decisions.

Grounds

1. It is for each church to consider how the gifts given to its members are to be deployed, in order to bring the congregation further on the road to the kingdom of God.
2. Each church ought to follow its own process of reflection, and come to its own decision if, if so in what manner, and when they will take action in line with these decisions.

Decision 8

To encourage the churches to engage in further reflection as to how justice can be done to the differences between men and women in the execution of tasks and offices in the congregation.

Grounds

1. The Bible speaks about both the equal value and position of man and woman, and the distinctive place God has given them within it, in marriage and in the congregation. In our present-day culture, which is strongly oriented towards equality, this aspect deserves special attention.
2. The Bible repeatedly sounds warnings that man and women ought not to intrude into each others place, nor lord it over each other (I Peter 3:7, 4:15, 5:3; I Timothy 2:8-15; I Corinthians 14:34-35; III John:9).

Decision 9

To send the decisions concerning Male/Female and Office to sister churches abroad.

Ground

A number of sister churches abroad have responded in writing to the reports of Deputies, and/or participated in discussion of these reports during the days allocated to relations with churches abroad at the Synod.

Decision 10

To appoint Deputies Male/Female in the church, with the following instructions:

1. To explain and provide further information concerning the shared service of men and women in the local churches and the classes;
2. To gather and develop material that will serve the process of reflection in the local churches and the classes;
3. To provide advice and guidance at points of difficulty regarding the decisions that have been taken (in collaboration with the Deputies for Church Polity);
4. To provide advice in relation to the ordination of men and women to tasks that belong, and do not belong, to the

offices (co-ordinated with the Deputies for worship services);

5. To make an inventory of the manner in which the local churches and the classes deal with the decisions that have been taken (in collaboration with the Praktijkcentrum).

Grounds

1. The decisions that have been taken call for careful communication with the churches.
2. There is already a great deal of material available in the form of reports to Synods of 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017. However, it is good to develop a coherent package of materials for the benefit of the churches.
3. The decisions that have been taken regarding the joint service of men and women have a sizeable impact, and will be received in quite different ways. That is why it is beneficial for the churches to be able to turn to a single address to obtain advice in relation to these decisions.
4. Now that it is in the freedom of the churches whether and to how to take action in line with these decisions, it will be beneficial to gain an overview of the manner in which the churches respond to them.
5. An insight into what lives within the churches in relation to these decisions may assist determining whether, in the longer term, the offices need to be described or organized differently.

Decision 11

To allocate a budget of € 20.500 in total to the Deputies Male/Female in the church.

Ad c

Appendix 2 (translation)

Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Relations with Sister Churches
FRCA 2015 - 2018

March 7, 2016

Mrs H.S. Nederveen-van Veelen, Secretary
BBK, Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad
Postbus 499
8000 AL Zwolle
The Netherlands

To: the Deputies m/w of the GKv

Dear brothers and sisters,

On the basis of decision 3b of Synod Ede 2014 regarding men and women in the church “to inform the sister churches, both nationally and internationally, concerning this Decision 3, and to request advice”, Synod Baldivis 2015 of the FRCA instructed its deputies “to interact with the request of Synod Ede for advice with respect to the role of men and women in the church, and present the clear biblical teaching on this matter”.

We view what has been happening with respect to our relationship and the strain imposed on it (as well as a similar strain between other mutual sister churches and yourself) as analogous to a family of sisters. Our oldest sister is doing something which the younger sisters deem not to be in accord with the instructions of their Father. They have tried to warn their older sister. Nevertheless, their older sister continues to defend herself, arguing that what she is doing still fits in with their Father’s instructions. Because of their love and care for their older sister, the younger sisters continue to engage in dialogue with her. And now this oldest sister has responded by asking for their advice.

As your sister we believe, on the one hand, that it is necessary to set out our position with respect to men and women in the church in detail. Please receive therefore the clear biblical teaching on this matter attached to this letter.

We also would like to refer you to the (hopefully known) supportive publications by several of your own children:

- J.J. Schreuder, *Dienende Mannen en Vrouwen in het huwelijk en in de kerk* (Woord en Wereld Cahiers voor de gemeente 85) 2010.
- Themanummer M/V. *Nader Bekeken*, nov. 2013.
- Kees van Dijk, Mannen en vrouwen *Nader Bekeken*, okt. 2013.
- Arie Kamer. Gelijkaardig *Nader Bekeken*, feb. 2013.
- P. Boonstra. "Een nieuwe manier van bijbellezen", in *Nader Bekeken*, nov. 2013.
- Hans van Pelt. Wat dan wel... *Nader Bekeken*, apr. 2014.
- Joop de Jong, Als dat zijn gezag is *Nader Bekeken*, mei 2014
- Frans Wisselink. Geloofwaardig, over M/V. *Nader Bekeken*, juni 2014
- Pieter Niemeijer, MIV en huwelijk, *Nader Bekeken*, jan. 2015
- Pieter Niemeijer, Orde van het huwelijk, *Nader Bekeken*, jan. 2015
- Pieter Niemeijer. MIV in de praktijk, *Nader Bekeken*, jan. 2015
- Perry Storm. (driemaal in) Kronick, *Nader Bekeken*, apr. 2015
- Hans van Pelt. Nieuwe kijk op ambt, *Nader Bekeken*, juli/aug. 2015
- Hans van der Jagt, Nieuwe stappen met M/V, *Nader Bekeken*, dec. 2015

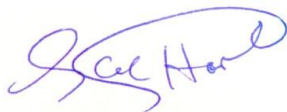
As Australian sister we take the opportunity to advise you to engage with what your children have been saying. Your children have become the dupe of a certain new way of interpreting our Father's words which has become accepted within higher theological circles of our oldest sister. You, our oldest sister, far from having been able to get your siblings to understand your reasoning, have instead alienated them from you. We, the younger sisters, are flabbergasted and saddened at the way in which our Father's words – in our view – are made to allow for things never envisaged by Him.

We as little sister do not have the pretension to know everything, but because we love our Father's Word so dearly and understand the impact of Father's words in the lives of His daughters, we cannot but encourage and advise you, from our deepest heartfelt sisterly love, to reconsider your understanding and interpretation of Father's Word. That would be of benefit to you as our sister, but also to your children for many of them become disorientated and/or disillusioned as to the question of what Father really wants.

This whole question of interpretation (hermeneutics) affects the way in which the will of Father is executed regarding the special gifts of office bearers. In our humble opinion, what is needed is a return to a deep-seated respectful personal piety for Father and His Word.

We submit this prayerfully in the hope that it may find a way into your hearts, and show honest love and respect for our Father's Word.

Your sister in Christ,



Rev Stephen 't Hart (chair)



Br Wayne Pleiter (Secretary)

Appended

GOD'S WORD AND THE WOMAN IN OFFICE

Prepared by Dr. R. Dean Anderson (minister, FRCA Rockingham, WA)

For a brief summary of what God's Word says about the woman in the government office we should of course limit ourselves to a number of important scriptures references. First we have to deal with some clear-sounding rules that the Apostle Paul offers us on behalf of Christ (comp. 1 Cor. 14:37, "What I am writing you is a command of the Lord"). In 1 Corinthians 14:34 we learn that women should remain silent and not speak during the meetings. They must be in submission as stated in the law. In 1 Timothy 2: 11-15, we also read that a woman should obediently and humbly let herself be educated. It is not permitted that they themselves teach or have authority over men. Another rule that Paul does not just suck out of his thumb, but that is based on the story of Genesis 2 and 3. Along with other regulations, it concerns the question "how to behave in the house of God" (1 Tim. 3:15).

Looking at it like this it seems the answer is plain and simple. However you think about finer points of application, a woman should never hold a government office in Christ's church. And indeed you will have to come with good arguments if you still want to make a plea for women in government office and also want to keep showing the highest respect, reverence and obedience to these words of Christ's emissary, Paul.

Besides these motivated regulations on the activities of women in the church, the New Testament also has attention for the full participation of women and men in the riches of Christ's redemption. Baptism is also administered to women by Paul (Acts 16: 14-15). And is not the same Paul who in Galatians 3:28 says that in Christ there are no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female? We are all one in Christ Jesus. Nationality, social status or gender have nothing to say about whether you are allowed to belong to Christ. Participating in the redemption in Christ is a matter of faith.

When we respect Paul for being Christ's envoy, we must not interpret it as if he was suffering from a split personality disorder. This is done, for example when texts such as Gal. 3:28 (no man or woman in Christ) are blown up into a kind of theological and social program. One then looks with a blushing face at the so-called silence texts. How could Paul (Gal. 3:28) ever write something like 1 Cor. 14:34 or 1 Tim. 2: 11-15?

When struggling with 1 Tim. they sometimes try to discredit Paul's by reading Genesis 2 and 3 different than he does. Although they move further away from Paul when they argue like this, such an approach gives the appearance that they are genuinely engaged in God's Holy Word. It is false because you then essentially say that God could not restrain his own emissaries and could not prevent them from dealing with his previously given word in an inappropriate (read: bad) way. Without it being indicated here it is actually the doctrine of Godly inspiration that is at stake. Can we read the New Testament as authoritative Word of God or not – although written by different men with their varied styles and language?

When we do believe that all Scripture should be read as authoritative Word of God, then it also means that from this confession we want to read Genesis 2 and 3 with a certain pair of glasses. That is the glasses - in this case - of the Apostle Paul.

Let us then look at Genesis 2 like that. In Genesis 2 we read how God created Adam ("man") and formed him from the dust of the earth (v.7). From both the grammar and the course of the chapter it is clear that this "man" is a male creature. This man is put in the Garden of Eden to work in it and watch over it. Only then it is noted that it is not good that he stays alone. God wants to make a "helper" for him that suits him (v.18). Noteworthy is that once God has said this, He first brings all sorts of beasts to Adam. Adam shows his dominion over the animals by giving them names. In the context of the Bible naming implies that one indicates characteristics. In this discovering process Adam will surely have found animals that could serve him as helpers (dogs, horses or cows), but no helper that was "bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh," no

helper "suitable for him." This is the moment when God builds a female being from Adam's rib. In her, he finally found a "helper fit for him." This story shows that from the outset God created people as man and woman, in accordance with what is stated in the summary in Genesis 1. Together, man and woman represent God's image on earth. Genesis 2, however, shows a distinction. The woman is made to serve Adam as an indispensable helper. Among others the close of Genesis 2 emphasizes that the woman will be his help with reproduction. While Adam was able to work in the garden alone, he alone would not be able to achieve reproduction. The context of Genesis 2 shows that especially in view of this reproduction reference is made to the woman as an "appropriate helpmeet" (comp. 1 Tim. 2:15). This accent (which of course does not rule out other forms of helping) is confirmed by the way that God later in Genesis 3 specifies the curse to man and woman. For the man the curse especially has to do with working the soil (3:17-19) and for his "helper", the woman, the curse has mainly to do with reproduction (3:16).

When Paul reasons out of the order of the 'forming' of man and woman and there concludes that there is a relationship of authority, he clearly thinks of this story of Genesis 2 and not of the six days of work of creation in Genesis 1. It is too easy and irrelevant to discredit Paul - as is sometimes done - with the remark that the previously created animals should have authority over man. Paul is not talking about a general principle (the one that is older always has greater authority), but the order of making the first man and the first woman. The man was formed and had to work in the garden. Later he was given a woman as a helper. Nowhere is it said that the man is a "helper" for the woman. Even more so when Adam shows his leadership by also providing her with a name, a name that characterizes her as the mother of all living (comp. 2:19 and 3:20).

It is sometimes said that Genesis 3:16 indicates that the battle of the sexes is a result of the fall. It is suggested that any talk of "authority relationship" is also partly determined by the fall. Genesis 3:16 would mean that the husband wins in this battle of the sexes, but his dominance is a result of sin. In light of this

interpretation of Genesis 2 it would at least have to be formulated in a more nuanced way (as is usually done with this interpretation). Emphasis is then placed on the way men, after the fall, tend to dominate women and abuse the authority that may possibly be granted to them. Another interpretation, however, is also common. When looking at the parallel between Gen. 3:16 and Gen. 4: 7. If we put them literally side by side, we see the following:

Genesis. 3: 16b (God is speaking to the woman)

And towards your man stretches out your desire, but he will / should rule over you.

Gene. 4: 7b (sin lies in wait for Cain ...)

And to you stretches his desire, but you should / must rule over him.

In these texts, the "desire" is an attempt to dominate another unlawfully. The second half of the sentence indicates who should have the leadership. Sin desires to dominate Cain, but he should rule over sin. Similarly, the woman is trying to dominate the man unlawfully, but he should rule over her. The word "rule", as so often in the Bible, can be interpreted in a positive sense (cf. Gen. 1:18; 2 Sam. 23: 3.).

Whichever interpretation one finds convincing, nothing stands in the way of the indicated relationship of authority in Genesis 2.

We then move on to what Paul says in 1 Cor. 14:34. Women should remain silent in the meetings, not speak, but remain subordinate as the law says. This rule cannot be undermined by a plea for the praying and prophesying women in 1 Cor. 11. Prayer and prophesy time was certainly not limited to the services. Moreover, Paul only starts to discuss the worship services in Corinth in 1 Cor. 11:17 (first communion celebrations in the afternoon, 1 Cor. 11: 17vv, then the liturgical morning meetings, 1 Corinthians 12-14.). This rule is also crystal clear without limitations. Here we are dealing with a general silence command. Paul calls it a shame when women break the silence command. It is obvious that Paul means that it should be seen as a disgrace by all true believers when a

woman would speak during a worship service. This especially because he has just said that this line is also visible in "the law". A few verses earlier, in 1 Cor. 14:21, Paul referred to "the law" which he then cites (Isaiah 28: 11-12). Paul uses the word "law" here (as was then customary) as a collective term for the Old Testament (cf. Jn. 10:34). Exactly what Paul refers to with the word "law" in 1 Cor. 14:34 is the subject of debate (many think of Genesis 3:16, see the explanation above). The simplest solution is the explanation Paul gives himself in the related passage in his first letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 2: 11-15). According to Van Bruggen, this letter was written only a few months after 1 Corinthians.

That brings us straight to this text. Some pre-comments should be made though. Firstly little controversy is seen in 1 Timothy 2. Paul writes in a calm way and typically gives order regulations to Timothy. When one makes an attempt to paint all kinds of background scenarios against which Paul here would be polarizing, then that must be seen as a subjective interpretation and not an explanation. Because of this, when we deal with verses 11-15, we ought to come to an explanation where Paul's words regarding women are in particular about women. For example, when verse 11 would be explained in such a way that the rebellious dominant women in Ephesus should keep quiet, we are faced with an exhortation which could just as easily be directed at rebellious dominant men. Paul's words, however, give no reason to suggest that he is trying to appease a particular situation. He wants to calmly discuss the respective roles of women and men in the worship service. And because this is the point here - men pray, women pay attention to the clothes, women remain silent, men are chosen to the offices – the explanation of verse 11 should also have something specific to say about the woman.

It is good to firstly have clearly in mind what Paul actually wants from women. A literal translation of 1 Tim. 2:11 reads: A woman should learn in silence and subordination. Women must therefore not teach or exercise authority over other men (v.12). Do men then never have to be taught? If we want to make fun of Paul, we could conclude that men never have to submit to

the authority of other men, nor need to be taught by other men. That's not the point here, of course. And that can at the same time be a clue to what Paul wants to make clear here, namely how to receive religious education. As is apparent from 1 Cor. 14 men were in conversation with each other during the service about what was taught, to learn in a questioning manner. Such a teaching conversation did not stand in the way of their due submission to the teacher or prophet. In order to make clear that this learning method is not intended for women, Paul writes in 1 Tim. 2 that women should let themselves be taught in "silence", which means, "in full submission". Paul gives two reasons for this difference between women and men in the learning attitude. The first has already been discussed and is the authoritative attitude that Genesis 2 clearly shows from the order of the formation of man and woman. The second reason of v.14 can generate a false impression from the NBV, where we read, "And Adam was not deceived, but the woman; they broke God's commandment "A literal rendering can make the intent of Paul clearer: And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Passages such as Rom. 5: 12vv make clear that Paul ascribes the ultimate responsibility for the fall to Adam. What he is doing here is to underline the nature of the Fall. His concern is not that Eve fell into sin, but to the way in which, by "deception" - according to the confession of the woman in Genesis 2:13. Perhaps he meant to say that women are generally easier deceived (partly due to a constitution made for giving birth to and care for young children, for example another hormone system than men). Yet he does not specifically say this. Even so, it may be intended to say that women after the fall should show appropriate shame for the way their arch mother fell into sin. Women show this appropriate shame by applying their subservience to religious education in a stricter way than men. And obviously by taking no part in the giving of such teaching or other forms of authority in the church.

It should be clear that the government office in the church in the vision of Christ's emissary Paul will stay closed for women.

Ad d

Appendix 3 (translation)

Generale Synode Meppel 2017
Postbus 770
3800 AT Amersfoort

To the Synod of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands

1 July 2015

Esteemed Brothers;

It is with deep sadness that Synod Baldivis herewith informs you that it has been decided to suspend our sister-church relationship with you. In practice this means that the practical provisions of our rules for sister-church relations are no longer in effect.

That means there can no longer be invitations of your ministers to our pulpits. Your ministers cannot be called to serve in the FRCA unless the call is first approved by classis. Attestations will only be accepted from your members when the consistory is convinced they are faithful in doctrine and conduct. Attestations to the RCN will only be issued with due care.

Delegates from your churches will be invited to attend our next General Synod where, besides the usual hospitality, opportunity to address us will be given according to synod rule 6.2:

to address synod in open session for the purpose of passing on greetings and information concerning our relations; to speak in synod's open sessions on matters specifically pertaining to our mutual relations where you may give advice when you request or are requested to do so.

Please understand that we have not come to this decision quickly or rashly, but did so with prayer and in anguish. We have become convinced on the basis of God's Word that under the present circumstances we can no longer continue this relation as it has been in the past.

Rest assured that we are well aware there are many members and churches among you who desire to remain faithful. The problem is that you tolerate both unacceptable hermeneutics and resultant unscriptural decisions and practices. We see that in various situations:

Even though the Report Male/Female tabled at your Synod of Ede was rejected, the hermeneutics used as basis for this report was not rejected and consequently the clear Scriptural injunction for women to have no authority in the churches is ignored. This is evident from the decision in relation to the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK). You have stated in this respect that neither women in office nor the rationale behind it within the NGK is an obstacle to ecclesiastical unity any longer.

When raising concerns about the developments and teachings in the TUK your deputies responded by saying that, by changing your school for theological training into a university, the supervision over professors and courses has now fallen under civil law. Consequently your churches now appear to be less able to restrain and censure professors when questions and objections are raised concerning how some promote and use unscriptural hermeneutics.

Further, our Synods of Launceston 2009 and Armadale 2012/13 have sent an exhortation and admonition about these matters (see Appendix). Instead of heeding and returning to a sound Scriptural basis, we were informed that you do not think we have fairly and rightly evaluated these matters and you see no reason for return or change. We, however, appeal to you to reconsider your evaluation of our admonition.

Despite our disappointment in your response we have acceded to your request for assistance in evaluating the hermeneutical principles that stand behind the report M/W in the church. We have acceded to your request by instructing asking our deputies to give you this evaluation.

We have decided to suspend our sister-church relation with you instead of terminating it at this time in the hope that you will still seriously reconsider our admonition and return from the

ecclesiastical path into which you have turned. We do so in our loving care for you even though you tell us no longer to address you regarding these matters. However, if by the next synod of the RCN in 2017 there is no return to the firm foundation of God's Word our sister relationship will sadly become untenable.

Our churches have and will continue to pray that there may be a change of heart. It remains our sincere, heartfelt desire to be united with you on the one foundation of God's Word as summarised in the Reformed Confessions.

In Love in our Lord Jesus Christ

On behalf of Synod Baldivis 2015 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia



Chairman
Rev Stephen 't Hart



Second Clerk
Rev Carl Vermeulen

Ad e:

Appendix 4:

Greetings to RCN Synod Meppel

April 2017

Esteemed delegates of Synod and honoured guests

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, we may extend greetings in the Name of our Lord and Saviour. We are thankful that we may attend your Synod and extend our greetings. We also appreciate your hospitality in this beautiful Mennorode conference hotel. It is a blessing to meet as brothers, with many of our church members tracing their family histories back to you and have benefited richly from that heritage. You therefore remain close to our hearts.

As you are well aware, it was with sadness that during our last synod in Baldivis 2015, we felt compelled to suspend our sister church relationship with you. There is no need at the present time to review the various admonitions that several of our last synods have directed to your churches. We may note that already Synod West-Kelmscott 2006 had decided “to express our concerns regarding the directions being taken, particularly in regard to the manner in which Scripture and the commandments are interpreted and applied in today’s circumstances...”¹ At Synod Legana in 2009 it was decided “to exhort the RCN with love and care to be faithful in their hermeneutics...”². At Synod Armadale in 2012-13 it was decided to make our admonitions more specific to you in a separate synodical letter. However differences between us in relation to the view on hermeneutics and the practical application of it in your churches, increased. This was highlighted during the Hermeneutics Conference held in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada in January 2014.

It was therefore with sadness that Synod 2015 had to determine that you “deny any Scriptural or Confessional deviation” and per consequence that you “feel no need for repentance and return”. As a result the synod with deep sadness suspended our sister church relationship. In addition it decided “that the FRCA’s

sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if the next synod of the RCN in 2017 does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of the synod of Armadale 2012 to the synod of Ede 2014”.³

Since that synod our churches have been encouraged to keep your churches in prayer asking the Lord that you may uprightly uphold and defend Scriptural truth as maintained in the three forms of unity. You correctly state in your letter of 8 Dec. 2016, “We are facing a crucial period as reformed churches in the Netherlands and with regard to our relations abroad. Decision have to be made on several topics in which there is disagreement within our own churches and with a number of churches abroad.” Rest assured that the prayers of our churches are with you, that you may indeed return to a path of humble obedience to Him who gave His life for us.

You will understand that our concerns have hardly been alleviated by the report from your deputies to this synod on man/women and office. Although the reasoning is quite different to the previous report, the same concerns with respect to hermeneutics are certainly present. This is evident for example in the appeal to the supposed lack of education of women in the first century as an important underlying ground for the contention that on this basis women were not admitted into office.

Your deputies earlier requested our input with respect to this question, and we have responded to that some months ago with a brief yet clear outline of how we understand Scripture to speak to this issue.

We would cherish the hope that this new report (M/V – Samen dienen) would not be accepted by your synod and that there may be a real spirit of humility and desire to return to what we see as the plain message of Scripture on this point. Love for God and our crucified Saviour compel us to plead with you not to rewrite the biblical message so as to conform to the cultural context, but to allow the love of God to quell any personal disquiet we may have in following his commandments.

Should the churches at Synod Meppel 2017 decide not to *turn* from these ways and so return to the paths of Scripture and Confession, our last synod has given us as deputies no option, but to recommend a termination of the ecclesiastical relationship.

Please understand that our prayers are with you as you will be deliberating on many issues in the coming months. It is not our desire that our ways should part, but that *together* we may bear witness to the marvellous truth which our Saviour has entrusted to us.

On behalf of the Deputies for sister churches

1. ACTS OF THE 2006 SYNOD and Reports to the 2006 Synod of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA West Kelmscott, Western Australia 10 – 20 July 2006, p. 64.
2. ACTS OF THE 2009 SYNOD of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA Legana, Tasmania 15-24 June 2009, p. 83.
3. ACTS OF THE 2015 SYNOD of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA BALDIVIS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA 22 June to 1 July 2015, p. 54

Appendix 5:

SONS AND DAUGHTERS PROPHECY

A few remarks on the current discussion about women in office

Recently the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN aka GKv) has started in Meppel. Compared to our own week-long Synods, their meetings are convened over a longer period of time. One week is dedicated to receive delegates from sister churches, the so-called “Foreign delegates-week” (3rd – 8th April). During this week the delegates will receive the opportunity to participate in discussions regarding the place of Men and Women in the church. There will also be a discussion on the RCN Report on Women in Office, called “Serving together” (see article in the *Una Sancta* by Br J Numan – 19 Nov 2016, p 544)

Two of our own Deputies for Sister Churches, the Reverends Hagg and Anderson, are preparing themselves to attend the “Foreign delegates-week”. This includes updating the FRCA members on recent developments regarding Women in office in the RCN. For this purpose we would like to share a few remarks by Rev R Visser (previously minister in the RCN, currently minister within the GKN) on this issue:

Why?

In the RCN¹ the discussion about women in office is becoming more intense. Leading up to the synod of Meppel two very significant documents were published.

The first is the book: Sons & Daughters Prophecy. This book was written by a group of people calling for the opening of all offices for women in the RCN (GKv) and other churches that do not already have women in office. The authors come mainly from the RCN. The book is a passionate plea for women in office. This is based on the belief that man and woman together

1 Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt – GKv)

form the image of God and apart from physical differences have exactly the same task in life. The book argues that this was the will of God from the beginning.

At the time I wanted to write this article, the RCN deputies tasked with submitting proposals about women in office published their report titled: Serving Together. Like the report to the previous synod, this report ultimately proposes to open all the offices to women. Yet there are also differences. It still talks about the position of 'headship' which the man ought to take in marriage and also in the church. But the authors of the report do not know how this could work in our days. They place great emphasis on our cultural environment that (they say) has always governed the manner in which the offices play out in practice. The same would therefore be allowed also today, and really also be necessary.

Rev Visser continues to ask: You may wonder whether it is useful and necessary to write about this. Should we still occupy ourselves with the developments in the RCN? I hear that question frequently asked among us (members of the GKN – ed). And yes, there are several reasons to do this, especially at this point. I will mention a few:

- a. It would display a very wrong attitude to say: 'Leave them alone, we have made the right choice.' Many of us still have direct ties with many in the RCN. Many of us have children and grandchildren there, other family and many friends of the past. I hope and pray that we are still moved with compassion and love for them. This then is the reason you need to be involved, and in love remind both yourself and them of the way of the Lord.*
- b. In a discussion about women in office and the role and position of man and woman in the 21st century we should not think that this passes us by. Is it not true that we're often touched by opinions and feelings that live strongly in our society? As these things are playing out around us, it is of the utmost importance to also talk about them together and observe what's going on, especially from the viewpoint of Scripture, and to let Scripture speak for*

us. It's foolish to just say: 'Yes, but we're against it'. Then it will hit us later with double strength.

Driving force

Rev Visser continues: When it comes to women in office you can see society's longing for it growing by the day. It is also there in church history when you look at the trend it has followed in the various church federations from the beginning of the 20th century. As more and more women became active in society and church the demand for women in office grew. This by itself says nothing about engaging women in society and with additional things in the church. In the world and in many churches all differences between man and woman had disappeared. It was more and more regarded as strange and even as deprivation and discrimination when people hear that you are in a church where women cannot become an office bearer. Surely this is backward?

Chances are that in your heart and feelings something begins to grow that longs for this irritant to disappear from your life. You don't want to belong to a minority that is regarded as being quite old-fashioned. Why should you as a woman, while you yourself believe that you really have gifts in that field, not be able to become an elder or pastor? The longing often begins with a sense of unease that grows and grows.

Rev Visser writes: I discovered this when some 10 years ago I attended the first training course in Kampen on hermeneutics. During this course one of the lecturers asked whether one of us was able to give an explanation of 1 Timothy 2:11-15 that would not stop women in office. That text was for him the last hurdle to supporting women in office. He wanted to be in favour, but that one text was still in the way. How could this be fixed up? You'll see then that the desire is there, but things in the Bible are seen as an obstacle. Then the search is on to remove that obstruction. I'll get back to this later.

The culture of the world and our own heart's longing often become the driving force and even more decisive as we are reading the Bible, as we are growing more tolerant to the spirit of the age, and as we brush aside what Scripture says. The

latter has been highlighted well by Dr H J Paul in the article Schermerzones (Twilight Zones).¹

1 Timothy 2

How do people now deal with the obstacle that is posed by what the Spirit says in 1 Timothy 2? It is remarkable that in the various publications the issue is invariably addressed in different ways. We get the clear picture that we're dealing here with ad hoc answers.

Rev Visser continues to mention some of those ways that in recent years have been proposed in the discussions in the RCN:

a. The previous M/V report

In the report that served the previous RCN Synod it was strongly the cultural environment – and thus public opinion – that had to give the answer; the reasoning was that it was for missionary reasons that Paul made the rule to have no female office bearers at that time. In our days [the reasoning went] it would be just the other way around. If we now stick to Paul's rule we would create an unnecessary obstacle for people to come to Christ. You can find this reasoning already, for example, in two popular Afrikaans study Bibles from the nineteen-nineties (Bybellennium; Bybel in praktyk).

The remarkable thing is that what the Holy Spirit says, is being pushed aside for the sake of how people in our days think and feel. This causes many people's faith to change. Why then should we not be able to say also on other points of Scripture that their reasoning was based on popular opinion? You'll see then that the spirit of the time tries to defeat Scripture.

b. Alamatine Lakhan in Trinity, anthropology and ecclesiology:

In her book, Lakhan also discusses 1 Timothy 2. She chose for the very unusual explanation that when Paul says that he does not allow a woman to have authority over the man, he is thinking of a woman who is teaching a specific heresy in the congregation. Like a woman who teaches heresy, so must also

a man who teaches heresy remain silent. At this point there would be no difference between man and woman. Of course, this is true. A man who teaches heresy must also remain silent. But this explanation really does not agree with the text. It also fails on the ground Paul mentions here, that Adam was created before Eve.

- c. **Jan Wessels in Sons and daughters prophesy** (co-author of the book).

Wessels admits that when you read 1 Timothy 2 Paul directs that a woman cannot be an elder or pastor. Yet [according to Wessels] that is no reason to conclude from Genesis 1 and 2 that it is really not allowed. He believes that a Bible text that was written a few thousand years later cannot be used to decide the explanation of these chapters. That would be a wrong rule.

That in itself is all very strange, because we confess that the whole Bible is the Word of God. That which we read in one book of the Spirit is best suited to explain the rest of the Bible! Who knows better than the Author himself what he meant thousands of years earlier when he had Genesis 1 and 2 written down?!

Wessels, too, comes with a very strange interpretation of this text. He writes:

“A few astute readers missed a reference to 1 Timothy 2:13 in my previous blog about the use of (the word) ‘order of creation’ in the discussion about women and their role in the church.

That was, of course, done on purpose. It was a choice I made in order to show that a text Paul wrote two to three thousand years after the emergence of Genesis, is being used as a hermeneutical key for the understanding of Genesis 1-3. The question then is whether that is actually legitimate? Whether from a revelation-historical viewpoint that is correct.

... Anyway, the question is too dear to my heart to let it slip away after some thirty years of study on the history of

the exegesis of the two Pauline 'silence' texts of which 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is one (compare 1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

So the question is: how do we read 1 Timothy 2:13 in the light of Genesis 1-3? And not the other way around!

After having seen that Genesis says nothing about an 'order of creation' as basis for the role of the woman as 'eternal subordinate', but rather the opposite (see for example Genesis 2:24), and that that subordination in no way is commanded – also not in Genesis 3 – it becomes interesting how Paul in 1 Timothy 2 puts his arguments. There he seemingly 'twists' the creation story! And I cannot imagine that, being a seasoned scribe he does so unknowingly. No, I have no criticism on Paul. I actually find it brilliant what he does. It is an associative way of reading the creation story, which he, being an experienced debater, uses to lend weight to his argument that women in the church must not take a leading position (teaching and lording it over men).ⁱⁱ

Rev Visser continues: By utilising Gods Word in this manner, you've already put yourself off-side. It clearly shows that your own opinion must triumph, and you just make Paul into a twister of Scripture for the right purpose. So you will finish up at what Peter writes in his second letter, that people twist Paul's words after their own opinion. See 2 Peter 3:14-16.

d. In Sons and Daughters Prophecy

Rev Visser: We find yet another explanation in this book: Paul's argument (that Adam had been created first and then Eve) should apply only in the case of authoritarian behaviour of women towards men. What this text says about the woman having authority over the man should be applicable only to women who just take over. This conclusion is reached after a lengthy reasoning based on the Greek word authentein that is used here.

Again, Rev Visser comments, we again find here a very unusual explanation that raises all kinds of questions.

Coming back to the latest report on M/V in the church (*Serving Together*), Rev Visser noticed that the same text is dealt with: *There we read the following (selection):* “In 1 Timothy 2 Paul calls both men and women to behave properly during the meetings; but he fills that in differently for men and women with an appeal to the creation and with a view on the renewed creation. He makes clear that it is not good that a woman should instruct men and have authority over them. This is not a blanket statement, because he makes clear later in his letter that Timothy should regard ‘old women as mothers’ who have authority over daughters and sons (1 Tim 5:2.) Read also of Paul’s gratitude for the sincere faith of the grandmother and mother of Timothy, expressed in 2 Timothy 1:5).”ⁱⁱⁱ

Rev Visser: *The conclusion then drawn is very striking. Paul’s appeal to the creation, and thus that of the Spirit, actually no longer plays a role in it. The conclusion is:*

“How that was filled in at that time is clear; how we fill it in today is something we must think about as a congregation.”^{iv}

A few pages later we read about this further:

“What Paul means exactly by his remarks in 1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:9, 10 is judged differently. What his words mean for our time is also not clear.”^v

We notice here that what the Spirit says in 1 Tim 2 is disregarded on the ground of lack of clarity. Thus you do not allow the Spirit to explain from the fullness of the Word what he himself has taught us in Genesis 1 and 2. In the end the spirit of our days, which not only lets man and woman be equivalent, but also thinks that there cannot be distinct tasks within equivalence, dominates this report. You see that also very painfully in the discussion about 1 Peter 3.

Four layers

Rev Visser continues: *In ‘Serving Together’ a method of reading the Bible is chosen that makes a distinction between four layers in the Bible. One of its aims is that the reader bear in mind that*

not everything in the Bible is standard for our life today. This is true. So that's not my criticism.

The method of reading the Bible is:

Layer 1: Creation

Layer 2: Broken reality

Layer 3: Liberating recovery

Layer 4: Fundamental renewal

The problem, Rev Visser remarks, is that in this scheme the writers also create space for the social culture that has had a great influence on what is in the Bible: You must (so they say) peel the cultural influences away from certain parts of the Bible, or [alternatively] the text is completely culturally determined and has then no prescriptive message for us...

Rev Visser: Much could still be said about this, but the point is that they promote the view that the cultural aspect incorporates a certain relationship of authority between man and woman in the Bible, which would not be a norm for us. Also not for the offices in the church in which authority over others is given by Christ. Yet by their own scheme the writers also get into conflict with certain Bible passages. One of these is what Peter writes in his first letter. We find there how Peter shows that male and female are equal before the LORD. (That is, in fact, true for the whole Bible!) While Peter puts this forward as being basic and liberating, he also writes:

"... in this manner in former times the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid of any terror."

Here Sarah, in her relationship to her husband Abraham, is set before women as an example. This is a clear norm which the Spirit gives through Peter with an appeal to what is said in the Old Testament. The report believes that the relationship in which authority between man and woman plays a role belongs to culture and that it is not a norm for all times. It agrees that this is indeed a difficulty. In reality, this is not only a difficulty,

but it reveals the failure of this whole model. It shows that for the authors one's own culture and spirit of the day carry more weight than what the Spirit in Scripture teaches us. Thus the Bible becomes an unclear and difficult book that is no longer easy to read and can be massaged by people in different ways to produce one's own opinion.

It is also clear that because of this contrived way of reading the Bible the report has to perform an acrobatic exegesis^{vi} to arrive at the conclusion that all the offices should be open for women.

By reading the Bible in this way they also make it hard for themselves to justify a conclusion which they themselves draw in the report. The conclusion I refer to can be found at page 24:

“When the broader exegetical lines in the Bible are studied, it becomes clear that in the Bible women and men are indeed equivalent but not equal. God gives the man a leading position and the woman gets a position in which she must accept that leadership. Thus there is a voluntary mutual servitude. The Bible shows again and again that we as humans make mistakes in this respect. Where sin has led to oppression and domination of women God gives protection, justice and a position. That shows that men and women have to take joint responsibility in which each has their own role and task.”

Is it then not fitting and natural what the Spirit tells us, that elders and pastors must always be men? If you do not want that you have to perform an acrobatic spin to get the Bible on side.

A few conclusions

Rev Visser concludes the following:

1. *The manner of dealing with Scripture testifies that, despite all good intentions, there is an acceptance of today's culture and popular opinion that do not allow the Scriptures as the Word of God to have the last word.*
2. *The Bible is not treated as the only Word that really is God's only Word. You see that very clearly in the*

example of Wessels, and also in the discussion about passages such as 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3.

3. *Very different, exceptional and daring Bible explanations are needed to arrive at the favoured point of view.*
4. *This way of dealing with the Scripture deviates from what it tells us, and will do so more and more. The faithful Church of Christ cannot work with this.*

These lengthy remarks by Rev R Visser hopefully give the readers of *Una Sancta* an even better understanding what we as deputies will encounter during the “Foreign delegates-week”. Pray that the Lord may grant us wisdom and courage to boldly speak the truth of God’s Word in love during the discussion of the report.

On behalf of the deputies:

Rev Anderson & Rev Hagg

Read more: <http://www.evangelie-voor-elke-dag.nl/news/zonen-en-dochters-profeteren-enkele-opmerkingen-bij-de-discussie-over-vrouw-in-het-ambt/>

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- i H J Paul. Schermerzones in M J Kater (ed) Apeldoorn, De Banier 2015 Tegenstrijdige verlangens p 11-26
 - ii Jan Wessels, Scheppingsorde in 1 Timothy 2:13? This article can be found on <https://www.missionenederland.nl/k/n646/news/view/245039/233410/scheppingsorde-in-1-timoteus-2-13.html>
 - iii Report Samen dienen (Serving Together) p 19, 20
 - iv Serving Together p 21
 - v Serving Together p 25
 - vi I took this expression from prof J Douma who in reaction to the publication of this report wrote (in Reformatorisch Dagblad, 2-11-2016, p 2): “Leg alle teksten ernaast die milder lijken te zijn, dan nog vind ik dat er acrobatische exegese nodig is om de vrouw tot oudste in de christelijke kerk en tot predikante van het Evangelie om te toveren.”

Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches – Indonesia

GGRI (Reformed Churches of Indonesia)

Deputies

Due to changes in employment, and new challenges that faced him, br. Tim de Vos withdrew as deputy with the result that the alternate, Br. Eric DeHaan, joined our ranks.

Synod 2015 mandate

Regarding the GGRI, Synod appointed deputies with the following mandate:

1. To continue sister relations with the GGRI in accordance with the adopted rules.
2. To continue to visit the national and regional Synods and conferences of the GGRI subject to available finance.
3. To support the GGRI with the intention of building up the reformed character of these churches.
4. To continue to support the plans to establish a Theological Seminary in Sumba and make funds available for this cause. To encourage the church at Mundijong to make their minister available for lectures at the seminary in Waimarangu, Sumba and to ask the other churches in our bond to assist the church of Mundijong in the pulpit supply during Rev A van Delden's absence. In light of the importance for the GGRI to maintain their own college, deputies should encourage and work with the Dutch and Canadian sister churches in this matter as much as possible. Given the fact that the Dutch churches are decreasing their financial contributions to the theological training in Sumba deputies receive the mandate to approach the Canadian churches for support.
5. To encourage the GGRI and their deputyship re the Theological Seminary to seek the expertise and help of

- the external adviser Rev Dr AJ Pol and – if necessary – to make some finances available for his task.
6. To contact the church of Smithville and the Canadian deputies re Indonesian churches to develop a common understanding regarding unity amongst the Indonesian churches and to continue to seek cooperation in the theological training of future ministers.
 7. To support two students/ministers financially to come to Australia during the inter-Synodical period to study English and to familiarize themselves with the Australian churches for three months subject to financial arrangements with the Dutch deputies and subject to available funding from the churches.
 8. To see to it that effective communication with the people involved is possible and if necessary also to make limited financial support available.
 9. To consult with the GGRI, the GGRC, and the Canadian Reformed Churches to determine the obstacles on the way to unity, and, to work together with all parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles, and to encourage the national and regional Synod of both the GGRI and GGRI-NTT respectively to plan and progress towards federal unity between themselves and the GGRC, and if possible, the mission work of Smithville in Timor.
 10. To keep in contact and share information with deputies of our Dutch and Canadian sister churches regarding the GGRI churches.
 11. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies 1-10 above mentioned.
 12. To as yet report to the churches with a clearer picture of the GGRI Papua and the GGRI Kalimantan Barat that have united and formed one federation with the GGRI NTT in February 2012, confirming their Reformed character and the implications of this union.

Regarding the mandate with the GGRC, Synod gave the following mandate.

1. To continue contact with the GGRC, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the reformed character of these churches by advice or other means such as seminars.
2. To continue to visit the Synods of the GGRC subject to available finance.
3. To consult with the GGRI, the GGRC, and the Canadian Reformed Churches to determine the obstacles on the way to unity, and, to work together with all parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles, and, to encourage the GGRC to plan and progress towards federal unity between themselves and the GGRI, and if possible, the mission work of Smithville in Timor.
4. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in point 1-3.

Execution of our Mandate

Regional and National Synods

Rev van der Jagt attended the regional synod of the GGRI – NTT (which consists of churches in Sumba, Sabu and Timor) in October 2016

Br Eric Heerema and Rev Arthur van Delden attended the regional synod of the GGRI – Kalimantan Barat from Dec 2-8, 2017.

Br. Eric Heerema and Rev Wilko van der Jagt attended the national synod of the GGRI from 18th-21st October, 2017 which was held in Waingapu, Sumba NTT this time.

Rev van der Jagt attended the Synod of the GGRC and gave lectures on the island of Roti in 2016.

We anticipate attending the provincial synod of the GGRI-Papua, which will be held in 2018, on a date still to be decided.

Our attendance at these assemblies is greatly appreciated. The GGRI do not have many international sister churches, and so contact with the Australian churches is very meaningful to them. At these synods, we are permitted to engage in the discussions, and we have done so at opportune moments. Regarding the Theological College in Waingapu, Sumba, NTT, we also have given some strong encouragement and recommendations.

Building up the Reformed Character of these Churches

Besides attending the regional and national synods, as mentioned above, there is only one project which the Deputies have undertake to assist in building up the Reformed Character of these churches, namely, the support of Rev van Delden as a part-time lecturer at the Theological College for one month each year. During this period, he focuses mainly upon teaching the Greek language to prospective evangelists and ministers. But there is also time to speak with the other lecturers, as well as with ministers and elders of churches that he visits during his month teaching. He also preaches in the churches, and through his selection of texts can address what he perceives to be areas of weakness in the churches.

This said, the deputies realise that the work of the Dutch missionaries in Indonesia was incomplete when they were forced to repatriate in the 1990's. The Dutch churches continued to support the GGRI by way of seminars and literature after the repatriation of the missionaries. However, the Dutch churches are increasingly withdrawing their support and involvement in the GGRI. We as deputies are convinced that the Australian churches ought to become increasingly active in striving to assist our Indonesian brothers and sisters in order to build up the Reformed character of the GGRI. A concrete plan will be mentioned further in this report.

The Theological College in Waingapu, Sumba, NTT

The Deputies have continued to provide financial support to the Theological College of the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (STT GGRI) in Waingapu, Sumba, NTT. The level of support has risen in the past year, due to the termination of support from the Dutch churches. The Australian churches have been

generous and faithful in financially supporting this work. In 2012 we sent \$1,800AUS, whereas currently we send \$36,000AUS. This amount is less than their budget of \$78,000AUS. Since at this time there are no other federations that contribute, it is likely that Deputies will need to increase the level of support in the next year or so, which means that the Australian churches will be asked to increase their contributions to this cause. At the same time, we continue to encourage the GGRI to seek funding from the GGRI churches, to contribute to the shortfall.

Some other areas of support for the College include:

1. \$5,620 AUS for rental of a large house for a five year period. (We have indicated to the Board of Governors that they should not count on lease being renewed after the five years are expired. This is a temporary measure, to allow them time to erect suitable facilities.)
2. Rev van Delden's expenses for teaching at the College for one month
3. The support of gifted students (2 or 3 per year) to complete their Bachelor of Theology degree in the STT SALEM in Malang, Java.
4. The purchase of computers for the students who have completed 6 semesters of study and begin their 'practicum' (one year of practice in one of the churches). Also maintaining and renewing computers at the College.
5. The transportation costs of 2 students from Sumba to serve their 'practicum' in Papua, in order to promote the unity amongst the three areas.
6. National Synod expenses \$3,000AUS.

Some individual churches have been found willing and able to support individual projects that are not included in our yearly budget. For example,

- Darling Downs gave additional support for a shortfall in the wages of the lecturers.

- Mt. Nasura provided funds for furnishing and fixing the rental house used to accommodate the Theological College.
- Darling Downs is supporting a young man for 2 years of study to obtain his M.Th, with a view to serving as an additional lecturer in the College, especially in teaching the ancient languages.
- Mundijong provides funding for the monthly food expenses of the students.

Deputies have had discussions with our counterparts in the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) concerning the support of the Theological College. These discussions have occurred when br. Brian Bosveld visited Canada, and when the Deputies of the Can RC have visited Australia (when they attended our last synod, and when their deputies visited Indonesia, and travelled also to Perth). The CanRC deputies made it clear to us that they have a far more restricted mandate than we have regarding their relationship with the GGRI, and that they have no authority to seek financial assistance from the churches for the support of the college. They explained that support would have to come from individual congregations who wish to contribute to this cause. The CanRC deputies have no mandate to organize such support. We encouraged them to seek such a mandate from their synod.

We deputies must admit that we are disappointed with decisions made by the most recent provincial synod of the GGRI-NTT regarding the STT-GGRI. We strongly encouraged them to exchange the present parcel of land (which was formerly a large rice field) for a larger parcel of land which was not as well situated as far as location is concerned, but far better for building upon. The Dutch churches, as well as we, clearly informed them that the cost of preparing foundations on a former rice field were exorbitant, and that we would not support building on that parcel of land. Their provincial synod did not accept our advice. The Dutch have subsequently reclaimed money that was set aside for the building of a new campus. And we FRCA deputies have made it clear to them

that we will not support the building of a campus on the former rice field.

We are also deeply disappointed with the decision made by the most recent provincial synod of the GGRI-NTT regarding the board of governors of the STT-GGRI. We strongly encouraged them to replace the dysfunctional board of governors. But they decided to reappoint the current board. This effectively means that the lecturers give guidance to and exercise supervision over themselves. Or to state it differently, in the absence of an functional board of governors, the lecturers run the college. This is a situation that occurred in previous years, about which we warned them that it was both unwise and contrary to Indonesian law, and that if a functional board of governors was not appointed, our support would stop. The reappointment of the dysfunctional board of governors at the last regional synod was a great disappointment for us, which we have expressed to them.

The instruction given at the STT-GGRI is good. While organizational matters need improvement, and while standards of admission need to be increased, the education given is sound. Many of the more gifted students who complete their studies at the STT-GGRI, and who then go on to study one additional year to complete their studies to obtain a Bachelor of Theology degree at another theological college (SALEM in Malang, Java), are among the top students at SALEM, which proves that the education given at the STT-GGRI is solid. When the deputies are proficient in the Indonesian language hear the more gifted students preach, there is clear evidence that the instruction at the college prepares men well for the ministry. The only matter that raises concern is the fact that some less-gifted students are permitted to continue their studies, to graduate, and to become evangelists, and in due course, perhaps even ministers in the churches. We have encouraged the STT-GGRI to establish higher standards for the students, and to terminate the studies of those who are not capable of reaching those levels.

The GGRI enjoy the luxury of having two theological colleges in the one bond of churches. This is due to the fact that

previously, the GGRI in the three provinces of Papua, Kalimantan Barat and NTT, each had their own college. The college in Papua could not continue (though the premises are still there). The colleges in Kalbar and NTT continue to function. The college in Kalbar (STTRB) is supported by the Dutch churches, at least until 2020.

Two of our deputies also had the opportunity to visit the Theological College in Bengkayang, Kalbar while attending the provincial synod there in December 2017. While our exposure to the college was very limited, these deputies were impressed with what they saw. The campus is large enough, and the classrooms and offices are held in a relatively new two-storey building. The original buildings, which are now used for housing the students, are in need of some repairs and refurbishment.

The GGRI understand, or need to understand, that if the Dutch terminate the support of the college in Kalbar, the FRCA cannot support both colleges. It is an unaffordable and unnecessary luxury to have two colleges in one federation. We as Deputies will undoubtedly recommend that the next national synod of the GGRI (2020) decide to amalgamate the two colleges into one, and to choose that location (either Bengkayang, Kalbar or Waingapu, NTT) which is best able to comply with the government requirements for accreditation. If their national synod does not make this decision to amalgamate the two colleges, then undoubtedly the deputies of the FRCA will choose which college it will support. Accordingly, we will propose that Synod changes our mandate slightly, so that deputies are not restricted to supporting only the theological seminary in Sumba, but to allow the possibility of supporting the theological seminary in Kalbar, if it is deemed the better of the two colleges.

Regarding the external advisor, the provincial synod of the GGRI-NTT appointed Rev Pol to serve as an external advisor to the college. However, this has not eventuated, because Rev Pol did not receive the leave required. Therefore the deputies have encouraged that Rev van Delden serve as advisor to the

board of governors. It remains to be seen whether the GGRI-NTT will accept this recommendation.

Inviting Students/Ministers to Australia

In 2015, the FRCA invited two ministers of the GGRI to come to Australia, to study, namely Rev Ferdy Tipu Kaya of the GGRI-NTT, and Rev Yan Wambrow of the GGRI-Papua. With the generous support of some individuals, these men could undertake formal English training at Phoenix Language Academy for the three months of their stay with us.

Prior to Synod 2018, we intend to extend invitations to two men, namely, Ev. Andreas Bantan M.Th, lecturer at the Theological College of the GGRI-Kalbar, and Rev Antonius Palandima M.Th., lecturer at the Theological College of the GGRI-NTT.

Unity Amongst the Reformed Churches of Indonesia

In the province of NTT, Indonesia, and especially on the island of Timor, three bonds of churches exist, which in our opinion, have no legitimate reason for independent existence. There are the original GGRI, our sister church (Reformed Churches of Indonesia). Then there are the GGRC (Calvinist Reformed Churches). And more recently, the mission work of Smithville has led to the formation of another federation of churches, the GGRI-Timor. As deputies we have used every opportunity to encourage and facilitate greater unity amongst these churches, chiefly by addressing this matter when attending the various provincial and national synods. Also, two of our deputies visited the GGRC in early October, 2017.

As strange as it is to our ears, the second national synod of the GGRI said that unity with these other Reformed churches in Timor should occur at the provincial level of the GGRI-NTT, since all of these churches belong to this province, and are known only to each other. This is in conflict with their own church order, which like ours states that sister relations with other churches must occur at the level of Synod, and that means National Synod, and not provincial synod.

As far as attempts from the side of the GGRC to promote unity, we see very little effort. They have sister relations, and so

pulpit exchange is permissible. but it rarely happens. At the last national synod in Sumba, NTT, for example, there were four members of the GGRC present. However, no pulpit was opened for them to preach. This is somewhat of an affront to the GGRC, and we as deputies regret that such opportunities are not used to promote unity.

At the last synod of the GGRC, in immediate response to the address of Rev van der Jagt, Synod decided the following²:

Article 16 Decision of Committee 2 Relations with the FRCA.

1.3. Reception of Greetings from the FRCA concerning unity between the GGRC AND the GGRI-NTT.

1.3.1. Synod decides to let the problems of unity between the GGRC in Indonesia and the GGRI-NTT to be arranged and managed mutually between the GGRC in Indonesia and the GGRI-NTT themselves, based on God's Word and the confessions of the church.

We explained to them in a letter, and again in a face-to-face meeting at the provincial synod of the GGRI-Kalbar, that this is one of the chief parts of the mandate given by our synod regarding the GGRC, and that if we cannot continue to encourage and facilitate this unity, then there is little left for us to do with the GGRC. We expressed the desire for the FRCA to

² PASAL 16 Keputusan Kimisi II Berhubungan dengan GGR Australia (FRCA)

1.3 Menanggapi sambutan dari GGRB Australia (FRCA) mengenai persatuan GGRC di Indonesia dan GGRI-NTT

1.3.1. sinode memutuskan agar biarlah masalah persatuan dan kesatuan antara GGRC di Indonesia dan GGRI-NTT di atur dan di urus secara bersama antar GGRC di Indoensia dan GGRI-NTT sendiri berdasarkan Firman Tuhan dan pengakuan gereja.

have unity with the GGRC, but we do not wish to have this unity with churches that have no legitimate reason for separate existence. Rather, we would like to have unity with the one federation of Reformed Churches in Indonesia. By way of letter and in our face-to-face meeting, they explained that it was not their intention to exclude the FRCA in the fulfilment of our mandate to encourage and facilitate unity. Rather, their point was that they would like the unity to come from the hearts of both the GGRC and the GGRI, rather than be 'forced' upon them by an external 'third' party. While we appreciate this sentiment, and wholeheartedly agree with it, it is very difficult to 'square' this explanation with what was written. Furthermore, we have exerted no 'force.' But we repeatedly remind them of our Lord's prayer that the church be united as one, without making a dilemma between spiritual unity and organic unity, especially where churches exist in the same area, speak the same language, and share the same culture.

Talks with Canada and Smithville

In October 2016, two of our deputies were able to meet with two of the deputies of the CanRC, who attended the National Synod of the GGRI. In these discussions, we endeavour to give the CanRC a clearer understanding of the various Reformed Churches in Indonesia, and to receive a clearer understanding of the position of the CanRC towards these Reformed Churches.

When the ICRC was held in 2017, we also had a video-conference with the CanRC Deputies, members of Smithville mission board, delegates from the GGRC as well as deputies from the URCNA. We again expressed our earnest desire that the Reformed Churches of Indonesia in the province of NTT work towards unity.

We have sent a letter to Smithville, expressing our disappointment that churches established as a result of Smithville's mission work in Timor have now formed yet another new federation in Timor, namely, the GGRI-Timor. In October 2017, Rev Wynia was sent by the Smithville Mission Board to Indonesia, as well as to Canada. Frank and wholesome

discussions took place regarding the matter of unity, and the developments leading to the formation of this new federation.

While attending the provincial synod of the GGRI-Kalbar in December 2017, we had the opportunity to speak with two delegates from the newly formed GGRI-Timor (the churches established as a result of Smithville's mission work). We were greatly heartened by these discussions. They indicated to us that they purposely adopted the name of our sister churches (GGRI) with the addition of the word 'Timor' at the end, because they have no intention of continuing a separate existence, but hope to unite with the GGRI in the future. They mentioned that they are unsure how they should go about this, and they would greatly appreciate assistance from the FRCA. With this in mind, we will ask Synod to broaden our mandate, to include also the GGRI-Timor.

Informing the Churches about the GGRI in Kalbar and Papua

In order to fulfil this aspect of our mandate, the deputies have written an introduction to the GGRI in each of the three provinces. These appeared in three successive issues of *Una Sancta* in 2016. These articles are attached to our report.

In December 2017, two of our deputies visited the provincial synod of the GGRI-Kalbar for the first time. Their stay from December 2-9 gave them limited exposure to these churches. Most of the time was occupied by attending Synod from 7:30 am-10:00 pm. The intervals for refreshments gave us the opportunity to speak with ministers, evangelists and elders. While not doubting that these churches are true and faithful Reformed Churches, there are things that we see as weaknesses and some concerns. What we have seen only underlines our view that these churches need the continued support of the FRCA, even to a greater measure than currently given.

We have not yet visited the GGRI Papua. We hope to receive the opportunity when they convene their provincial synod in 2018.

Some Specifics from the Synods

A few items on the agenda of the second national synod of our sister churches, the GGRI, might be of interest.

1. The GGRI Papua were not able to attend this national synod. This revolves around the matter of their “stolen identity.” A breakaway group from the GGRI-Papua took a substantial amount of government funding, plus the official name of the GGRI which has been registered with the government. To appreciate this, it is necessary to know that all churches need to be registered with the government. The churches of GGRI-Papua are currently regarded by the government as being ‘unregistered.’ The synod proceeded without them, but sent a delegation to assist them with their problems.
2. The second national synod reversed a decision made at the first national Synod, namely, that there should be one theological college for the entire federation. Now two theological colleges are operating under the sanction of synod. The churches in Kalbar were disappointed with the little progress made by the GGRI-NTT in erecting a new campus (a disappointment we as deputies share with Kalbar). Therefore with the help from the Netherlands, they sought approval from the second national synod to operate their own theological college, as they had done before.
3. The national synod warned the GGRI-Kalbar about the liberalism and pluralism that exists in the PGI (a ‘union’ of protestant churches in Indonesia) of which the GGRI-Kalbar has become a member. In our discussion with Rev Acong, it was explained that the GGRI-Kalbar did not officially seek membership. He, on his private initiative, became involved with this organization, and even has been elected chairman of it. And with his election, the GGRI-Kalbar ‘automatically’ became members without a decision from their churches to this effect. Rev Acong explained that membership in this organization is only used to facilitate legal matters with the government.

There is no fellowship or communion or pulpit exchanges with other member churches of this organization.

Proposed Mandate

Regarding the GGRI, Synod appoint deputies with the following mandate:

1. To continue sister relations with the GGRI in accordance with the adopted rules.
2. To continue to visit the national and regional Synods of the GGRI subject to available finance.
3. To support the GGRI with the intention of building up the reformed character of these churches.
4. To continue to support a Theological College of the GGRI and make funds available for this cause.
5. To encourage the GGRI and their board of Governors to seek the assistance of an external adviser Rev A van Delden.
6. To continue dialogue with the deputies of the CanRC and the Smithville Mission Board, in order to develop a common understanding regarding unity amongst the Reformed churches in Indonesia.
7. To support two students/ministers financially to come to Australia during the inter-synodical period to study English and to familiarize themselves with the Australian churches for three months subject to available funding from the churches.
8. To see to it that effective communication with the people involved is possible and if necessary also to make limited financial support available.
9. To encourage the GGRI, the GGRC, and the GGRI-Timor to work together towards federal unity, and to facilitate this process where possible.

10. To keep in contact and share information with the deputies of the CanRC regarding our (mutual) relationships with the Reformed Churches of Indonesia.
11. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the activities of deputies 1-10 above mentioned.

Regarding the GGRI, Synod appoint deputies with the following mandate:

1. To continue contact with the GGRC, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the reformed character of these churches by advice or other means such as seminars.
2. To continue to visit the Synods of the GGRC subject to available finance.
3. To encourage the GGRC to work together with the GGRI and with the GGRI-Timor towards federal unity, and to facilitate this process where possible.
4. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in point 1-3.

Regarding the GGRI-Timor, Synod appoint deputies with the following mandate:

1. To contact the GGRI-Timor and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the reformed character of these churches by advice or other means such as seminars.
2. To visit the Synods of the GGRI-Timor subject to available finance.
3. To encourage the GGRI-Timor to work together with the GGRI and with the GGRC towards federal unity, and to facilitate this process where possible.
4. To encourage the churches and their members to provide the means of support for the mandate of deputies detailed in point 1-3.

Deputies for Relations Reformed Churches of New Zealand

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS USED

BBK	Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the RCN
BCF	Belgic Confession of Faith
CanRC	Canadian Reformed Churches
CER	Committee for Ecumenical Relationships of the CRCA
CO	Church Order
COD	Canons of Dort
CRCA	Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (formerly known as 'Reformed Churches of Australia')
CRCNA	Christian Reformed Church of North America
CRTS	Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
ESV	English Standard Version
FRC	Free Reformed Church
FRCA	Free Reformed Churches of Australia
GKN (S)	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Synodical)
GKN-Lib / GKNv	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)
GKSA	Reformed Churches of South Africa
ICRC	International Conference of Reformed Churches
IRC	Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCNZ
MARS	Mid-America Reformed Seminary
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NGK	Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken
NIV	New International Version

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

NKJV	New Kings James Version
OMB	Overseas Mission Board
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
PCEA	Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRCA	Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia
RCA	Reformed Churches of Australia (now known as 'Christian Reformed Churches of Australia')
RCN	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), also abbreviated as GKN-Lib and as GKNv
RCNZ	Reformed Churches of New Zealand
REC	Reformed Ecumenical Council
RES	Reformed Ecumenical Synod
RPC	Reformed Presbyterian Church
RTC	Reformed Theological College
URCNA	United Reformed Churches of North America
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches

1. INTRODUCTION & MANDATE

Synod Baldivis 2015 in Article 38 came to the following decision with grounds regarding the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). The deputies' mandate is found in decision 5.

Synod decides

To accept Recommendations 1-5, together with the grounds, of the deputies report:

1. Express thankfulness for the faithfulness deputies have observed in the RCNZ and in their decision to discontinue a sister church relationship with the CRCA.
2. To offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ under the established rules, and to accept their offer of a sister church relationship.
3. To invite delegates from the RCNZ to attend our next Synod.
4. To authorise two delegates to visit (if invited) the next Synod of the RCNZ.
5. To discharge deputies and thank them for their work, and to appoint new deputies with the following mandate:
 - a. to convey Synod's decisions to the RCNZ and provide them with a copy of the Acts as well as the 'Rules for Sister Church Relations';
 - b. to continue to monitor the impact of the Ecumenical Fellowship relation of the RCNZ with the CRCA, and to encourage the RCNZ to be consequential in this relationship in light of the concerns expressed in the report to Synod 2015;
 - c. to promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA by way of exchange of speakers where opportunity arises as well as exchange of publication of articles;
 - d. monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established 'Rules for

Sister Church Relations' and keep the churches informed;

- e. to report to next Synod along with recommendations.

Grounds

1. The final impediment identified by previous Synods to becoming sisters, being the sister relationship between RCNZ and CRCA, has now been removed.
2. The RCNZ has placed safeguards in place in the new "Rules for Ecumenical Fellowship" in an effort to maintain the purity of the preaching and the sanctity of the Lord's table.
3. The RCNZ is showing in many ways and in many areas to be a faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. For a sister relationship to function in a meaningful way, it is important for the membership to become acquainted.

In order to fulfil their mandate, deputies met formally on more than half a dozen occasions, with all the deputies present at each of these meetings. In addition to these regular meetings, all the deputies met with their New Zealand counterparts, the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC), in Geelong in September 2016. While the Synod of the RCNZ met in September 2017 Rev H. Alkema and Rev R.E. Pot were able to witness and be part of the proceedings, as well as meet again with the brothers of the IRC.

We have chosen to compile this report under various headings which are listed in the table of contents that follows.

It is and remains our prayer that the Lord, the King of the Church will bless the work of Synod Bunbury 2018 for the glory of His name and the benefit of His church gathering work here in Australia and wherever He continues to gather His Church.

Rev H. Alkema
Br M. Bax
Rev R.E. Pot

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FRCA'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE RCNZ

To assist the delegates to Synod with appropriate background information, the Deputies' Report to Synod Baldivis 2015 provided a detailed overview of the history of the FRCA's contact with the RCNZ. The relationship has had several phases as it has progressed over the years, recapped here in brief:

1. First contacts and positive developments (Synods 1985-1994)

Mention of the RCNZ already appears in the FRCA Acts of Synod in 1962. Synod Launceston 1985 initiated correspondence with the RCNZ, and while concerns were expressed about third-party relations, positive developments in the RCNZ were reported to subsequent synods.

2. Ongoing discussions about third party relations (Synods 1996-1998)

It was reported to Synod Kelmscott 1996 that the RCNZ had acknowledged the FRCA as true churches. Gratitude was expressed for the faithfulness found in the RCNZ, and for their principled approach in dealing with third party relations. Given that deputies had indicated that the RCNZ must be considered a true and faithful church, it was decided to strive for a sister church relations, with the RCNZ's relationship with the RCA remaining as an impediment.

3. Recognition as true churches; ongoing discussion about impediment (Synods 2000-2009)

Synod West Albany 2000 in principle agreed to recognize the RCNZ as true and faithful churches, but their continuing relationship with the CRCNA remained an issue. Synod Rockingham 2003 acknowledged that they maintain this relationship in a Scriptural manner, and Synod West Kelmscott expressed a positive view towards the RCNZ in regard to practical support and interaction with the RCNZ in areas not restricted to sister church relations.

4. Changed relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA (Synods 2012-2015)

The RCNZ Synod 2011 discontinued sister church relations with the CRCA, and changed this to a relationship of “ecclesiastical fellowship”. Synod Armadale 2012 mandated deputies to investigate this new relationship more closely, and evaluate it in light of the impediment identified by previous synods.

5. Sister church relationship (Synod 2015-present)

Synod Baldivis 2015 decided to offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ under the established rules, and to accept their offer of a sister church relationship; which was confirmed by the RCNZ's Synod Palmerston-North 2017.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF A SISTER CHURCH RELATIONSHIP

Gratitude and goals

Via a letter in November 2015, at a meeting with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee in September 2016, and in an address at the RCNZ Synod Palmerston-North in September 2017, deputies expressed gratitude to the RCNZ that Synod Baldivis 2015 could finally accept the RCNZ's offer of sister church relations after many years. It was noted that the discontinuation of the RCNZ's sister church relations with CRCA was a big factor in this decision, and it was recognized that entering into a sister church relationship has been a long process from the side of the FRCA. Deputies stated that while the FRCA already quite some time ago could gratefully acknowledge the RCNZ as a true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this commitment to God's Word and the Reformed confessions was also evident at the RCNZ's 2014 Synod, the FRCA considers it a real blessing now to be in a sister church relationship. We also expressed a sincere desire that this relationship be meaningful and of mutual benefit. In our meeting with the RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee, the RCNZ men expressed similar sentiments, including the desire for the relationship to deepen and be fruitful.

Rules for sister church relations

Our respective rules for sister church relations (see Appendix A) were used as the framework for the initial part of the meeting of Deputies together with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee held in Geelong in September 2016, with attention given to topics such as the following:

1. ***Exercising mutual care and assistance:*** General consideration was given to ways this can be done, as required by the rules for sister church relations. It was acknowledged that this is an important element to keep in mind in having a sister church relationship.
2. ***Sharing decisions of broader assemblies:*** Acts of recent synods have been exchanged, and in a meeting

the key decisions of our respective Synods were reviewed and discussed, to ensure familiarity and understanding.

3. ***Establishing ecclesiastical relationships:*** Sister churches are required to give account about establishing relations with third parties. There was discussion about the sister church relationship established between the FRCA and First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, as well as the suspending of the FRCA's relationship with the RCN. Discussion also considered the RCNZ's 2014 decision to discontinue sister church relations with the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, concerns that the RCNZ has about the direction of the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA), and a mandate they have to work towards a sister church relationship with the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA).
4. ***Accepting attestations and admitting to the sacraments:*** While this isn't in the RCNZ's rules for sister church relations, it is covered by the privilege granted to sister churches in their church order Art 60 & 61. Practical matters about the FRCA's practice with attestations was discussed, and ways suggested about how to ensure that visitors between the FRCA and RCNZ be appropriately prepared.
5. ***Accepting and calling ministers:*** Being in a sister church relationship opens the way for pulpit exchanges and calls, and at the time of this meeting, an RCNZ minister had already preached in an FRCA church, and plans were in progress for a pulpit exchange between an RCNZ and an FRCA minister.
6. ***Consulting about revising ecclesiastical documents:*** It was noted that the benefit of sister church relations is that it gives opportunity to consult each other when changes are made. Currently the only document undergoing potential changes in the FRCA is the Book of Praise. Synod Bishopdale 2014 of the RCNZ completed

the process of making several changes to their songbook and forms, and the current discussions within the Church Order Committee are primarily about nuancing rather than making changes to the Church Order.

7. **Attending synods:** A verbal invitation was given for the RCNZ to send delegates to Synod Bunbury 2018, while delegates from the FRCA were invited to Synod Palmerston-North 2017.

Increasing familiarization and contacts

At our first meeting with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee following the decision of Synod Baldivis 2015, considerable time was spent in considering ways to promote increased familiarization of our respective memberships. There is a mutual desire on the part of both the FRCA and RCNZ to grow the relationship, and find ways to strengthen the bonds and ties. Various possibilities were mentioned and discussed, and the outcome of these will be reported on later in this report.

4. DECISIONS OF RCNZ SYNOD PALMERSTON-NORTH 2017

Not all the decisions of the Synod Palmerston-North 2017 of the RCNZ have been included in the summary below, but only the ones which may be of particular interest to our churches. Under these headings we will also include observations and impressions gleaned from numerous conversations in formal and informal meetings. Also see Appendix D, which is the report about Synod 2017 that was published in *Una Sancta*.

Songbook, Creeds & Confessions, Liturgical Forms

The Hymnal Committee organized a reprint of the new *Sing to the Lord* song-book that was first presented in complete form to Synod Bishoptdale 2014. It was reported that the churches have been blessed with the use of this book in the worship services.

Synod 2011 already approved a finalized version of the forms and confessions, for example borrowing the translation of BCF and COD from the Canadian Reformed Churches. Besides the Three Forms of Unity, the RCNZ also uses the Westminster Standards. A separate book of the Forms and Confessions was printed in 2015, and the reprint of the *Sing to the Lord* song-book will now include the content from the book with the forms and confessions. There has even been interest from other churches in Australia and NZ in purchasing the new books. It was reported:

"It is our desire and prayer that this book will serve our churches well for many decades to come, in aiding our worship and in enabling us to hold fast to the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints, for the building up of the church to the glory of God."

Church Order Committee

Synod 2011 had dealt with a matter relating to a difficult and sensitive pastoral situation in a particular local church, and some of these items came up again in Synod 2014. From this situation some church political questions had arisen, particularly about the involvement of broader assemblies in matters of

discipline, and what is the nature and role of the broader assemblies in relation to a local church. Some of these questions touched on important principles of church polity about the autonomy of a local church and about the cooperation that is necessary and promised within a federation. It was reaffirmed that a central principle at stake here is that the Bible calls us to behave well in the church (1 Tim 3), since it is not our church but the Lord's. To illustrate that we witnessed sound Reformed church polity at work, we give several examples of decisions about this:

1. *Absence or abstaining when cases in which you are involved are dealt with*

Synod/Presbytery rules were changed to include the following:

"A seated delegate at a meeting of one of the church courts cannot be compelled to leave the meeting. The chairman, at the request of the meeting, may ask a delegate to leave the meeting, but cannot compel him to do so."

The grounds emphasized trusting each other as office-bearers; other solid thinking was present here as well. This had as background some difficult cases from the past where this was an issue, and the need to distinguish between an involved party being absent, or merely abstaining when the situation in which they were involved was dealt with. Unless they behave in an ungodly way, they should be present, but abstain from voting. This is similar to a principle stated in our own CO.

2. *Definition of concurrence*

The main question under discussion related to the nature of the "concurrence" that broader assemblies are required to give in matters of discipline. Is concurrence making a judicial decision that discipline is right in all aspects, or is it only concerned with procedure?

The Church Polity committee had done much work in studying this question, and as part of this had invited Rev De Gelder from the Canadian Reformed Churches to do a series of speeches in RCNZ churches on related topics, to help educate

members generally about this, and also to give guidance to those in resolving the church political questions that had arisen. The Church Order Committee recommended a definition of concurrence that reflects our own practice in the FRCA and how we are familiar with it from the CanRC, namely that it primarily is about procedure, and not judging all aspects of discipline.

Synod adopted the following definition of concurrence:

"Concurrence in matters of church discipline then, we would define as, agreement that, in the discernment of the presbytery, the requesting session has sufficiently carried out its pastoral duties toward the sinner, seeking his restoration to faithfulness (in doctrine and/or life) but, faced with no sign of godly repentance, the formal, public steps of discipline may continue."

The discussion on this point was very helpful to listen to, and the comments made by delegates demonstrated that there was an awareness of the fundamental principles of Reformed church polity which we share. In our mind this was an important issue, because answering it correctly requires a proper understanding of the nature of a federation and how it operates. In our view, it is a principle of sound Reformed Church polity that while original authority lies in the local session (consistory) and in the elders of a local church, churches voluntarily have agreed to accept the decisions of the broader assemblies. As such, we believe the definition adopted by synod is a good one, reasons including:

- a. a local session (consistory) has the right to proceed with discipline due to the autonomy of a local church, and it is only by virtue of being a federation that we have introduced concurrence as an additional safeguard; having a presbytery (classis) needing to judge all aspects would be more hierarchical;
- b. a presbytery and another session not directly involved can't judge all aspects of a case, since this would require rashly judging without knowing all details;

- c. requiring a complete judgement would short-circuit the appeal process; if a member is wronged (including due to incomplete information), they can still appeal to the presbytery, so the broader church orderly system still ensures justice.

3. *Process of concurrence when reading a disciplinary statement when those who resign*

When a session wishes to read a disciplinary statement in cases where people resign, concurrence of Presbytery is required. Some changes were made to the existing guidelines about how this happens, to make clearer to the churches what the practice should be (e.g. the need first to rebuke the resignee, suspension from the Lord's Supper, concurrence from presbytery, reading of a disciplinary statement to the congregation).

4. *Ability of broader assemblies to overturn decisions*

The following rule for Presbyteries/Synods was agreed to:

"Broader courts cannot overturn a local session's decision. Rather, it is the responsibility of the local session to abide by the decision of the broader court as a part of the essence of belonging to this federation of churches (as per C.O. Art. 35)."

The discussion here had some interesting comments that reflected good Reformed church polity, and a proper understanding of the nature of a federation and how it operates. While original authority lies in the local session, churches voluntarily have agreed to accept the decisions of the broader assemblies. Refusal to do so would in effect place them outside the federation, unless they follow the proper appeal process. We have made promises to each other in a federation, and accepting decisions is not a matter of an inherent authority that lies in broader assemblies.

5. *Disagreement with concurrence*

The previous Synod decided not to make this rule as recommended by the CO Committee, and upon reconsideration the CO Committee now agreed that this rule not be made:

"If a session disagrees with concurrence given by Presbytery, it may appeal to Synod (CO. Art. 28). The matter may only be considered at a subsequent presbytery if concerns involve previously unconsidered material."

The reason for not making this rule is that the only session that can appeal is the aggrieved party, and not some other church that isn't directly involved. If another church realizes an issue or has reasons to disagree with concurrence, they should forward that information/reasons to the aggrieved party so that that party can appeal to the Presbytery. Some delegates were concerned about justice at the broader assemblies, but one delegate correctly pointed out that we must be careful not to use "justice" as a way to legitimize meddling in another session's business and also to incorrectly judge after hearing only one side; furthermore, our thoughts about justice must take into account that we are part of a federation, and an aggrieved party has the right to appeal, and that is how we ensure justice. It was also mentioned that sometimes we can't get perfect justice, so we must simply do our best and have to leave things to the Lord.

6. *Electronic credentials*

An overture was received and approved for a revised version of the article in the Church Order dealing with credentials to assemblies, to enable the use of electronic credentials. It was especially encouraging for us to hear in the discussion about this the reasoning and concerns that were raised, which reflected a real desire to ensure that the principles of Reformed church polity are not compromised by a change in practice like this.

7. *Entry to the federation*

South Island Presbytery proposed an addition to the church order about how churches be admitted to the federation, and that this happen upon recommendation of a session and with office-bearers subscribing to the confessions and agreeing with the church order; with provisional acceptance by the presbytery to be ratified by the synod, and examination of the minister by way of a colloquial doctum. This was referred to the church order committee for more work and recommendation, and demonstrates caution and thoroughness.

Training for the Ministry

With gratitude it was noted that there has been an increase in students desiring to prepare for the ministry, yet it was also affirmed that the churches needs to continue to encourage this. It was noted by one of the deputies that training for the ministry is one of the most significant work the church does, because it impacts the future of the church.

1. *Students*

There are currently five RCNZ students preparing for the ministry, three via the RTC and two at MARS. Four ministers were recently ordained, two from MARS, one from RTC, and one from Covenant Theological Seminary. Currently there are four vicars (theological students who have completed their academic training, and are doing a year-long internship in a local RCNZ church under supervision of its minister), one from MARS, two from RTC, one from Westminster Theological Seminary.

2. *Reformed Theological College*

The RTC has been undergoing some changes in recent years, both in regard to geographical location, and in regard to governance, with changes being proposed to the Memorandum of Understanding that the RTC has with its supporting churches, including the RCNZ.

- a) *New location and modes of delivery.* For various reasons, the campus location of the RTC has moved

from Geelong to a new location in the city of Melbourne, and at the time of Synod was in its second semester of operation there. Class sizes seem to be bigger, and the RTC is also providing more online delivery of classes. One of the RTC's faculty, Dr. Philip Scheepers, addressed Synod on behalf of the RTC, and explained the background of the growing emphasis on live-streaming and distance education. Even though the RTC's location and modes of delivery have changed, they want to continue giving theological education deeply embedded in the Reformed tradition. Besides the traditional supporting churches (RCNZ, CRCA, and Reformed Presbyterian Church), they also are attracting a growing interest from those from other backgrounds who are genuinely interested in the Reformed faith.

- b) *Financial support.* It needs to be remembered that the RTC is an independent college, and is not a denominational one. As such, it is not a seminary operated by the RCNZ or CRCA, although both federations do provide a lot of financial support for it. This also accounts for the fact that the support for the RTC is not done via a levy of fixed contributions for each RCNZ church, but by voluntary contributions. The RCNZ's current level of support is about \$60,000 per year, and an amount of \$80,000 was recommended for 2018.
- c) *Revised Memorandum of Understanding.* A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the RTC and its supporting churches ensures the separation of the churches and the college, while at the same time ensuring that there is still a connection between them. The churches as such do not govern the RTC. This has parallel with theological institutions in the USA, like the independent MARS. Synod Palmerston-North had to consider a proposed new Memorandum of Understanding, as a result of some of the recent changes in the RTC's governance and operation. An amended

MOU was adopted by Synod, which was subsequently approved by the RTC as well.

- d) *Restructured governance.* Currently the RTC's board has two members from the RCNZ, but a restructuring of the RTC's governance means that in the future representation on the board will not be done geographically but based on expertise. This could mean less board members from the RCNZ, although the constitution does require at least one RCNZ representative on the board. The RTC is also looking at other churches that might become supporting members (e.g. some Korean churches in Australia), and the constitution would provide for their representation. This raises the potential concern that this could water down the influence the RCNZ has in the RTC, and this concern was also expressed by some at Synod.
- e) *Oversight of instruction.* Part of the role of RCNZ deputies is to observe and ensure that the theological education of students is Reformed, thorough, and well taught. Even though the deputies and RCNZ churches currently say they have no reason for the RCNZ to have suspicion about the instruction given, several delegates pointed out the need for the churches and deputies to ensure close supervision of the instruction. It was encouraging to note that Synod took this matter seriously, and it was not dealt with lightly or quickly, even though there were some differences of opinion. Our deputies are not aware of legitimate concerns about the teaching currently being given at the RTC.
- f) *Systematic theology.* One concern that some RCNZ churches have about the RTC is that it currently doesn't have a systematic theology (dogmatics) chair. This department of theology is currently being overseen by Dr Martyn Williams, who is considered to be sound in Reformed doctrine. The RTC is starting to move to getting a half-time professor for this department. Meanwhile deputies reported confidence that the current lecturers are sound in Reformed theology and give

quality instruction. Comments made by synod delegates pointed out that there still needs to be the goal of pursuing a systematic theology chair; also that deputies need to closely evaluate the instruction. To do this presently, deputies attend some of the classes, talk with students about the course content, see course outlines, and all the current faculty are individuals that present ministers have been taught by, so there is good familiarity with them. Deputies also engage directly with faculty about any concerns they have, and have been encouraged by the positive responses they have received.

3. *Mid America Reformed Seminary*

The president of MARS, Dr Cornel Venema, also addressed Synod, observing that six of the RCNZ's ministers at Synod were graduates of MARS. MARS began in 1981 in the CRCNA with a clear confessional commitment and pastoral emphasis; even today it only issues two degrees, with the emphasis on its MDiv degree to ensure that the clear focus remains on pastoral ministry. Its present faculty consists of four ordained URCNA ministers and two ordained OPC ministers, and over half of the student body comes from these churches. MARS uses the same four confessional standards as the RCNZ, and there are many interesting parallels between MARS and the RCNZ, which in his view includes elements of the spectrum that characterizes the historic Reformed faith. The emphasis at MARS is to prepare students thoroughly and well for the challenges of pastoral ministry in today's secular culture.

4. *Preferred seminary*

In regard to the choice of seminary, the RCNZ's Office-Bearers Handbook currently states

"Churches sending men to study for the ministry should first consider sending them to the Reformed Theological College in Geelong. Other institutions used by our sister churches may be considered in consultation with the Deputies for Students to the ministry."

The proposed version of the Memorandum of Understanding between the RTC and the RCNZ said: "*The RCNZ Assembly shall also urge their Churches to support the College by encouraging potential students to attend the RTC,*" which on the surface appears to be a definite choice for the RTC. However the deputies' report to Synod Bishopdale 2014 stated that MARS provides equally sound instruction. However deputies believe that the financial support given by the RCNZ to the RTC implies that it makes sense to consider the RTC first when choosing theological education.

It was noted that the word "encourage" does imply that students could choose differently, but even so some churches felt this language still puts too much pressure on churches and students to choose the RTC. As a result an amendment was accepted in which it was decided that churches are to "consider" encouraging this. It was also noted that the language reflects the fact that this is a MOU with the RTC, while the language in the RCNZ's own guidelines for training for the ministry is more even handed and makes reference to "other institutions". In recent years, about half the students receive training at MARS, and half at the RTC.

5. Supervision of students

Two deputies supervise all RCNZ ministerial students wherever they are studying, and interview them annually. They also visit the RTC annually to meet with the students and discuss the curriculum and student progress with the RTC faculty. Given the number of students that have studied at MARS, a visit will be made there as well in the inter-synodical period. Deputies also are to seek to arrange summer internships for RCNZ students at the end of the student's second and third years of study with at least one of these being in an RCNZ church; as well as arranging vicariate placements. One delegate mentioned a concern about the influence on a RCNZ student by worshipping in a CRCA congregation while living in Geelong or Melbourne. While studying, theological students remain members of their local RCNZ church, which also has an ongoing responsibility to support and supervise them.

6. *Vicariate exams*

An overture from South Island Presbytery proposed that Synod appoint a committee to review the current examination system for candidates for ministry and propose ways in which the current system could be improved. The intent of this wasn't to say that the current process was wrong, but looking at strengthening the current process of examining vicars and theological students, and asked for a study committee. The background of this was a desire to be able to address properly weaknesses noted in one or more areas of a student's exam. The proposal was adopted, and the discussion made it clear there is a real desire to ensure men who enter the ministry are very well and properly prepared.

Overseas Mission

The RCNZ's passion for the task of the church in spreading the gospel was evident. This continues to be coordinated by the Overseas Mission Board, and this generated good discussion and lively interest from the delegates, giving evidence of their love for this work. The work in Papua New Guinea continues to receive extensive financial support and attention, and includes support for Rev. Alan Douma at the Reformed Bible College in Port Moresby, and the work of br Richard 'tHart (originally from the FRCA, but now member of the RCNZ of Bishopdale) who serves as the campus manager. Local churches are involved in supporting other mission projects as well, and it was evident to us that this is the subject of much love, commitment, and prayer. Synod approved the figure of \$200,000 as the recommended quota for support of the OMB's work in 2019, which is around \$100 per communicant member, and is slowly increasing on an annual basis.

Confessional Membership

The South Island Presbytery overtured synod to appoint a study committee to investigate the matter of confessional church membership. The RCNZ's current position on confessional membership is the same as the FRCA's, namely that communicant members are expected to subscribe to the confessions of the church, and this is evident from the wording

used for the vows in their form for profession of faith. It was stated that this proposal was not the result of a desire to move away from confessional membership. Rather, it arose from situations where prospective members have difficulties with part of the confessions, or where English is their second language and they struggle to comprehend aspects of the language. It reflects the fact that those seeking membership in the RCNZ sometimes come from diverse backgrounds, and it can be a challenge for them to be incorporated, especially when they come from other cultures.

Some delegates were keen to see a study, and saw value in passing on the reasons for confessional membership to the next generations. Others didn't want to entertain the idea of a study committee about this, believing that the grounds overstated the case and could implicitly attack confessional membership. Reference was made to previous decisions of the RCNZ, including a decision of Synod 1995 which stated that guests to Lord's Supper were not to oppose the truth of the confessions, and the recently adopted liturgical form for confession of faith which confirmed this, by requiring acceptance of the Bible and that its teaching is faithfully summarized in the teaching and confessions of the church. It was also mentioned that local elders already can show pastoral sensitivity to individual situations (as also happens in the FRCA, e.g. in cases of mental handicaps), and that there was no need for a study committee to look into this. Delegates from several sister churches spoke, including ourselves, urging caution on this matter. In the end we were thankful to see that the overture was defeated by a strong majority.

Local Church Names

Another proposal considered by Synod from the South Island Presbytery was the suggestion that local churches have the freedom to choose their own name, as follows:

1. *That allowance be made for each individual congregation to choose a name that reflects their identity and how they would desire to be known in*

their respective community, per the following restrictions:

- a. *Each congregation must publically identify as one of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand on all signage, stationary, web based communications, etc.*
- b. *Each name change shall receive Presbytery approval prior to a new name being used. Approval cannot be withheld if there is no specific and principled objection to the proposed name.*

This resulted in some robust debate, with those in favour pointing out that the conditions ensured that the church still be identified as Reformed, and that we are living in a secular culture where people are unfamiliar with the gospel, and where the word “Reformed” often isn’t recognized or understood by the surrounding community. However many concerns were also raised, including the fact that weighty reasons had been previously brought forward against this idea; that being Reformed is an important part of our identity; and that individual churches should not have a different identity to the rest of the federation.

The proposal was not adopted, and as deputies we appreciated that there was a real desire to be unified and non-divisive in dealing with this matter, and also to be very cautious, rather than go in a different direction from previous decisions. We also appreciated many of the sentiments raised in the discussion, particularly about the need for a clear Reformed identity.

Emeritus Fund & Emeritus Savings Fund Committee

In view of some government changes, Synod 2014 put in motion an investigation that determined that KiwiSaver is a better vehicle through which to provide for the ministers’ retirement income rather than the previous system in use. This led to the previous Emeritus Fund being wound-up on 30 June 2016, and now an Emeritus Savings Fund is in operation as a

new vehicle. The goal is that ministers can be free from worldly care and focus on their spiritual labours. The RCNZ scheme has always been to provide entitlements to retired ministers based on the number of years of service in the RCNZ.

Sister Churches

1. *Free Reformed Churches of Australia*

Rev Alkema received opportunity to address Synod on behalf of the FRCA on Tuesday evening (for the text, see Appendix E), and for the first time in the history of our relationship with the RCNZ we could speak as delegates of a sister church. He focused on various elements of what it means to be in a sister church relationship, and also addressed some of the areas in particular that deputies had been mandated to focus on.

Rev Dirk Van Garderen responded on behalf of the RCNZ, acknowledging that it was a long road, but that personally he and his wife have fallen in love with the FRCA. Having spent time in Western Australia and in Cairns, he has appreciated the warm welcome he has received both on a formal and informal level, and has become convinced that this new relationship can be mutually beneficial. Both in Australia and in NZ there is the same challenge to ask the question about how can we reach our nation with the gospel. He encouraged the delegates to tell their local churches to visit the church group in Cairns, and led in prayer of gratitude and intercession for the FRCA. Gestures of brotherly affection were given, including congratulatory handshakes from all the delegates as they left the building that evening.

The decisions of Synod Palmerston North about the FRCA were the following:

1. *Recognizing that we are now in a sister church relationship with the FRCA.*
2. *The IRC meet with the FRCA deputies during the next inter-synodical period.*
3. *The IRC consult with FRCA deputies and our respective emeritus committees to seek a mutually*

satisfactory way whereby ministers who serve in each other's churches are able to do so without significant detrimental effect to their retirement entitlements.

4. *The RCNZ send one delegate to the next synod of the FRCA.*

The statement in decision 1 might seem unnecessary, but this was prompted by the fact that Synod Baldivis 2015 had taken the unnecessary step “to offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ” when the RCNZ had already offered this to the FRCA previously, and so the decision of Synod Baldivis 2015 “to accept their offer of a sister church relationship” was already sufficient. The RCNZ’s wording (“recognizing that we are now in a sister church relationship with the FRCA”) ensured that the FRCA’s offer was not left without a response.

Also of particular note is the mandate for the IRC to consult with us about our respective emeritus funds, in an effort to remove any practical obstacles that could in some instances make calling each other’s ministers difficult.

2. *Reformed Churches of the Netherlands*

Two delegates were present from the RCN, synod chairman Rev Melle Oosterhuis and deputy br Johan De Jong, in order to address Synod with respect to the concerns the RCNZ have in relation to a number of issues, including the RCN’s recent decision to open all the offices to women. They mentioned that as mature believers we must be transformed by the renewal of our mind, and realize that there has always been a struggle to interpret God’s Word. In their view, they have not developed new hermeneutics which undermines the authority of God’s Word, or deviation in areas like the doctrine of creation or homosexuality. As part of their explanation they stated that in creation God created man and woman in equality, unlike the animals where the males lorded it over the females; however this equality was disturbed by sin, and for men to lord it over their wives is a result of sin, and Christ delivers us from sin and abuse of authority, and restores his church to the intention of creation, which includes equality of men and women. The two

Pauline texts which appear to forbid women to serve as office-bearers (1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:8-15) were also addressed, and it was acknowledged that this appears to contradict the aforementioned conclusion, there are solutions to this apparent contradiction, and synod decided to leave this in the freedom of exegesis and the freedom of the churches. The RCN believes these are merely differences in ecclesiastical practice, and is no obstacle to sister church relations.

The explanation given was unconvincing, and received no sympathy or support from the RCNZ delegates. In his responsive address, the moderator of the RCNZ synod acknowledged the courage of delegates to come, despite the anticipated decision, and the mutual desire to uphold God's Word, but firmly disagreed with the exegesis they presented, and proceeded to present a clear Biblical view of the Scriptural passages in question. At the same time this was done in the context of sincere affection, love, deep concern, and fraternal care, with a desire that the RCN still listen to the RCNZ's concerns, and seek to submit to God's will.

Synod decided the following:

- "1. That Synod express its deep concern that the RCN has not abandoned its current hermeneutical direction which has led it to, for one thing, admitting women to the offices of the church, but is also demonstrated in a number of other areas of church life, e.g. the lenient attitude in the RCN towards the admission of practicing homosexuals to the Lord's Supper.*
- 2. That due to the decision of the RCN 2017 Synod to admit women to all the offices of the church, and the hermeneutical direction for this decision, our sister-relationship with the RCN be suspended.*
- 3. That unless there is repentance our sister-church relationship with the RCN be terminated at our next Synod in 2020."*

This decision was made without dissent, and minimal need for discussion. It was noted that this decision was not intended to mean downgrading the relationship to ecumenical fellowship, but a complete break; by opening all offices to women, the RCN would not even be considered for a relationship of ecumenical fellowship with the RCNZ. It was also noted that Synod's decision was in line with similar decisions of sister churches. Our understanding is that the setting of a specific date for termination is a measure taken by the RCNZ brothers that ensures the matter will be dealt with in a timely fashion.

3. *Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA)*

The recommendation from the IRC was to continue sister church relations for now, but to discuss with the GKSA downgrading their relationship to a relationship of ecumenical fellowship, similar to that with the CRCA. The recommendation to Synod Bishopdale 2014 was stronger, but this was under the mistaken belief that appeals had been exhausted, which proved not to be the case. The grounds for the recommendation included the fact that the GKSA had confirmed at their 2016 Synod that their practice will be to ordain women deacons, and this is consistent in how relationship with CRCA was dealt with.

Rev Stefan De Bruyn spoke as foreign delegate for the GKSA, and mentioned the challenges South Africa faces culturally and spiritually. He noted that the GKSA has decided not to open the offices of elder and minister to women, and hoped that the RCNZ would not accept the IRC recommendation, which he considered to be like initiating a divorce.

Convinced that the ordination of women as deacons is unbiblical, the RCNZ decided to express continued concern to the GKSA about their direction, and adopted the recommendation of the IRC to investigate downgrading the current relationship with the GKSA to ecumenical fellowship. Besides ordination of women deacons, there are also other concerns, including the fact that even though their most recent synod decided not to open the offices of elders and ministers to women, it is apparent that some GKSA churches have ordained women elders anyway, and there are still voices (a minority)

calling for this. The RCNZ is seeking to be faithful in the exercise of its relationship with the GKSA, by giving every opportunity to warn them, while at the same time not tolerating their position about women deacons.

4. *Other sister churches*

Sister churches were continued with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Canadian Reformed Churches, United Reformed Churches of North America, and Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (their delegate also mentioned that they are on a course to suspend their relationship with the RCN). All churches had representatives present, who addressed the assembly.

Churches in Ecumenical Fellowship

1. *Christian Reformed Church of Australia (CRCA)*

Rev Andrew Nugteren spoke on behalf of the CRCA, and observed that the long history with the CRCA results in ongoing connections. For example, eight ministers currently in the CRCA have served in the RNZ; while five ministers currently in the RCNZ have served in the CRCA. The CRCA wants to focus on the mission task of the church. They are now part of the ICRC and as a member they supported move to suspend the RCN from the ICRC. The CRCA synod has encouraged its deputies for ecumenicity to focus on relationships with a strong practical edge. The CRCA appreciates the strong seminary in the RTC. Their contact with the RCNZ's IRC has included a meeting with them at Geelong and at the ICRC. There is also still cooperation in some projects which have a long history (e.g. outreach in the Solomon Islands, Compassionate Christmas Catalogue).

In his response, Rev Michael Willemse of the RCNZ acknowledged that the most recent CRCA synod had given evidence of a careful way in which they dealt with issues and of increased internal unity. He also expressed appreciation for the fact that the CRCA valued the RCNZ, despite the downgraded relationship. In the context of a downgraded relationship, RCNZ deputies are able to continue to raise matters of concern,

such as women deacons. Synod decided to continue the relationship of ecumenical fellowship.

Other Ecclesiastical Contacts

1. *Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA)*

The Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia consists of only seven small congregations, located between Adelaide to Brisbane³, and your deputies reported to Synod Baldivis 2015 that they were a small splinter group, concerning whom the RCNZ decided at Synod Bishopdale 2014 to have the goal of working towards a sister church relationship.

Their fraternal delegate explained that this year was their 50th anniversary, since their origin dates back to 1967, when they seceded in order to break from modernist theology, and wanted to return to historical Presbyterianism. He acknowledged that one of their weaknesses was a tendency towards isolationism, an example being that they only appointed an inter-church relations committee for the very first time just two years previous. Numerous personal connections appear to have played a big role in the PRCA's relationship with the RCNZ, including their mission work in Vanuatu.

The IRC proposed a sister church relationship with the PRCA. Discussion on the report and recommendations was relatively brief, and Synod adopted this recommendation.

2. *Grace Presbyterian Reformed Church of New Zealand (GPCNZ)*

There have been contacts with the GPCNZ already for some time, and also attendance of delegates at their General Assembly. The recommendation of the IRC was to encourage sessions to meet with the local GPCNZ session when necessary, and especially to discuss church planting work in proximity to an existing church plant from the other church. Our understanding is that these discussions were not about pursuing cooperation, but rather to avoid awkward situations

³ [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian_Reformed_Church_\(Australia\)](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian_Reformed_Church_(Australia))

that had arisen previously where a RCNZ church plant caused distress to a local work of the GPCNZ in the same area. Synod 2011 had decided that pulpit exchanges with the GPCNZ be done with caution, and there be some local contact; but since then the RCNZ churches have concluded that pulpit exchanges are not appropriate, and so that recommendation has been dropped since 2014.

3. *Other contacts*

Other ecclesiastical contacts that were reported on or had a presence at the RCNZ Synod included representatives who spoke concerning the Christian Reformed Church of Myanmar, the Reformed Church in the Philippines, and another group of Reformed churches in the Philippines with the acronym REACH.

The RCNZ also decided to continue membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). This also includes involvement with Asia-Pacific Regional Conferences. It was mentioned that the ICRC is not a super synod but a conference, aiming amongst other things to give a witness of the Reformed faith; it was reported that membership is helpful. The recent ICRC suspended membership of the RCN.

See appendix C for more details of the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) report to synod 2017. The full report was rather lengthy so only relevant parts have been reproduced there.

Other Decisions

Various other matters discussed and decided included the following, including reports from the National Diaconate Committee, Church Extension Committee, National Publishing Committee, Synod Interim Committee, and more.

General Observations about Synod

1. *Delegation*

Delegation to Synod in the RCNZ differs from the FRCA model in that each local church sends two delegates (and sometimes

alternates, who can speak but not vote). Delegates are mostly expected to speak on behalf of their local session, and there is a strong sense they represent their local church. In the FRCA delegates are chosen and then act on behalf of all the churches, so there is more deliberation on the floor of synod, as delegates try to work together and find a consensus that will serve the federation as a whole.

One disadvantage of the RCNZ's method of delegation (acknowledged by the brothers themselves) was the difficulty in wording of decisions and amendments on the floor of Synod, with so many brothers involved in the decision-making process. Conversely, one advantage is that there is a close sense of connection between synod and the local church, because all the local churches are involved and represented; furthermore elders and ministers gain valuable experience by becoming involved with the issues and process of the broader assemblies at a young age.

The difference is mostly practical, and there are different advantages to both methods of delegation. However both models emphasize Reformed church polity, and do not compromise the principle of local autonomous churches who avoid hierarchy yet cooperate together in a federation.

2. Terminology

There were some other differences noticeable in church polity, such as terminology that has Presbyterian origin (e.g. "presbytery" and "session" instead of "classis" and "consistory"), and some practices also differ (e.g. the RCNZ has a stated clerk who serves the church between synods, as do the previous synod's moderamen, who serve as an inter-synodical committee that at times gets called upon for advice or to help with things between synods). Most of these differences are merely superficial, and the underlying principles of Biblical Reformed church polity were clearly evident.

3. Spiritual atmosphere

It was clearly evident that in all the business dealt with there was a real desire to acknowledge the Head of the Church, to be

Biblical and Reformed, and to glorify God, and not be led by human opinion or glory. This was evident in the devotions at the start of every day with the exposition of God's Word, which was applied to the thinking and conduct appropriate for synod.

At numerous times a member of synod was asked to pray concerning a specific item, thanking God for His specific blessings, and praying for His ongoing care on certain matters that Synod had just dealt with or decided on. These prayers showed much spiritual maturity and a deep love for the Lord, His church, and His Word.

Devotions encouraged real love and spiritual grace, and in the way brothers conducted themselves towards each other there was a real desire to show graciousness and love, even when there were differences of opinion. Brothers were not afraid to ask one another for forgiveness in the event any potentially harsh words were said. Moments of jovial levity also helped generate and confirmed a good atmosphere.

All delegates are also required to rise to express their agreement with the confessional standards, and this was also applied strictly to replacement delegates or late arrivals. Scripture was also referenced frequently in discussions, and in introducing reports.

4. Elders

Also evident was a real desire to honour the work of elders and to encourage them in their task. Many ministers had elders who were at synod for the first time, and actively saw it as important to teach and guide them. One of the considerations mentioned was the importance of training men to be able to lead the church and assemblies in the future.

Several younger elders that we spoke to expressed their awareness of their own inadequacy in themselves, and yet it was obvious that these men took their task seriously, because they wanted to serve the Lord and His church faithfully, and expressed a very godly approach to serving at synod and serving in the church. It was encouraging to see how more experienced men used opportunities to speak to younger elders

and offer them encouragement and support, as an act of love and wisdom.

5. Hospitality

We were very well cared for by our hosts, and we also felt warmly welcomed by all those at synod. Ministers and elders we had met before were eager to welcome us, and others were cheerful in making our acquaintance, learning about us, and discussing various matters with us. We felt genuinely at home with brothers and sisters in Christ, and the spiritual bond was evident in many ways throughout our visit.

5. THE RCNZ'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CRCA

Meeting with RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee (September 2016)

The RCNZ's relationship with the CRCA received special attention at the meeting with the IRC held in September 2016. It was noted that there is a close historical and cultural connection between the RCNZ and CRCA that has a long and close history, similar to the FRCA's relation with RCN.

Among other things, the following points emerged from this discussion:

1. *Calling ministers:* No CRCA ministers have been called by RCNZ churches in the last couple of years at all. For this to happen, extra safe-guards are in place that don't apply when calling a minister from a sister church, as documented already in the report to Synod Baldivis 2015.
2. *Admission to Lord's Supper:* To be admitted to the Lord's Supper in RCNZ churches, CRCA members now need to be examined. In one instance a large group of CRCA members came to NZ for a wedding, and were all examined; i.e. they were all asked about their confessional commitment and the session was happy with their responses. Admission is based on adherence to the Reformed confessions. This is being consequential. However in reality attendance of CRCA members doesn't happen very often. RCNZ sessions would treat them in the same way as visitors from non-sister churches. It is granted that there is a different level of rigor from church to church in terms of the length/depth of the interview. In contrast if someone comes as visitor from another local RCNZ church, very little would be asked, because their membership in a sister church is the basis for admitting them.
4. *CRCA Synod Gosnells 2015:* Overall positive things could be reported about this:
 - a) At the CRCA's most recent synod there was good interaction with RCNZ deputies about women

deacons, and the RCNZ felt they had a listening ear and hope to continue that discussion; the CRCA even agreed to investigate having unordained women assisting the deacons rather than ordained deacons. This demonstrated that the new relationship of ecumenical fellowship with the CRCA still gives opportunity for the RCNZ to raise concerns, and they continue to raise the main concerns, and the CRCA even appears to be listening. The change in relationship has not closed dialogue about this, but if anything such dialogue has improved, and the tone of the interaction has been encouraging.

- b) The RCNZ deputies stated that no new concerns emerged from this synod. While there were some things that haven't changed, there were also some encouraging changes, e.g. the CRCA discontinued the use of a children's worker, which is good because there were church polity concerns about it being a synod appointed position rather than local church appointed and overseen.
5. *Four-fold task*: Concern had previously been expressed about the CRCA's emphasis on the four-fold task of the church and over-emphasizing outreach at the expense of the upbuilding of the local church covenant community. There has been improvement in this area, with the CRCA even making reference to the three marks of a faithful church as per the Belgic Confession Art. 29.
 6. *Ecumenicity*: The CRCA has chosen to go in the direction of seeking membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) rather than the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), so this shows they are looking for fellowship with faithful churches.

Meeting with RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee (September 2017)

At a meeting with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee during Synod 2017, Deputies again raised the matter of the RCNZ's relationship with the CRCA and discussed this further. The RCNZ brothers again confirmed the fact that it is a downgraded relationship. In their view this does not mean that the RCNZ's relationship with the CRCA is better than before, but it does mean that RCNZ-CRCA discussions no longer take place in the context of a sister-church relationship, and there is a recognition that the issue of women deacons won't be resolved. The current relationship of ecumenical fellowship is expected to continue unless the CRCA or RCNZ changes.

The RCNZ focuses on continuing to pursue the issue of women deacons with the CRCA in their discussions, rather than every other issue previously identified. It was also remarked that when local issues about concerns in the CRCA are anecdotal, it is difficult to raise these if there is no official classis or synod decision about them in the CRCA, making them difficult to deal with and address with the CRCA. It was further noted that the CRCA has now joined the ICRC.

Meeting with CRCA's Interchurch Relations Committee (September 2017)

The two CRCA delegates to the RCNZ Synod requested a meeting with your deputies, which we agreed to on the understanding that we had no official mandate to dialogue with them, and that it would be an informal meeting only. At the same time we also recognized that this could be useful in carrying out our mandate to monitor the RCNZ's relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRCA, and get a clearer picture of RCNZ-CRCA relations. Both of these men had previously served within the RCNZ, and were very familiar with both church federations.

Most of what is reported here reflects what we learned in this informal meeting. The CRCA currently has around 60-65 churches, with around 9,000 members. In the past FRCA

contact with the CRCA broke off as a result of concerns that included the three Ws:

1. *Women in office*: Synod 2000 of the CRCA gave provision for women to serve as deacons, provided that they are not part of a ruling session, but meet separately. The CRCA sees the ordination of women deacons as a setting apart to service, rather than a position of authority. This is the official position of the CRCA, and instead of continuing to revisit this issue, they want to focus on spreading the gospel and church planting. The CRCA has also stated that elders and ministers being women is not permitted by Scripture, and said this is a closed matter. Men who have different views on this are not admitted to the ministry.
2. *Word and Spirit*: As far as they are concerned, this issue is now resolved. The CRCA has affirmed the authority and sufficiency of Scripture, and accepts the three Forms of Unity, and the Westminster Standards in so far how it agrees with the Three Forms of Unity.
3. *Worship*: It was acknowledged that there is more diversity in worship in the CRCA. For worship they have been using "The Book of Worship", which was a combination of the CRC's Psalter Hymnal and the CRC's red song book, and from this came another worship book. Currently it is just left to the individual consistory to decide. Examples of diversity in CRCA worship would include having a children's talk; use of a band; having a visiting minister doing the sermon and prayer while other members could lead other elements of worship such as the reading; elders can write their own sermon but only with the approval of their elders. The CRCA men asserted that a dialogical principle of worship still was operative in worship, and that even though there is variation, the principles of Reformed worship are maintained, and things are done under the supervision of the elders.

In their view, the CRCA should be judged not by exaggerated or anecdotal examples of extremes, but by their official position,

and it is important not to represent them unfairly, but have objective assessments that don't rely on stereotypical ideas. Within the federation there are also checks and safeguards (e.g. classis and church visitations).

It is also important to consider ways in which the CRCA of today might be different than the CRCA of decades ago, as well as take into account decisions of its recent Synods. According to them, there haven't been study committees on new issues advocating for change for some time. The CRCA has left the WCRC, and is now a member of the ICRC as of July 2017. They wanted to join a group of churches that was confessionally Reformed, faithful, and conservative. The CRCA spoke in favour of the removal of the RCN Liberated at this ICRC meeting.

Entering the ministry in the CRCA requires an MDiv, BTh or equivalent, including knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. The understanding is that men would spend at least a year at the RTC, and men are generally encouraged to be instructed at the RTC rather than a local Bible college. This hasn't always happened, but is becoming easier given the new teaching options the RTC has made available online.

Having heard the CRCA delegates, the FRCA delegates expressed their desire to be accurate and factual in stating concerns concerning the CRCA.

Changed relationship

We refer readers to the detailed report presented to Synod Baldivis 2015 (c.f. Part 4), where an extensive description of the RCNZ's changed relationship with the CRCA was explained and evaluated. Our observations in the inter-synodical period since Synod Baldivis 2015 have served to confirm the conclusions of that report concerning the nature of this relationship, and what was reported then remains accurate, hence some brevity is possible here rather than repeat the detail included there.

The new Rules of Ecumenical Fellowship adopted by Synod Bishopdale 2014 continue to be in place and are applied to the

relationship with the CRCA. By virtue of no longer being a sister church, according to Articles 10, 61, and 62 of the RCNZ's Church Order, ministers of the CRCA are no longer automatically eligible for call, and members are no longer automatically admitted to the sacraments, unlike ministers and members from sister churches. Special provisions are in place for a CRCA minister to be admitted to the pulpit; pulpit exchange can only occur following an evaluation of the session, and an evaluation of the presbytery in the case of longer term pulpit exchanges, while calling ministers from the CRCA now involves a more rigorous process.

Ongoing contacts

However there are still continuing contacts, including sending delegates to each other's major assemblies, as was evident at Synod Palmerston-North 2017. The respective Interchurch Relations Committees also continue to meet together, and these meetings include discussions about outstanding issues, such as ordination of women deacons. The RCNZ is now more selective in what they discuss with the CRCA given the downgraded relationship. Women deacons is not the only concern that the RCNZ has about the CRCA, and it is matters like this that have led to the change in relationship.

There are still practical relationships and occasional visiting, similar to what might happen when family members from the RCN in the Netherlands visit the FRCA. Also there is still some continued involvement in the same projects such as in the Solomon Islands. We will face similar questions in our relationship with the RCN in places like Indonesia, where the RCN has also been involved, and where there are projects in which we cooperate together. To be fair, while there are some parallels in terms of a long-term relationship that has changed in character and yet involves ongoing contacts and challenges, it should be pointed out that the parallel is by no means exact. The level of deviation evident in the RCN has not been present in the CRCA, as evidenced by the fact that they recently joined the ICRC and were also one of the member churches that voted for the expulsion of the RCN from the ICRC.

Theological education

Theological education will be covered under a separate heading later in this report, since strictly speaking this does not come under the umbrella of the RCNZ's relationship with the CRCA, and because the RTC is not a denominational seminary of the CRCA. Furthermore, about half of RCNZ students are trained at MARS rather than at RTC. But it has to be admitted that in practice, those theological students who are trained at RTC are open to potential influences from the CRCA. However, as noted elsewhere in this report, the RCNZ takes the matter of theological education very seriously, and has several safeguards in place to monitor its students throughout the process of their studies, and the need for a one year vicariate within the RCNZ and thorough examination by presbytery ensures a further safeguard before students are considered available for call within the RCNZ.

Safeguards in place

The FRCA has not stated that the RCNZ is called to break all forms of contact with the CRCA, but rather that the RCNZ is called to be Biblically faithful in the exercise of this relationship. Previous reports to our Synods have consistently reported that this faithfulness is evident. For example, Synod Rockingham 2003 observed that the RCNZ maintains their relationship with the CRCA in a Scriptural manner, and stated that "*Past synods have not required the RCNZ to break ties with the CRCA but have expressed appreciation for the manner in which the RCNZ use their relationship to admonish their erring sister.*" (Art 62) The RCNZ is also aware of the potential for unhealthy influences; after all they felt that their concerns about the CRCA's decision were reason to no longer continue in a sister church relationship. As a result, the big question should not be whether there are any influences, but whether the RCNZ is on guard against such influences, and endeavouring to deal with them in a faithful way.

6. OTHER DEVELOPMENTS AND DECISIONS OF THE RCNZ

Theological Education

1. *Early involvement*

Theological students remain members of their local RCNZ church even when studying overseas at RTS (Australia) or at MARS (USA). The vicariate process has had a long history (16 years), and there is a desire for churches to be directly involved in the process of preparation for the ministry and calling to the ministry from early on. It is acknowledged that theologically, a call only happens when a man is called to office by a local church. Yet early involvement of a church in encouraging a man is seen as a call to study and prepare. When someone aspires for the ministry, they are interviewed by their local session, and must also be approved by presbytery; if someone prepares for study without this, it is not generally viewed positively. A session or presbytery will not give support if they aren't convinced someone has the right gifts or if they need first to demonstrate suitability in their life (e.g. ability to lead a family). Examples have happened of instances where men don't receive this approval. The RCNZ's approach of early and constant involvement has several benefits:

- a) it can avoid a situation where someone prepares for the ministry and never receives a call;
- b) the churches are involved from the beginning in mentoring and shaping a student;
- c) the spiritual aspects aren't really the responsibility of a seminary but of the local church.

One consequence of this approach is that not many men enter the ministry at a young age as tends to happen in the FRCA/CanRC; many are in their 30s or older before entering the ministry.

2. *Mid America Reformed Seminary*

As was reported concerning the decisions of Synod Palmerston North 2017, approximately half of the RCNZ's theological

students receive training at MARS. We are not aware of any reasons to call into question the Reformed character and pastoral emphasis of theological training at MARS. Even so, students who study remain under the supervision of their local RCNZ church and have regular contact with deputies; and a one-year vicariate following this training is still required.

3. Reformed Theological College

Extensive information concerning the RCNZ's position with respect to the RTC was provided in the Deputies Report to Synod Baldivis 2015. Since Synod Bishoptdale 2014, the RTC had undergone an intense process of self-evaluation, and subsequently a new model of operation was in progress, which includes moving the campus to Melbourne, broadening the target audience, and online delivery of courses. The online material explaining this new model included the following:

“The new RTC model aims at a major repositioning of the College, not theologically but in the theological education landscape. We remain as committed as ever to Reformed theology, as summarised in the historic Reformed confessions. But we want to see the College repositioned not only to where it needs to be for practical reasons but to where it should be for gospel reasons ... Nor do we want to be known as a College that really only exists for Reformed Churches. We want to reposition the College so that it has a growing reputation for producing excellent gospel workers and leaders, for many different reformed evangelical churches and ministries.”

At a meeting with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee in September 2016, we asked how the RCNZ sees this development, and for further clarification about it. In that lengthy discussion we were informed of the following:

- a) *Faithful faculty*: It is not new for the RTC to have non-Reformed students. The key element that determines theological education is who the professors are. The present professors are considered to be very Reformed, perhaps even more so than in the past. The current faculty includes Dr Murray Capill, Dr Phillip Scheepers,

Rev John de Hoog, Dr Martin Williams, and adjunct lecturers Rev Alistair McEwen and Dr Bill Berends. In terms of the calibre of the lecturers, they are very solid and the trajectory is good. The faculty is probably the best faculty they've had for a while, in terms of their commitment to being Reformed. So at the present time there is no theological concern, and the RCNZ is very impressed with the theological education provided at the RTC.

- b) *Motives for broadening:* The RTC does seem to be wanting to have a broader appeal, but they still want to ensure that the training is Reformed. The broadening is in part a desire to share the truth of a Reformed doctrinal framework with a broader audience. Another contributing element is a pragmatic concern to increase numbers and funding, giving a broader base of financial support. So partly for survival reasons there has been broadening, and this means the program of study has broadened as well. One concern is that there is no full-time systematic theology lecturer on the faculty at present. However, the long term intention of the RTC is to fill this position. At present dogmatics is taught by a number of adjunct lecturers. It was also noted from a supporting church perspective that it is less than ideal when the core business at the RTC is not the core business of training ministers; However, despite this, the RTC is considered to be faithful, and the initiative being taken seems to be the only way forward for the college. Again, it is the faculty who really determine the flavour of the seminary, not the students.
- c) *RCNZ involvement:* The RCNZ is involved closely throughout the whole theological education process of their seminary students. The year-long vicariate is an additional safeguard. The RCNZ is not unaware of the challenges and influences that are part of theological education (eg summer vicariates in CRCA), but tries to deal with these influences appropriately, and there are encouraging signs.

4. *Canadian Reformed Seminary?*

Some might wonder why RCNZ students don't go to the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton, and why some instead go to the RTC. It should also be noted that our theological students are directed to prepare for the ministry by studying at the CRTS, and so they typically begin university studies by ensuring that they can meet its rigorous entrance requirements regarding the original languages. This entrance requirement has been an impediment for RCNZ theological students to be accepted at CRTS. As mentioned already, many of them also pursue the ministry later in life, after first securing the support and encouragement of their local elders, which happens only after they have demonstrated godly character and meet the criteria that Scripture gives for leaders in the church (1 Tim 3; Tit 1).

5. *Monitoring training and students*

The FRCA is blessed with a history that emphasizes the value and importance of a denominational seminary, and so students begin their studies with this in mind. However the lack of a denominational seminary does not in itself make a church unreformed. The RCNZ recognizes the importance of sound training for its ministers, and the need to monitor their training carefully. Both the RTC and MARS are independent institutions without an official connection to a particular church, and in the RCNZ it is emphasized that there is a need to closely supervise the instruction given at these institutions. Deputies meet with faculty and with their theological students, and stay in close contact with them throughout their studies. Students also remain members of their local church in New Zealand, and need the support of their local elders to even begin pursuing these studies.

One area where we would want to encourage the RCNZ is on the importance of supervising content of training for ministry. The history of Reformed churches shows frequent instances where spiritual deviation of a church federation begins at a seminary and with the training for the ministry. This is not an argument against RTC, but is argument for close supervision of

the content that is taught. Changes in governance that lead to a reduction of the RCNZ's role in determining curriculum is a concern, and highlights the need for their deputies to have close supervision over what is taught.

However it is clear that there is close and ongoing involvement of session, presbytery and deputies throughout the entire process of training for the ministry. If someone is not 'home-grown' and is not originally from the RCNZ prior to taking theological studies, the checks and balances are even more thorough. A few cases of concerns in the history of the RCNZ has led to even closer scrutiny and more rigorous care of candidates, to improve the supervision and care, especially during the process of seminary training, in order to address any potential weaknesses very early on. Deputies also meet with staff at the seminary and the students concerned on a regular basis. The aim is to protect the church and to protect the man. Our deputies are appreciative of these efforts to uphold the integrity and faithfulness of the office of minister.

6. *Vicariates*

In addition, at the completion of studies, theological students must do a full year "vicariate" in a local RCNZ church. This is effectively a year-long internship under a RCNZ minister which happens at the conclusion of theological training, and ends with a formal examination that declares a candidate eligible for call. During a vicariate a theological student preaches, attends meetings, and becomes involved in aspects of pastoral work, minus administering the sacraments. There is a careful process involving a session, presbytery, and deputies before someone becomes a vicar. Candidates are thus carefully screened before they end up on the pulpit this way, so that everything is closely guarded (including a supervising minister looking over most or all of sermons preached).

Over the last 16 years, there have been 25 vicars. This creates additional costs for the RCNZ, but has proven to be a rich blessing to the students themselves, and also to the churches in training their ministers, since there is direct mentoring happening prior to ordination. Ministers can and often do come

from a variety of ecclesiastical contexts, but a vicariate proves to be a great safe-guard and training ground. Most home-grown ministers are encouraged to return, and churches play a very close role in working with students through-out their studies. We are very encouraged by the vicariate program, and the close involvement of churches in process of training for ministry.

7. Examinations

The decision on the overture to review the current examination system confirmed this desire to protect the pulpit. This overture originated in a desire to give the churches opportunity to properly address any potential weaknesses that might arise in one or more areas when a theological student undergoes an ecclesiastical examination. All of the above are considered to be important safeguards, to make sure that men are well trained and thoroughly Reformed before admitting them to the ministry.

8. Conclusion

As deputies, we were greatly encouraged by the thoroughness in which the members of synod questioned the deputies for training for the ministry, the nature of the discussion about theological education, and the various safeguards the RCNZ has in place on the road to the ministry. This demonstrated how seriously the RCNZ takes theological education, and the need to stick to Biblical principles.

Church Polity

It was reported to Synod Baldivis that the next RCNZ Synod would be an important one for the RCNZ in discussing some church political questions that have arisen. Already at Synod Bishopdale 2014 it was evident that the RCNZ was consciously choosing not to adopt a hierarchical Presbyterian approach, but instead affirming the two basic principles of Reformed church polity, namely the autonomy of the local church, as well as the responsibility to cooperate in a federation. Synod Palmerston-North 2017 has confirmed this impression, and the careful consideration of these questions will help a new generation of

church leaders to grasp the principles of church polity this involves.

It was good to see that in working through sensitive matters in connection with the report from the Church Order Committee, the RCNZ Synod maintained that the exercise of church discipline is entirely the purview and prerogative of the elders of a local session, and that concurrence and the appeal process is an extra check and balance that we have agreed to by virtue of being a federation. Admittedly there were some who struggled with these questions, because some in the RCNZ have a Presbyterian background, and at times so there can be church political undercurrents that appear to conflict with the Reformed church polity we operate with.

It was helpful for the RCNZ to have to consider these questions carefully, and we were grateful to observe:

- a) the careful study and thoughtful reflection that had gone into this;
- b) the gracious manner of discussion and brotherly debate on what were very sensitive matters for some;
- c) the outcome of these decisions, which in our view is completely in line with our own Reformed church polity.

Emeritus Fund & Retired Ministers

On 10th of June 2016, a one-day synod was held to deal with the Emeritus Fund, which was necessary for legal reasons. The RCNZ has its own fund, but because the NZ government changed the laws about managing financial trusts, it wasn't feasible to continue the current arrangement, so a change was needed. A financial committee had done work on this, and as a result of this, a new process was adopted.

The basic approach that the RCNZ has used is that the amount of support given to a retired minister corresponds proportionately to their years of service within the RCNZ. Other churches like the URCNA use a similar model to that of the RCNZ. The FRCA operates with a different model of support (similar to the CanRC), in that a minister is only eligible for any

support if he retires in an FRCA church, and then that local church receives assistance from the emeritus fund to provide for him in his retirement, and the number of years of service is not really taken into consideration. This means that an RCNZ minister receiving a call from a FRCA church and then retiring there, will be fully supported by that church, with assistance from the Emeritus Fund, although he will also be eligible for a pro rata level of support for the time he has served in the RCNZ. On the other hand an FRCA minister receiving a call from a RCNZ church and then retiring there, will only be supported by that church with assistance from their Emeritus Fund proportionate to the amount of years he has served within the RCNZ.

There was an instance in which a RCNZ church was considering calling an FRCA minister, and this fact then proved to be an impediment for them to do so in a responsible way, because they would not be in a position to support his full retirement should he only be in the RCNZ for a short time, and yet the FRCA Emeritus Fund would provide no support in such a case. As deputies we did have dialogue with our RCNZ counterparts and with the FRCA Emeritus Fund in order to come to an understanding on this point, but it became evident that under our current models of support for retired minister, this is a very real practical hurdle that needs to be addressed if possible.

In our estimation, arguments can be made for both models of support, and both are different ways of honour the Biblical principle that ministers of the Word be provided for. Each works well within the context of a single federation. However difficulties arise when ministers move from one church federation to another, where there is a different model being used. Having identified this practical problem, Synod Palmerston North 2017 has mandated the Interchurch Relations Committee to address this with FRCA deputies and our respective Emeritus Funds. Our churches would do well to give attention to this in the next inter-synodical period, and it will return under our recommendations.

Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia

1. *Background to sister church relations*

The establishing of a sister church relationship with the PRCA was initially somewhat of a surprise to us, but it had been mentioned at the previous Synod that there was the goal to work towards a sister church relationship, and personal connections and history played a role in this decision. The background to this decision can be found more in a more extensive report to Synod Bishopdale 2014, at which time a sister relationship was already entertained, but it was decided that it would be wise to give additional time.

The PRCA is a very small group of churches, with many aging members. It appears that they need real help, and so much of this sister church relationship is intended to give them assistance and support. They have no other ecumenical relations, and they have also been very open to suggestions from the RCNZ. The question of triangular relations with the FRCA did come up at the committee level within the Interchurch Relations Committee, but wasn't considered to be an issue, since they are only located in Eastern Australia.

2. *Meeting with RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee* (September 2017)

In a meeting with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee at Synod following this decision, we sought more information about the background of this decision. It was explained that the reason for not proceeding with a sister church relationship in 2014 was not because of theological concerns, but because at that time only a few individuals knew all the details. It wasn't anticipated at that time that more issues or barriers would be discovered, or that the RCNZ would come to a different conclusion or evaluation about the PRCA, but simply that there was a need for more observing and investigation, so that the RCNZ would have time to get better acquainted and visit. Areas of ongoing discussion between the RCNZ and the PRCA include an addition they have made to the WCF, number of Sunday services, and the fact that the PRCA has a very rigorous two-office view and that their ruling elders preach.

3. Meeting with delegate from Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (September 2017)

The PRCA delegate Ken Stevenson requested an informal meeting with us, which we agreed to as an unofficial meeting. Since we are both in a sister church with the RCNZ, he was keen to learn about the FRCA. We also saw this as opportunity for us to learn more about the PRCA, and so assist us in carrying out our mandate about monitoring developments with the RCNZ.

The PRCA's website is prc.org.au. They consist of just seven churches, plus they are allied with a presbytery in Vanuatu which was formed as a result of their mission work. Their confessional basis is the Westminster Standards, and the RCNZ is their only sister church. Personal contacts were one factor in the establishment of this relationship. The PRCA also cannot see themselves affiliating with the PCEA due to theological differences. The establishment of this relationship has been a process of about 10 years.

For theological education, the PRCA has been training their own men. Because of liberalism they started on their own and want to be cautious, but they recognize that because of their small size they can't sustain training in this manner in an ongoing way. They are considering using RTC, given the theological strength of some of their faculty such as Dr. Martin Williams, a six day creationist.

In public worship the PRCA uses the book "Praise", which includes some traditional and modern hymns; unlike some churches opposed to the use of instrumentation. The meeting was also a helpful means for us to introduce aspects of the history, identity, and character of the FRCA.

7. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE RCNZ

In relation to the more general mandate about monitoring developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit, deputies gleaned their picture of the RCNZ from a number of sources.

Sources

1. **Attending Synod:** First and foremost, being able to attend the RCNZ's Synod 2017 with two delegates was tremendously helpful in carrying out our mandate. By visiting for a week and remaining virtually for the entire duration of Synod, deputies could get a good insight into the decisions being made, and also the process and thinking underlying them. Virtually the entire Synod is held in open session. Having two delegates present was a good safeguard in that it enabled us to compare our observations, and also sure that we were reporting accurately and fairly, and that anything said by us on the floor of Synod was not purely a personal opinion but would reflect the position of our churches.
2. **Meetings:** Deputies met with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee on two separate occasions, and especially the meeting in Geelong gave opportunity to spend several hours with our counterparts, and have lengthy and detailed discussions about matters relating to our mandate and to our functioning as sister churches.
3. **Worship services:** Being able to attend the RCNZ's Synod also gave opportunity to attend several worship services, in which it could be observed how the local churches worship the Lord, and listen to the preaching. Deputies also heard a couple of RCNZ ministers preaching during visits to Albany.
4. **Personal conversations:** Especially when at synod, Deputies made a real effort to have meaningful conversations with delegates and visitors, during coffee breaks and meals. This was very helpful in giving us opportunity to engage with RCNZ members about the FRCA, and also clarify our own understanding of matters

within the RCNZ. We also had opportunity to have similar conversations with RCNZ ministers who visited Western Australia.

5. **Reading:** Through reading magazines like Faith in Focus, and the writings of ministers and other members, which also includes reports on broader assemblies, one also gets acquainted with life within the RCNZ.

It is our observation that being able to send two delegates to attend the RCNZ Synod for its duration, and being able to meet once in the inter-synodical period with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee are both extremely valuable in assisting deputies complete their mandate. Staying for the entire duration of synod was extremely profitable and worthwhile. Given that a large part of the cost is the travel, it makes sense to maximize the benefit of this. Staying for the entire week gives opportunity to see all the decisions and discussions of synod, plus attend worship services on a Sunday, and the many conversations with people over coffee and meals and between sessions is invaluable. As deputies we made a deliberate effort to have intentional conversations with delegates in order to help us understand the RCNZ better, which was a very rich experience.

In relation to these activities we can report the following general observations about the RCNZ.

Worship

1. **Content of service:** The worship services we attended in Palmerston North were arranged in a similar way to what has been previously experienced with and reported about attendance at RCNZ services previously. An elder began with welcome and announcements, after which there was a silent prayer and call to worship. Then the service officially began with a votum, greeting, and how we normally do things in the FRCA. There were some small differences, including extra prayers - e.g. ahead of reading the Word, and after collections (by a deacon). The law was read from Ex 20, and before a prayer of confession of sin there was a brief explanation of the

function of the law in the life of Christians. Singing was led by an organ plus an oboe, the additional instrument being relatively unobtrusive. Psalms and hymns were sung from the green *Sing to the Lord* book (provided below each seat). In the afternoon an elder did the reading of Scripture.

2. **Ordination:** The Sunday morning service included ordination of an elder, which used the adopted liturgical form, which is somewhat similar to our own form, but with greater brevity. The vows were similar to ours, and immediately after ordination there was signing of subscription form, which was explained to the congregation. Ordination included laying on of hands by the elders of the church, but the laying on of hands would not happen in the event someone was later called to office, because then they are considered to be “installed” rather than “ordained”. The entire process was orderly, sober, and respectful, with Biblical emphasis.
3. **Preaching:** The sermons we have listened to from RCNZ ministers were Biblically faithful. While we must be careful to generalize, since we only heard a number of different ministers preach, the sermons we heard were all around 25 minutes in length, and tended to be a expositional walking through the text, practical, and perhaps not as exegetically in depth as we might be used to, but very practical and also Christological.
4. **Song Book:** Since the *Sing to the Lord* song book was finalized and presented to Synod Bishopdale 2014, it is being used by almost all the churches. It contains over 500 songs, with around 180 psalms (some have alternate tunes/words), as well as hymns that originate from a wide range of times and cultural backgrounds. Part of the desire for this new song book was to ensure that the Psalms are closer to the original language, and also to ensure that it reflects the entire psalm rather than just part of it. The breadth of the psalter reflects the breadth of the RCNZ, and it was intended to reflect a range of ages (e.g. some songs in the book were intended more

for use in youth clubs and by children rather than in church services) and a broad cultural range as well. Some churches sing across the entire range of the new book, whereas other churches are more selective, so it can vary whether there is more emphasis on psalms or hymns; the church order however commit the churches to the singing of psalms.

Spread of the Gospel

1. ***Overseas Mission:*** Since Synod 2014, the Overseas Mission Board that coordinates the work of mission has undergone some structural changes, and put a new handbook together. It is now a national board with the executive centered in Christchurch, and the changes currently in transition aim to ensure continuity but also involvement of the churches. The structure is quite different than the FRCA where it is a local church that operates the work of mission (with cooperating churches), and sometimes the RCNZ's structure creates more work. As well as supporting the projects that the OMB is busy with, some individual churches also like to be involved with and support local initiatives. The OMB's primary support is for the work in PNG, although they also report on works done by local churches (e.g. work in Uganda; and the work of Janice Reid who is supported by local congregations.) The RCNZ's structural model for doing mission is somewhat a hybrid between the more centralized OPC-style mission model, and the more localized FRCA-style mission model. The OMB is very sensitive to the fact that they are a committee that is accountable and works for the churches, rather than telling the churches what to do, and there is generally excellent support for their work.
2. ***Evangelism:*** There is a real desire within the RCNZ to spread the gospel in New Zealand. The aspect of witnessing to one's neighbour seems to be alive and well in local congregations, and comes up naturally in conversations. As an example, the church of Palmerston North employs a former minister 20 hours a week to be

involved in evangelism type activities, and in reaching out to members in the community and giving them practical assistance.

Christian Education

There are very few Reformed schools in the RCNZ, and from various conversations we had it appears that there are several factors that contribute to this. One reason for the strong emphasis on Reformed education in the FRCA has to do with our history: it was a heritage that our forefathers began with and made a priority, and we continue to be richly blessed by it. To establish this from scratch today might prove to be very difficult. In the FRCA Reformed education also receives strong support via resources and government funding, which is a real blessing.

The idea of Reformed education in a well-developed and widely supported system like we have in the FRCA is something most of those in the RCNZ are unfamiliar with, and is not part of their heritage. According to some, one factor here is that immigrants to Australia came as families, and thus there was an immediate need for education for their children, which led to the establishment of Reformed schools. As mature adults, parents also tended to have a clear view of the need for Reformed education. Immigrants to Australia also took with them from the Netherlands a strong covenantal thinking that was a fruit of the 1944 Liberation, and while some would argue that this had as a weakness a tendency towards insulation, its strength was that it led to the building of Reformed schools. In contrast, immigrants to New Zealand were often single young people, who didn't have that immediate need for education of children. Many also came from different Reformed churches, and so the covenantal emphasis wasn't as strong.

Another factor that plays a role is that the RCNZ congregations tend to be smaller than FRCA churches, and there are often significant distances involved between them; schools also need to be 'integrated' if they are to be eligible to receive government support. Many RCNZ churches try to be faithful in their context, but in some instances children are going to state schools or general Christian schools, and this creates its own challenges

for the youth, and not all youth remain Reformed; this might explain why the level of internal growth we witness in the FRCA is not matched by that in the RCNZ, where it can happen more often that youth join other churches over the years. In some areas, home schooling is very common. This also means catechism instruction becomes all the more important for the RCNZ.

The RCNZ situation should make us aware of the richness of our heritage with respect to Reformed education, and continue to promote it and also share it.

Unity in Diversity

Deputies reported to Synod Baldivis 2015 their impression that at times there is evidence of some diversity within the RCNZ, which is evidenced by a range of viewpoints on matters like church polity. This needs to be understood against the background of the historical roots of the RCNZ. Both Presbyterianism and continental Reformed theology have shaped the formation of the RCNZ, and the fact that they have both Presbyterian and continental Reformed confessions (Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity) is a result of this. These different influences also have had an impact the terminology used in their church polity (e.g. session, presbytery). But with the benefit of having carefully studied some of the issues involved, Synod Palmerston-North clearly affirmed a very Reformed view of church polity, even though this was questioned by some.

There is also a greater spectrum of practices in worship services than what we are used to, and this is also in part a result of the more diverse history and make-up of the RCNZ, unlike the FRCA, which has a more uniform church culture as a result of being composed largely of Dutch immigrants. Yet despite the diversity that was apparent, there was a fundamental unity of faith that was evidenced time and again, and a real willingness to work together within the context of the Reformed confessions, rather than allowing differences to divide. At times the diversity causes real challenges, yet the

desire to work together graciously and in the unity that is found in a shared Reformed faith was encouraging to see.

Reformation Conference

Prior to the start of Synod, a Reformation Conference was held. One of the invited speakers was Dr C. Venema, president of MARS, who spoke amongst other things about the Solas of the Reformation. He highlighted the importance of recapturing the joy that the Reformation rediscovered, and summarized the key truths of the Reformation in a simple and yet articulate and passionate way. The choice of speaker and the decision to hold this conference confirmed a very deliberate desire of the RCNZ to reaffirm and embrace its Reformed identity.

Local churches

The majority of the RCNZ congregations are in the North Island, but they are often separated by large distances. Most RCNZ congregations have a membership of around 200 or so, and so generally we heard surprise expressed at the fact that FRCA congregations are as large as 400 or more, especially as to how ministers can handle this. However, RCNZ ministers don't typically have the frequency of exchanges that ours do. In contrast, the church of Bishopdale has two ministers and is around 350, while the church of Pukakoe recently decided to have a second minister.

Sentiments towards the FRCA

There seems to be a growing awareness of and appreciation for the FRCA, and this was evident in personal discussions as well. There was genuine warmth toward us and interest toward us. Part of this is that for the first time we could be present as delegates from a sister church, and it represents a new stage of our ecclesiastical relationship after a long time. It also is a result of a growing familiarity and mutual respect from both sides.

8. INCREASED FAMILIARIZATION BETWEEN THE RCNZ AND FRCA

Deputies took an active role in promoting increased familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA by way of exchange of speakers and mutual exchange of publication of articles. Various ideas for this were discussed at the meeting held with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee in September 2016, and what follows are some of the outcomes that we have observed about growth in contacts and familiarization. This may not be an exhaustive or complete list, but it just includes some examples that we are aware of. In most cases, we have heard a great deal of positive feedback about the examples mentioned.

Speakers and ministers

1. *Exchange of ministers:* An “exchange” of ministers was arranged between the churches of FRCZ Southern River and RCNZ Silverstream, with Rev D. Poppe travelling to New Zealand and Rev P. Archbald travelling to Perth. Both ministers preached in each other's churches over two consecutive Sundays. Rev Poppe had an information evening about the FRCA in two churches (Silverstream and Masterton). Rev Archbald had an information evening about the RCNZ in FRC Southern River for the metro area churches and in FRC Bunbury for the south-west churches.
2. *Exchange of speakers:*
 - a) Rev D Van Garderen travelled to Western Australia upon invitation of the FRC Baldivis, and spoke at a three-day conference relating to church planting and evangelism. He also travelled to Albany where he delivered a speech on a similar topic. He also had formal meetings with the Evangelism Support Committees in Albany, Busselton and Baldivis.
 - b) Rev John Haverland was invited to be the feature speaker for the 2017 FRCA Ministers and Wives

Conference held in Albany in October 2017. He agreed to attend, receiving the support and approval of his elders to do so. Rev Haverland came with his wife, and spoke on a range of topics relating to longevity in the ministry. He and his wife were very well received, and his contribution was Reformed, and helpful, and came with a wealth of practical wisdom gleaned from years of ministry.

- c) Rev P. Archbald presented a talk while in WA as part of his pulpit exchange in Southern River.
- d) Rev D. Poppe presented a talk while in New Zealand as part of his pulpit exchange in Silverstream.

3. *Pulpit supply:*

- a) Rev D Van Garderen led worship services in Perth and in both Albany congregations in conjunction with his conference speeches that he delivered in WA. Altogether he preached in seven different FRCA churches, preaching twice each Sunday over five consecutive weeks.
- b) Rev J. Haverland preached in both Albany and West Albany on the Sunday ahead of the Minister's Conference in October 2017.
- c) Rev W. Huizinga accepted an invitation to help a vacant church in New Zealand by providing pulpit supply there for some time.
- d) Rev J. Kroeze has assisted churches in New Zealand with pulpit supply on more than one occasion.
- e) Rev H. Alkema preached in the church of Palmerston North on the Sunday ahead of the RCNZ Synod. In line with their practice to exposit the doctrine of God's Word as summarized and confessed in the catechism, he preached on Lord's

Day 22. From what we heard afterwards, his sermon was well-received, and also generated some good discussions about the nature of catechism preaching.

- f) Upon suggestion of the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee, the FRCA ministers were informed that if ever they are holidaying in New Zealand and are willing to make themselves available to speak or preach, this can be communicated and shared with the IRC to help facilitate this.
4. *Preaching and pastoral assistance:* Rev D Van Garderen has made several extended visits to Cairns, to assist the group that is under the supervision of the church of Armadale with preaching, teaching, and leadership.

Publication of articles

1. *Articles of introduction:*
 - a) An article was written by one of the deputies, Rev Pot, introducing the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to RCNZ readers, and was published in Faith in Focus.
 - b) At our initiative and invitation, an article was written by Rev. John Rogers, a retired RCNZ minister, introducing the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to FRCA readers, and was published in Una Sancta in two instalments.
2. *Exchange of articles:* Contact was made with the editors of both Una Sancta and Faith in Focus, to request and encourage publication of articles from FRCA writers in Faith in Focus, and RCNZ writers in Una Sancta. Material from Faith in Focus is potentially available for being published in Una Sancta, but it is up to the discretion of the editor as to whether or not to include this.

3. *Exchange of magazines:*
 - a) Contact as made with the editors of both Una Sancta and Faith in Focus to explore the feasibility of making our respective church magazines available to the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee and the FRCA's Deputies respectively.
 - b) A complimentary one-year digital subscription to Faith in Focus was made available to readers of the FRCA and advertised by way of the church bulletins. All back issues of Faith in Focus can be accessed via the official RCNZ website here: <http://www.rcnz.org.nz/synodical/faith-in-focus.php>
4. *Reports on work:* several updates were given about the work of deputies and contacts with the RCNZ by reports in Una Sanctas.
 - a) Deputies published an article in Una Sancta about the meeting with the RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee held in September 2016.
 - b) Deputies published an article in Una Sancta about Synod Palmerston North held in September 2017.
 - c) Rev. D. Poppe published an article in Una Sancta about his visit to Silverstream, New Zealand.

Other contacts

1. *Personal visits to New Zealand:* Various FRCA members have travelled to New Zealand during the inter-synodical period, and made an effort to visit RCNZ congregations during this time. A number of our members have ongoing correspondence and contact with RCNZ members as a result of personal contacts.
2. *Personal visits to Australia:* Members from RCNZ have visited Western Australia during the inter-synodical period, attended FRCA churches, and in at least one known instance have also been admitted to Lord's Supper by presenting an attestation from their elders.

3. *RCNZ National Youth Camp:* About fifteen FRCA youth attended the annual RCNZ youth convention held in New Zealand in January 2017. Some FRCA churches had expressed concerns about the attendance of our youth at this conference, due to the potential for liaisons with and influence from CRCA attendees. To our knowledge, no CRCA youth were present at this youth conference. These camps typically feature a RCNZ minister or speaker, and are under the supervision of the nearest local church, which typically sends serving elders there on the Sunday. In private conversations deputies had with some of the FRCA youth who attended, we received positive reports about this youth convention. In private conversation with RCNZ ministers, we also heard positive reports about the participation and involvement of the FRCA youth.
4. *Membership:* A number of former RCNZ members have joined FRCA churches in Perth over the years, and have ongoing contacts with family in New Zealand; similarly there are former FRCA members who have joined RCNZ churches, and have ongoing contacts with family in Australia. These contacts lead to occasional traffic in both directions, and visits to each other's churches.
5. *Education:* A FRCA teacher accepted a position to assist in teaching at the Reformed school in Silverstream, New Zealand.
6. *Mission-work:* Cooperation continues with the mission work in Papua New Guinea, with the RCNZ supporting the work at the Reformed Bible College financially and via their missionary. In addition, br Richard 't Hart, formerly from the FRCA and now a member of the RCNZ church of Bishopdale, serves as campus manager there.

9. OVERVIEW OF MANDATE ITEMS COMPLETED

Deputies can report that they have fulfilled all areas of the mandate given by Synod Baldivis 2015. The decision of Synod was as follows:

1. Express thankfulness for the faithfulness deputies have observed in the RCNZ and in their decision to discontinue a sister church relationship with the CRCA.
2. To offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ under the established rules, and to accept their offer of a sister church relationship.

Action: Deputies conveyed these decisions by way of letter (November 2015), personally in our meeting with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee in Geelong (September 2016), and also mentioned them in the address to Synod Palmerston-North (September 2017).

3. To invite delegates from the RCNZ to attend our next Synod.

Action: A verbal invitation was extended in a meeting held with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee in September 2016. Deputies also facilitated contact between the convening church of Synod and the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee, and also sent an email of invitation in December 2017.

4. To authorise two delegates to visit (if invited) the next Synod of the RCNZ.

Action: Deputies were invited to send delegates to Synod Palmerston North 2017, and Rev H. Alkema and Rev R. Pot attended for most of the duration of Synod.

5. To discharge deputies and thank them for their work, and to appoint new deputies with the following mandate:
 - a. To convey Synod's decisions to the RCNZ and provide them with a copy of the Acts as well as the 'Rules for Sister Church Relations';

Action: Deputies conveyed the decisions of Synod Baldivis 2015 via letter (November 2015). A digital copy of the Acts of Synod was provided at the same time, and a hard copy given at the meeting with the Interchurch Relations Committee in Geelong (September 2016)

- b. to continue to monitor the impact of the Ecumenical Fellowship relation of the RCNZ with the CRCA, and to encourage the RCNZ to be consequential in this relationship in light of the concerns expressed in the report to Synod 2015;

Action: This is covered in section 5 of this report.

The relationship with the CRCA has continued to be the subject of discussion in meetings with the Interchurch Relations Committee. Deputies also had a meeting with the CRCA delegates at Synod Palmerston North 2017.

- c. to promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA by way of exchange of speakers where opportunity arises as well as exchange of publication of articles;

Action: This is covered in section 8 of this report.

- d. monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established 'Rules for Sister Church Relations' and keep the churches informed;

Action: This is covered in sections 4-7 of this report.

Monitoring developments was especially accomplished by the attendance of two deputies at Synod Palmerston North 2017. Additionally, it was accomplished by meeting with the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCNZ (September 2016), and another meeting in September 2017 (while at Synod). Finally, we benefited from

personal contacts with several RCNZ ministers who visited Western Australia during the inter-synodical period, discussions with FRCA members who visited New Zealand (e.g. youth who attended the RCNZ youth conference in January 2017), and reading articles from Faith in Focus.

The Rules for Sister Church Relations were used as a guide for determining the agenda item in our meeting with the Interchurch Relations Committee in September 2016, and each of these rules have been standing agenda items for our deputies meetings, to ensure that nothing was overlooked.

Keeping the churches informed was accomplished by several reports that were published in the Una Sancta, and by means of this deputies report.

- e. to report to next Synod along with recommendations.

Action: This is now completed by means of this deputies report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Deputies have completed the mandate as provided by Synod Baldivis 2015.

Concluding Remarks

Faithfulness: The proceedings and decisions at Synod Palmerston North 2017, and our discussions with the RCNZ Interchurch Relations committee, as well as with various ministers and elders at the RCNZ Synod, all give evidence that the RCNZ continues to be a true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is confirmed by our attendance at worship services, reading of articles in their church magazine, and anecdotal reports that have been conveyed to us.

Unity and truth: As was reported to Synod Baldivis 2015, it needs to be remembered that the RCNZ has a different history and background than the FRCA, with a more diverse membership. This also creates different challenges, but there continues to be a real desire to pursue unity based on the Reformed faith, without this unity coming at the cost of the truth. Over the past inter-synodical period the RCNZ has made important decisions, such as their suspension of their relationship with the GKN, and initiating a downgrading of their relationship with the GKSA, both of which show that they want to be faithful to God's requirements concerning office-bearers in His church.

CRCA Relations: Despite their long history with the CRCA, they no longer are in a sister-relationship with them. Some questions might linger about the impact of their continued relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship with the CRCA, and the training of some of their theological students at the RTC. However, it remains the case that this new relationships with the CRCA has real implications for admittance to the pulpit and to the Lord's Table, with additional safe-guards put in place, and is a significant change that was motivated by a desire to recognize that there is a spiritual gap between the RCNZ and CRCA. While there are continued concerns about the potential influence that the CRCA can have on the RCNZ, and ongoing monitoring is necessary in regard to this, no evidence has been

presented that the RCNZ has been Biblically unfaithful in the exercise of its relationships.

Theological education: The training of theological students continues to be different than the pathway used by the FRCA, but the decisions and practices of the RCNZ in the inter-synodical period in this regard confirm that it recognizes the importance of sound theological training, and in their circumstances even has numerous safe-guards in place that even go beyond what we have in the FRCA to ensure that men who are admitted to the ministry are soundly taught and thoroughly Reformed.

Challenges: The unique history and make-up of the RCNZ does mean that it faces unique challenges different from those we face in the FRCA. While the FRCA is blessed with a relatively uniform and stable church culture due to a largely shared history and shared cultural identity of our members, this stability also can present inherent challenges of its own. In contrast, the RCNZ finds itself in a more dynamic environment, which has unique challenges but also comes with the blessing of needing to focus on the essential unity found in Christ and in the Reformed faith. In our observation, areas that need continued monitoring include how they deal with ongoing influences from the CRCA, and ensuring sound theological education for future ministers. Yet we also acknowledge that the FRCA faces its own challenges, and so identifying areas that need ongoing monitoring is not intended to call into question the RCNZ's faithfulness as a Reformed church. We also recognize that our impressions are based on limited data, and may not be accurate in every respect.

In short, it remains apparent that the RCNZ is a faithful to the Lord of the church, submits to His Word as the rule for all of life, and is zealous to carry out the church's calling to bring the gospel to a fallen world.

Recommendations

1. Continue the sister church relationship with the RCNZ, under the established rules;

2. Make the churches in our bond aware of the practical obstacles that have been identified in relation to the support of retired ministers, which in some cases makes calling each other's ministers difficult, and encourage the churches to engage with the Emeritus Fund to consult with the RCNZ counterpart, in an effort to find a mutually satisfactory solution that would remove these obstacles, so that this aspect of the sister church relationship can function in a meaningful way.
3. Discharge deputies and thank them for their work, and to appoint new deputies with the following mandate:
 - a. Monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established "Rules for Sister Church Relations", and maintain the contact necessary in exercising the relationship according to these rules.
 - b. Promote continued familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA;
 - c. If necessary consult with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee and our respective emeritus committees to seek a mutually satisfactory way whereby ministers who serve in each other's churches are able to do so without significant detrimental effect to their retirement entitlements.
 - d. Meet with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee during the inter-synodical period, subject to finances;
 - e. Send two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ, subject to invitation and finances;
 - f. Invite up to two delegates from the RCNZ to attend our next Synod;
 - g. Continue to monitor the RCNZ's relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship with the CRCA, in light of the concerns expressed in the report to Synod

2015; and continue to encourage the RCNZ to be vigilant in its approach to theological education.

- h. Report to next Synod along with recommendations.

Grounds

1. From the decisions of its most recent synod, and the ongoing contacts observed and reported by deputies, the RCNZ gives evidence of a love for the gospel, ongoing faithfulness to God's Word, and commitment to the Reformed faith, and no evidence has been presented of any deviation or unfaithfulness in this respect.
2. For a sister relationship to function in a meaningful way, it is important for the membership to become acquainted, and given that the relationship is still in its infancy, continued growth is needed to strengthen these bonds in practical ways.
3. Part of a sister church relationship includes the privilege of calling one another's ministers, and if there are practical difficulties that prohibit this due to different models being used for the support of retired ministers, real efforts should be made to remove these obstacles in the proper way.
4. Although there is no evidence that the RCNZ is being unfaithful in its relationship with the CRCA, the ongoing contacts that the RCNZ has with the CRCA via its relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship and via the RTC means that continued vigilance is needed to guard against any potentially unhealthy influences from the CRCA.
5. Although there is no evidence that the RCNZ is being unfaithful in the matter of theological education, and the RTC is not a denominational seminary of the CRCA, theological students who attend the RTC will have greater contact with CRCA churches and are more open to potentially unhealthy influences from the CRCA.

6. Although the rules of the relationship of “Ecclesiastical Fellowship” have safeguards in place to maintain the purity of the preaching and the sanctity of the Lord’s table, this is still a relatively new relationship for the RCNZ, and we need to observe how it will be implemented over time.

APPENDIX A: RESPECTIVE RULES FOR ECCLESIASTICAL RELATIONSHIPS

FRCA: Rules for Sister Church Relations (*Acts of Synod Bedforddale 1992, Art. 95*)

- a) Sister relations shall be used to mutually assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world.
- b) The churches shall mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.
- c) The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or their Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to their respective churches (if possible in translation).
- d) The churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties.
- e) The churches shall accept one another's attestations, which also means admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of these attestations.
- f) The churches shall in principle open their pulpits to each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted by the respective church federations. Also the churches agree in principle to the possibility of calling each others ministers, while the churches reserve for themselves the right to maintain their own rules in connection with the extension and approval of calls.
- g) In cases of substantial changes or additions to the confession, church order or liturgical forms this intention shall be brought to the special attention of the sister churches, so that as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached.

- h) The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as advisers, as much as possible.

RCNZ: Objectives for Interchurch Relationships (*Acts of Synod 1989, Art. 44, Pt. o*)

1. Fraternal delegates to present their speech/remarks in writing for inclusion in the Acts/Minutes of Synod. Such an address to include material of mutual concern and questions.
2. If unable to send delegates, send written greetings and information on current life and state of the church, on matters before the church that would be of interest and concern to the other church, and also on any significant actions of the most recent Synod/General Assembly.
3. To consult each other prior to making amendments or additions to confessional standards.
4. To consult with each other concerning relationships with third parties (denominations and/or ecumenical bodies).
5. To share insights in matters of pastoral concerns, and make use of each other's studies on theological issues and other ecclesiastical matters.
6. To find ways and means to cooperate in areas of evangelism and mission overseas.

RCNZ: Rules for Sister Church Relationships (*Acts of Synod 1962, Art. 28-D*)

The sister church relationship involves:

1. The appointment of delegates to each other's synods or general assemblies, if possible, as a token of mutual friendship and interest in the Lord.
2. Keeping each other duly informed of our gesta ecclesiastica, (i.e. events, developments and decisions) through the exchange of the Acts of Synods or General Assemblies.

3. Bringing to each other's attention our spiritual and ecclesiastical problems together with our attempts at their scriptural solution; and offering each other help upon request thereof.
4. Warning each other in respect of spiritual dangers that arise and spread and imperil the Church of Christ.
5. Correcting each other in love in the event of unfaithfulness whether by commission or omission on the score of profession and/or practice of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.
6. Consulting each other regarding the eventual revision of our respective ecclesiastical standards (i.e. the Confessions, Catechism).

RCNZ: Rules for Ecumenical Fellowship (*Acts of Synod 2014, Art. 84-1, 2*)

1. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies. If feasible, the interchurch relations committees should meet at least once in the intersynodical period.
2. The eligibility of call of ministers from each other's churches, subject to our current practice of holding a preliminary evaluation before a call is issued and a Colloquium Doctum (see Church Order Article 10).
3. Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships, subject to session examination; longer term pulpit supply should be subject to presbytery evaluation.
4. Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, co-operation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
5. A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, publication ventures).

6. Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns.

APPENDIX B: REPORT ON MEETING BETWEEN FRCA DEPUTIES AND RCNZ INTERCHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE (September 2016)

(also published in Una Sancta)

Synod Baldivis 2015 appointed Rev R Pot (convenor), Rev H Alkema and Br M Bax as deputies for contact with our new sister church in New Zealand. Synod provided deputies with the following mandate:

- a. To convey Synod's decisions to the RCNZ and provide them with a copy of the Acts as well as the 'Rules for Sister Church Relations';
- b. to continue to monitor the impact of the Ecumenical Fellowship relation of the RCNZ with the CRCA, and to encourage the RCNZ to be consequential in this relationship in light of the concerns expressed in the report to synod 2015;
- c. to promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA by way of exchange of speakers where opportunity arises as well as exchange of publication of articles;
- d. monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established 'Rules for Sister Church Relations' and keep the churches informed;
- e. to report to next synod along with recommendations.

Since being appointed, deputies have met on three occasions, which included reviewing the mandate and setting out ways of implementing the same, as well as preparing for a meeting with the InterChurch Relations Committee (IRC) of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). This meeting took place on Tuesday 20 September in Geelong. This location was chosen as the IRC deputies were also attending a conference there later in the week. Present at the meeting were from the RCNZ Rev. D. Waldron, Rev P. Archbald, Rev D. Wilson and Rev A De Vries, as well as an observer, Br J Flinn, who is presently

doing a one-year vicariate in the Nelson congregation, while from our side all three deputies attended.

Rev Pot, on behalf of deputies expressed gratitude and thankfulness that Synod Baldivis was able to accept the RCNZ offer of sister church relationship after many years of growing closer together. It was seen as a blessing that we are now able to meet as sister churches, our meeting being the first official get-together. It was then agreed to use both the RCNZ and FRCA rules for sister church relations as a framework for the discussion.

Rev Alkema proceeded to outline some of the key decisions and issues of Synod Baldivis, with domestic items being the approval of the ESV Bible translation, the developments relating to a new Book of Praise, as well as theological training. On the international front, the highlights mentioned were the new sister church relations with both the RCNZ as well as the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, as well as the ongoing relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and various other contacts. The decision to suspend the relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was also elaborated on.

The RCNZ deputies then went through some of the major decisions of Synod Bishopdale 2014. This synod was able to finalise some items which had been in progress for quite a number of years, one item being the final adoption of the new "Sing to the Lord" songbook for use in the churches. Part of the desire for this new songbook was to ensure that the psalms are closer to the original language, and also to ensure that it reflects the entire psalm, rather than just parts of it. The songbook intends to replace a number of other songbooks having been in use over past years, although churches still have the freedom to continue using the older books if desired.

Another item which was dealt with at Synod Bishopdale was church polity. The diverse background within the RCNZ has resulted in differing views on church order in the past, and much work has been done to become united in these matters. The

Church Order committee has been active in promoting a common understanding and application of the church order and has facilitated several speeches and conferences about church polity, and the relations between local sessions (consistories) and presbyteries (classis). Rev J De Gelder from the CanRC has been invited to speak on this issue.

Synod Bishopdale also approved two new Bible translations, being the ESV and the NKJV for use in the churches. This is in view of the 1984 NIV no longer being available. The 1984 NIV as well as the NASB continue to be approved for use, although the 2011 NIV was explicitly rejected as being an unfaithful translation.

In connection with the sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA, aka Doppe Churches), Synod Bishopdale 2014 continued to express a deepest concern about the GKSA's recent decision to allow women deacons, and the deputies with the GKSA have been active in demonstrating to the GKSA where this is wrong.

The relationship of the RCNZ with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) is receiving ongoing attention. There is a strong historical cultural close connection. However in practice it appears that there is less practical interaction since the relationship has been changed. No CRCA ministers have been called in the last couple of years. Admission to the Lord's Supper for CRCA members visiting the RCNZ is now subject to an examination by the session and is based on the adherence to the Reformed confessions, just the same as for other visitors from non-sister churches. In reality however, attendance of CRCA members does not happen very often.

At the recent 2015 CRCA synod there was good interaction with the RCNZ deputies. There was a good, open discussion about the RCNZ concerns about women deacons in the CRCA, and the RCNZ felt that their concerns received a listening ear. The CRCA has agreed to investigate having unordained women assisting the deacons, rather than having ordained women deacons. It is encouraging to note that the new level of relationship still provides opportunity for the RCNZ to address

issues of concern, and they are making active use of these opportunities.

Theological training of students is a topic which has diverse opinions within the RCNZ, with some advocating training at Mid America Reformed Seminary, while others are advocating the Reformed Theological College (RTC) in Geelong. The current faculty of the College in Geelong is considered to be very Reformed, perhaps even more so than in the past, and the RCNZ is impressed with their theological calibre and commitment to being Reformed. The RTC is an independent body which is governed by a board comprising of members both of the CRCA as well as the RCNZ. At present one student is in the process of completing his studies there, while two students are presently doing the first year of study on-line from New Zealand. The RCNZ is closely involved in the theological training of their students, with much counsel and support being provided by the local church throughout the training. Before being called to the ministry the students will complete a one-year vicariate with one of the churches, in which time they receive practical guidance and supervision in pastoral work as well as preaching and teaching. There is a careful process involving a session, presbytery, and deputies before someone becomes a vicar. Candidates are thus carefully screened before they end up on the pulpit this way.

The implications of a sister church relationship for accepting attestations, admission to the sacraments and accepting and calling ministers was also discussed. Part of deputies' mandate is to promote increased familiarisation between the RCNZ and FRCA. Some possibilities of bringing this into practice were mentioned and discussed. It was noted that this process is already well under way, with scheduled visits to W.A. by Rev P Archbald and Rev D Van Garderen, while Rev D Poppe hopes to visit the RCNZ church of Silverstream in return. Facilitating the exchange of articles in each other's periodicals was also discussed as was encouraging mutual participation at various congresses for youth and families.

To conclude we may look back with gratitude for the growing relationship and the gift of brotherly fellowship which was evident at our meeting. After Rev Waldron read from Psalm 133, the meeting was closed in prayer by Rev Alkema.

M. Bax

APPENDIX C: THE IRC'S REPORT TO SYNOD PALMERSTON-NORTH 2017

Selected sections of the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee's report to the RCNZ Synod Palmerston-North 2017 as part of their report 17 are included below, to help give our churches and synod delegates a clearer picture of the background to the RCNZ's decisions on interchurch relations.

Report 17: Interchurch Relations Committee to Palmerston-North 2017

Synod 2014 appointed Revs. Paul Archbald, Leo de Vos, Andrew de Vries, David Waldron and Daniel Wilson and Mr. Pieter van der Wel as members of the IRC.

During the inter-synodical period our committee has met seven times (five times via Skype) and one of these meetings was held at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, where we also met with the Deputies of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, the Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and representatives of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia. Other work has been done via email.

B. Sister-churches

2. Canadian/American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Synod 2014 decided (Art. 107):

To continue our sister-church relationship with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

Synod 2014 also decided (Art. 138-2):

To send a delegate to the next CanRC synod.

We have not had much direct contact with the CanRC during the past inter-synodical period. However, Rev. Paul Archbald and Rev. Leo de Vos interacted informally with their delegates at the FRCA Synod in June 2015.

Our churches continue to receive pulpit supply from retired CanRC ministers and do at times consider calling one of their

ministers. A part-time lecturer in church polity from the CanRC, Rev. De Gelder, was able to come and lead three polity conferences in each of the main centers while also preaching in Silverstream and Masterton.

Rev. Leo de Vos was delegated to attend the CanRC Synod at Dunnville, Ontario, in May 2016. Unfortunately he had to cancel his attendance at the Synod for health reasons. We therefore recommend that our churches send a delegate to the next CanRC synod which is scheduled for May 2019 and will be held in Edmonton, Alberta.

Through our cooperation on the mission field in Papua New Guinea there has been more intensive contact with representatives of the CanRC present on the field and at the mission conference in October 2016. We appreciate the continued good cooperation with the CanRC in this mission work.

Recommendations

4. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the CanRC.*
5. *To send a delegate to the next CanRC Synod*

4. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

Synod 2014 decided (Acts 2014, Art.110-1, 2)

1. *To continue to offer a sister-church relationship to the FRCA.*
2. *That the IRC meet with the FRCA deputies during the next inter-synodical period.*

The 2015 Synod of the FRCA met at Baldvis, Western Australia. Revs Paul Archbald and Leo de Vos represented our churches at this synod. Their report is attached below as Appendix 3.

There was a lengthy report and some overtures with regard to the relationship with our churches. After discussing the report and the overtures, the synod strongly endorsed the Deputies'

recommendations to accept the invitation of the RCNZ to the FRCA to enter into a sister-church relationship.

The full decision is found on the Acts of Baldivis Synod (2015), Art. 38, and can be seen in Appendix 4. In a sense the main article from the proposal from the Deputies is item II, Clause 2:

2. To offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ under the established rules, and to accept their offer of a sister church relationship.

There have been various exchanges between our churches since that time in an effort to make the sister-church relationship as meaningful as possible. There have been pulpit exchanges and other invitations from the FRCA to come and preach or speak at their churches. Rev Dirk van Garderen has been in a number of FRCA congregations supplying the pulpit, leading seminars and leading a youth camp. A number of FRCA youth attended the recent RCNZ national camp at Teapot Valley and brought back a positive report to their churches. Their presence at the camp was a very positive influence. Articles have also been swapped between our denominational magazines.

A minister of the FRCA has been considered for call by one of our churches. However, the differences between the emeritus funds of the RCNZ and FRCA make it difficult for FRCA ministers to transfer to the RCNZ if they are approaching retirement and this difficulty could not be resolved at this time.

In the FRCA the retirement benefits are provided by the emeritus fund, through the church in which the minister retires. These funds are not assigned to an individual minister. This means that they would have no retirement benefits from the FRCA, for one of their ministers who served for a time in New Zealand, and retired here; and perhaps no support for a man who served in the RCNZ until retirement, then returned to Australia.

Recommendations

8. *That the RCNZ recognize that we are now in a sister church relationship with the FRCA.*

9. *That the IRC meet with the FRCA deputies during the next inter-synodical period.*
10. *That the IRC consult with the FRCA Deputies for the RCNZ and the Emeritus Committees of the FRCA and the RCNZ to seek a mutually satisfactory way whereby ministers who serve in each other's churches are able to do so without significant detrimental effect to their retirement entitlements.*
11. *That the RCNZ send one delegate to the next synod of the FRCA.*

8. Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)

In relation to the RCN Synod 2014 decided (Art. 32-1 to 4):

1. *To convey that synod is encouraged that the RCN synod did not open the offices to women and that there appears to be a willingness to listen to the concerns of sister churches.*
2. *To express its concern that the RCN synod has not clearly rejected the hermeneutical foundations of the conclusion and recommendations of the "Men/Women in the Church" report.*
3. *To instruct the Interchurch Relations Committee to seek clarification from the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the RCN regarding these decisions, since unless they constitute a clear withdrawal from this hermeneutical direction (see previous point) our sister-church relationship may be affected negatively.*
4. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the RCN at this time.*

Synod further decided (art. 138-5);

5. *Barring unforeseen circumstances, to send a fraternal delegate to the next RCN general synod.*

The committee has carried out its mandate as instructed under items 1, 2 and 3 above and written a number of e-mails and letters to the BBK – the Committee on relations with churches

abroad. We also responded to a questionnaire from the "Committee on men/women and office". Some of our answers from this questionnaire were noted in the report of the "Committee on men/women and office".

Since Synod 2014 we have received a number of items of general correspondence – including an invitation to attend the Foreign Delegates week of the current synod - but we have received no specific response to any correspondence in which we expressed our desire to discuss the matters that currently divide us nor have received any response to our expressions of concern at the (what we regard as unbiblical) developments in their federation.

In our response to the invitation to attend their 2017 RCN Synod we declined the invitation to attend the Foreign delegates week. We also raised these issues again but we only received an acknowledgement of receipt of this letter and that it would be passed on to the appropriate department. We are very disappointed at the lack of meaningful communication on the part of the "Committee on relations with churches abroad".

At the FRCA Baldivis Synod in 2015, Paul Archbald and Leo de Vos met with the RCN delegates. They discussed their report on women in office and the hermeneutic that it employs. They also discussed with them the RCN approach to dealing with practising homosexuals.

At the 2014 RCN Synod Rev. van Garderen expressed our deep misgivings about the report from the "Deputies Male / Female in the Church" that was submitted to that synod and the new report that came out in January 2017 does not hold hope for a change in direction from that report despite the decision in 2014 not to open the offices of the church to women and that there appeared to be a willingness to listen to the concerns of sister churches.

The committee issued its "Preliminary report Male/Female and Office – the sore points", the report itself "Report Male/Female – Serving together" and the "Summary report Male/Female – Serving together". All these have been translated into English and can be down loaded as PDFs.

The main proposal from the “Committee on men/women and office” to the RCN Synod, though divided in several sections so that each aspect of this issue can be properly addressed, is as follows:

“h. To open up all offices to women (this will be at the discretion of local churches).

Ground: This does most justice to the use of gifts which the Spirit has given to women, to the collective task and responsibility of men and women and to the current practice. Mutual sensitivities must be taken into account, both locally and at home and abroad. The matter of honouring the authority of Scripture is a major point at issue (a “sore point”) in the objections to opening up the offices to women. The local churches must be able to determine their own choice and pace in this matter.”

We have expressed our grief that such a recommendation can be made by a committee of the RCN on the basis of the view that “this option does justice to the room (*ruimte = space (lit.)*) Scripture gives for the deployment (use) of the gifts and talents of women who have such a calling [to office] etc.”

We remain aware that this discussion on the role of women in the church in the RCN is part of a bigger picture where God and religion do not seem to have the last word anymore. Other areas of concern in the life of the RCN are their views on the doctrine of creation and on homosexuality. If the current hermeneutical issues are not resolved these other issues may very well come up for debate.

Our sister churches, the Canadian Reformed Churches (Acts of Synod 2016, art.104 (4.2, 4.3) and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (Acts of Synod 2015, Art. 75), as well as other sister-churches of the RCN, are equally concerned about these matters and will have delegates at this synod.

At the time of completing this report we received the sad news that during the sessions of 15th-17th June 2017 the current RCN Synod has decided to admit women to all the offices in the church, that of deacon, elder and minister. The synod also

decided that women will be able to receive a preaching licence. Synod decided that the manner and timing of the implementation of these decisions will be left to individual congregations.

Recommendations

19. *That Synod express its deep concern that the RCN has not abandoned its current hermeneutical direction which has led it to, for one thing, admitting women to the offices of the church, but is also demonstrated in a number of other areas of church life, e.g. the lenient attitude in the RCN towards the admission of practicing homosexuals to the Lord's Supper.*
20. *That due to the decision of the RCN 2017 Synod to admit women to all the offices of the church, and the hermeneutical basis for this decision, our sister-relationship with the RCN be suspended.*
21. *That unless there is repentance our sister-church relationship with the RCN be terminated at our next Synod in 2020.*

C. Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship

1. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)

Synod 2014 made the following decisions in relation to the CRCA

1. *To continue the relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship with CRCA (Art. 123-1).*
2. *To inform the CRCA of the amended "Rules for Ecumenical Fellowship" (Art. 123-2).*
3. *To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA (Art. 138-6).*

The CRCA Synod 2015 was held in Gosnells, WA, from 17-22 May of that year and was attended by Revs. Willemse and Waldron as fraternal delegates. Their report is attached as Appendix 6.

Our committee met with the Committee for Ecumenical Relations of the CRCA in September 2016. Amongst other things we discussed the ordination of deaconesses and it became clear that the CRCA has a different view of office and what it implies than the RCNZ. The CER drew to our attention a 1985 report from their churches, dealing more with the nature of ordination than the nature of ecclesiastical office. The IRC sought to clarify that the main issue for us is office, which we understand to involve inherent authority. Thus, even if the functional aspects of authority are removed from the deacon's duties, the problem of authority still remains inherent. The CER is interested in having us interact further with the 1985 report, while we have asked if they would give further consideration to the idea of office.

The meeting also touched on the CRCA's response to the changing views of the definition of marriage which is also very much alive in Australia. They forwarded us the CRCA Public Statement on Marriage and CRCA - Biblical perspective and denominational position on homosexual relations.

The IRC affirmed its continued willingness to nominate the CRCA for membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The CRCA will re-apply for membership again at the ICRC Conference in 2017.

Recommendations

22. *To continue the relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship with CRCA.*
23. *To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*

E. Churches with Which We Have Contact

2. Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia

Synod 2014 decided (Acts 2014):

1. *That the Interchurch Relations Committee work towards recommending that we establish a sister-church relationship with the PRCA at our next synod (Art. 39)*

2. *To send a delegate to at least one presbytery of the PRCA annually during the inter-synodical period (Art. 138-9)*

Further to this decision for annual visits to the meetings of Presbytery of the PRCA Rev. Andrew de Vries visited the Presbytery held from 16th – 19th October 2015 and Rev. Daniel Wilson visited the Presbytery in April 2017 (see Appendix 9 and 10 for their reports).

Our committee also met with the Inter Church Relations Committee of the PRCA on 21 September 2016 at the RTC in Geelong.

The differences between Reformed and Presbyterian churches revolve mainly around church government and liturgy. One difference worth noting is that ruling elders preaching regularly and also administer the sacraments. This is their application of the parity between teaching and ruling elders. The elders supervise the preaching of the word, as they do in our churches. This matter was discussed with them and the IRC believes this should not be a hindrance in establishing an ecclesiastical relationship with the PRC.

The committee, aware of their confessional commitment to the Westminster standards, also received and perused copies of the PRCA Book of Common Order (their liturgical forms) and the current issue of the PRCA Code (including Rules and Forms of Procedure) which is the basis of their church polity. We also received the Presbytery Guidelines which function as general procedures for the courts of the PRCA.

We draw your attention to the fact that the PRCA has made some amendments to the Westminster Confession of Faith, particularly their addition of a chapter 34 on the free offer of the gospel. It is our opinion that in making these amendments the PRC has not deviated from the reformed system of doctrine.

Having considered all these things and our attendance at the meetings of Presbytery and our meeting with the brothers in September 2016 has confirmed to us that there are no

obstacles to accept their request to enter into a sister-church relationship with them, as stated in the following decision

The PRCA at their Presbytery meeting of October 2013 decided:

“That the PRCA inform the RCNZ Interchurch Relationships (sic) Committee of our satisfaction and gratitude to God for what they represent, and we request to enter into a sister relationship with them.”

The PRCA continues in its mission work both in Australia (Northern Territory) and in Vanuatu. Two years ago a team from the South Island Presbytery went to Vanuatu to help with repair and rebuilding work made necessary by the damage caused by cyclone Pam in March 2015. They support a single congregation in Fiji and regularly send men to Kenya to lecture at a theological college there.

They have their own training institute (John Knox Theological College) but are concerned about the decreasing number of students.

Recommendations

29. *That the RCNZ accept the PRCA offer of a sister-church relationship.*
30. *That the RCNZ send a delegate to at least one Presbytery of the PRCA during the inter-synodical period.*

APPENDIX D: REPORT OF VISIT TO SYNOD PALMERSTON-NORTH 2017

(also published in Una Sancta)

New Zealand is one of our closest neighbours, and yet it took Revs H. Alkema and R.E. Pot a full 24 hours to travel from their home town of Albany to the city of Palmerston North, on New Zealand's North Island. This was where Synod 2017 of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) was convened on 9 September 2017. A Thanksgiving Conference to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation was in progress when we arrived, and after a sleepless journey that included a red-eye flight, we were just able to keep our eyes open long enough to appreciate a hearty refresher of the five Solas of the Reformation presented by guest speaker Dr. C. Venema from Mid America Reformed Seminary (MARS).

We were hosted at the home of the local church's 'verger' and his wife, where we enjoyed warm Christian fellowship and were well cared for throughout our stay. We're confident that your curiosity will be enough to head to Mr Google or Ms Siri to find out what that means, just as we did. Hint: no responsibilities in digging graves or ringing bells is part of his task, and we were surprised to learn that these activities are typically associated with a similar word commonly used in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). Maybe we can learn a thing or two about vocabulary from our New Zealand brethren?

Convening of Synod

Synod convened on the following day, where credentials from all the 20 churches were examined. Unlike the FRCA, each local church sends two delegates (and in some cases alternates, who may also be present and speak, but not vote). So there is a real sense of a close connection with the local churches, similar to what was the case in the FRCA prior to the formation of classes. Rev David Waldron was elected as moderator (= chairman), a task he carried out throughout the one week duration of synod with much wisdom, sound leadership, and brotherly love, and as he himself regularly reminded us, only in the strength of the Lord.

A prayer service for Synod was held on Saturday evening. This included the singing of praises to God, reading of various Scripture passages, prayers for God's glory, the sister churches, the spread of the gospel, and the work of synod. But the chief feature was the exposition of God's Word from 1 Cor 3:5-17 by the local minister, Rev Aaron Warner. He reminded us from Scripture that the focus of the work of ministers is to take care how they build the church by preaching Christ, and that it is the Lord who builds the church.

Prior to the commencement of the actual work of Synod came the blessing of spiritual refreshment of a Lord's Day, where we could participate in two worship services. The morning service was led by Rev Michael Willemse, and his sermon on Psalm 98 demonstrated how looking at God's past deeds, His present rule, and His future return should lead to a crescendo of praise, which will one day include all creatures. While there are some small differences in liturgy, the overall structure of the worship service was immediately familiar and recognizable as having a Reformed and covenantal character.

This was the first RCNZ synod we were attending in a new capacity as delegates from a sister church. Since one of the privileges of a sister church relationship is being able to receive each other's ministers on the pulpit, we had been invited to preach. Rev Alkema thus led the afternoon worship service, with a sermon on the next Lord's Day that the Palmerston North congregation was up to in the sequence of catechism preaching. His sermon on Lord's Day 22 included a proclamation of God's goodness in promising us life after death for those in Christ. This was a timely gospel message, since an older brother in the local church community had recently gone to be with the Lord, and was to be buried that coming week.

Work of Synod

Virtually all of the Synod was conducted in open session, with the work beginning at 9am and concluding at 9pm each day. Refreshment breaks and meals were usually filled with conversations, and served as wonderful opportunities for us to

learn more about the RCNZ, and have many fruitful discussions.

Besides a different process of delegation, there are other differences in how a RCNZ Synod operates compared with the FRCA, although much of the terminology has an obvious and direct parallel with our own church lingo (e.g. presbytery = classis; session = consistory). More importantly, it was encouraging to observe the same Biblical principles of church polity at work. There was a constant emphasis on the Lordship of Jesus Christ as sole Head of the church, the autonomy of the local church, and the duty of churches to cooperate together in a federation, where the role of broader assemblies is not to be hierarchical, but to act as a safeguard, and to help churches in matters in common.

Our own church order stipulates that assemblies are to “only deal with ecclesiastical matters and in an ecclesiastical manner” (CO Art 30), and sometimes our own people wonder what the latter expression means. Certainly this “ecclesiastical manner” was very evident in that a spiritual atmosphere prevailed in how all the business on the agenda was conducted. Regular devotions showed a reliance on God and His Word, and frequent prayers on matters Synod had dealt with showed spiritual maturity and a deep love for the Lord and His church. The way the delegates conducted themselves towards each other showed a real desire to show graciousness and love, especially when there were differences of opinion.

A few items that were of special interest to us will be mentioned in what follows.

Books for Worship

Reports received included those from the Forms and Confessions Committee, which has published a separate booklet containing the Forms and Confessions as approved by Synod 2011. As the culmination of much work, a *Sing to the Lord* book containing psalms and hymns was adopted by Synod 2014, and it could be reported that the churches have been blessed with the use of this book in the worship services.

Church Order

A difficult pastoral matter that had arisen in a local church had to be dealt with by Synod 2011, and subsequent synods, including this one, had to deal with some church political questions that had arisen in relation to this. In particular there was the question about the relationship between a local church and the involvement of broader assemblies in matters of discipline. A church order committee had done extensive work on a Reformed understanding of the role of broader assemblies in giving concurrence. As part of this, Rev J. DeGelder of the Canadian Reformed Churches had been invited to do a series of talks last year in New Zealand on subjects relating to this and on the underlying principles of church polity.

Synod adopted the following definition of concurrence: "Concurrence in matters of church discipline then, we would define as, agreement that, in the discernment of the presbytery, the requesting session has sufficiently carried out its pastoral duties toward the sinner, seeking his restoration to faithfulness (in doctrine and/or life) but, faced with no sign of godly repentance, the formal, public steps of discipline may continue." In the discussions about this, many excellent comments were made that reflected sound Reformed church polity, and a proper understanding of the nature of a federation and how it operates, especially the idea that while original authority lies in the local session (consistory) and in the elders of a local church, churches voluntarily have agreed to accept the decisions of the broader assemblies.

Training for the Ministry

The RCNZ recognizes the importance of sound training for its ministers, and it was noted by one of the deputies that training for the ministry is one of the most significant work the church does, because it impacts the future of the church. Currently most theological students from the RCNZ receive training either at the Reformed Theological College (RTC) in Victoria, or at Mid America Reformed Seminary (MARS) in the USA. The need for several years of university study in the original languages as an entry requirement for the Canadian Reformed Theological

Seminary has been an impediment for students to study there. Many RCNZ theological students pursue the ministry later in life, after first securing the support and encouragement of their local elders, which happens only after they have demonstrated godly character and an ability to lead the church.

Both the RTC and MARS are independent institutions that are not officially connected to a particular church. Yet the RCNZ realizes that there is a need to closely supervise the instruction given at these institutions. They not only have meetings with faculty, but their deputies also meet regularly with their own students, whom they supervise and stay in close contact with throughout the duration of their studies. These students also remain members of their local church in New Zealand, and need the support of their local elders to even begin pursuing these studies. In addition, at the completion of studies, theological students must do a full year “vicariate” in a local RCNZ church, which is effectively a year-long internship under a RCNZ minister. All these are considered to be important safeguards, to make sure that men are well trained and thoroughly Reformed before admitting them to the ministry.

A decision on an overture to review the current examination system confirmed this desire to protect the pulpit. This overture originated in a desire to give the churches opportunity to properly address any potential weaknesses that might arise in one or more areas when a theological student undergoes an ecclesiastical examination.

As deputies, we were also greatly encouraged by the thoroughness in which the members of synod questioned the deputies for training for the ministry. It demonstrated very conclusively how seriously the RCNZ takes theological education and the need to stick to Biblical principles.

Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Rev Alkema addressed Synod on behalf of the FRCA, gratefully acknowledging that this was the first time we could do so as delegates from a sister church. He focused on various elements of what it means to be in a sister church relationship, and also addressed some of the areas in particular that

deputies had been mandated to focus on. A warm response was given by Rev Dirk Van Garderen, who told synod that he and his wife “have fallen in love with the FRCA” as a result of their visits here, and encouraged delegates to tell their members to visit the FRCA.

Amongst the decisions of Synod about the FRCA was a mandate for their Interchurch Relations Committee to consult with the FRCA about our respective emeritus funds, in an effort to remove any practical obstacles that could in some instances make calling each other’s ministers difficult. As a gesture of fraternal love, brotherly handshakes from virtually all the delegates of synod confirmed the new sister church relationship.

Interchurch Relations

Delegates from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN) were present and addressed Synod to defend their recent decision to open all the offices to women. The explanation they gave was unconvincing and found no sympathy or support whatsoever. Synod decided to “express its deep concern that the RCN has not abandoned its current hermeneutical direction which has led it to, for one thing, admitting women to the offices of the church, but is also demonstrated in a number of other areas of church life”. This decision was made without dissent and without need for much debate or discussion, due to agreement from all the delegates. Due to the RCN’s recent decision and the hermeneutical direction for it, the RCNZ sister-relationship with the RCN was suspended, and will be terminated at the RCNZ’s next synod in 2020 unless there is repentance.

Sister church relations were continued with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Canadian Reformed Churches, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, and United Reformed Churches of North America. Investigations will begin in downgrading the current relationship with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA) to ecumenical fellowship, similar to the RCNZ’s relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA), due to concerns about their

decision to ordain women as deacons, a position that the RCNZ is convinced is unbiblical. The relationship with the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA), which consists of seven small congregations from Adelaide to Brisbane, was upgraded to a sister relationship, in part because they are a very small group that needs help and support from the RCNZ. Personal connections have also precipitated this relationship, which had its origins already ten years ago.

Overseas Mission

The RCNZ is very passionate about the church's task to spread the gospel, and an Overseas Mission Board (OMB) coordinates this work, so as a result it surfaced at synod. Currently extensive financial support is given to the work in Papua New Guinea. This includes the work of Rev Alan Douma at the Reformed Bible College in Port Moresby, and also one of our home-grown men, br Richard 'tHart, who serves as a campus manager, and is being cared for by the Reformed Church of Bishopdale, where he is a member. Local churches are involved in supporting other mission projects as well.

Other Decisions

Many other decisions were made on various practical matters and about the work of various committees, but two other agenda items in particular caught our eye. One was about a proposal to appoint a study committee on the subject of confessional membership. The RCNZ's current position on this is the same as our own, and is also echoed in their form for profession of faith, that members subscribe to the confessions of the church. An overture from one of the presbyteries asked: how does this work when prospective members have difficulties with one part of the confessions, or perhaps as foreigners struggle with comprehending their language? In the end it was decided that there was no need for a study committee about this, and the current practice was reaffirmed, including that elders are sensitive to individual situations and considerations on a local level. This would also happen in the FRCA, for example, in dealing with those who are mentally handicapped.

Another interesting proposal concerned the names of local churches, and whether there should be freedom for local churches to choose their own name. There was a real reluctance to proceed rashly in this matter. It was encouraging for us to hear in the discussion that there was also a desire to maintain the unity of the churches in the federation, and that being Reformed is an important part of our identity.

In the end, it is this shared conviction to confess the Reformed faith and to encourage each other to be a faithful witness of God's Word in this world that is at the heart of what it means to be sister churches as well. The decisions and discussions of Synod Palmerston North 2017 gave us reason for confidence and optimism, because they confirmed the Reformed character of the RCNZ and their desire to be faithful to the Lord of the church. May the Lord continue to bless our growing relationship, that it may be of mutual benefit in holding to this Reformed faith.

R.E. Pot

APPENDIX E: ADDRESS TO SYNOD PALMERSTON-NORTH 2017

(delivered on 11 September 2017)

Dear brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ: Mr. Moderator, synod delegates, fellow foreign delegates and guests:

It is a great joy and delight to be here in your midst, and on behalf of my fellow deputy, Rev. Richard Pot, I wish to express my thanks to you for the invitation to attend your Synod and to be blessed with your hospitality. Particularly for domestic delegates, synod may be very challenging in the context of deliberations and considerations mulled over and decisions made; at the same time there is a rich and wonderful blessing in the fellowship we may enjoy as brothers in Christ, and we have already in these past few days experienced that. Standing here to address you on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, I am acutely aware that there have been many in my place in previous years who have done the same. Yet for the very first time, we may address one another at Synod in light of our new bond. On behalf of your sister church, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, I pass on heartfelt greetings!

At our last Synod (Synod Baldivis 2015) the decision was made to accept your offer of a sister church relationship. Your delegates to that Synod, Rev. Paul Archbald and Rev. Leo DeVos can testify to the fact that this decision was made in a very positive way, with an overwhelming show of support. As a result, we have been blessed not only with the establishment of a new sister church relationship, but also in the manner in which this decision was taken.

It is both appropriate and beneficial to acknowledge a number of aspects of this new relationship. There is a providential aspect to the *timing* of the establishment of this bond. I think we must believe that. Even though there have been those in both of our federations who would have preferred this relationship to have been established much earlier, the Lord in His wisdom allowed a lengthy period of discussion and familiarisation. I have already learned that the roads here in New Zealand twist

and turn in unexpected and surprising ways and reaching a destination can take longer than one might suppose. That imagery is reflective of what our journey in moving closer together over the years has been like. Throughout this process you persevered, and in this respect we acknowledge with gratitude your continued patience, that loving fruit of the Spirit. To speak candidly and openly, there are those who consider that more deliberations are yet necessary and consider the establishment of this sister church relationship to be premature. Yet our impression is that the establishment of this bond has in general been received with thankfulness and appreciation. In His good pleasure the Lord has now brought us together, and we trust His wisdom with respect to the timing of this relationship.

There is also a providential aspect to the *timeliness* of this bond. We see in our respective societies (in line with the general global trends) a movement away from the foundation of Christian principles on which our societies were built and established. Norms in our countries are changing, ever more rapidly, with results that will increasingly be reflected in the laws of our lands. In this climate we cherish the bond we share in the Reformed faith, founded on God's Word, the doctrine of which is also summarized in our confessions. From this common basis we may give a faithful, Scriptural response and witness to the world. This is also why our great King calls us to be together. In His so-called high-priestly prayer of John 17, the Lord Jesus prayed: *I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me* (John 17:20,21). In our support for one another we may also present a strong witness within the broader culture, to the glory of our awesome God.

I would also like to stress the great necessity for the *functionality* of this sister church relationship. We unite together with other Reformed churches in response to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ given in His Word that His church may be one. Our confessions echo this call. In Lord's Day 21 we

confess that Christ gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself by His Spirit and Word a church chosen to everlasting life, a church that is characterized by “the unity of the true faith.” Where it is to be found, there it is to be celebrated, and we cherish this bond with other sister churches. In practical terms, however, there are geographical distances, and linguistic and cultural differences that can make these relationships less functional than what we might desire. In this sense there is such a fortunate array of factors that lends itself very beautifully to the practical functioning of our sister church relationship. Our geography is close, our language and culture are very similar, and the opportunities for cooperation and mutual support are numerous.

As is the case in many different kinds of relationships in life we enjoy, the best kind of growth occurs when it is natural and heartfelt. There has already been some cooperation and interaction in the past between our churches, and in this respect I mention the shared work done in Port Moresby, PNG. Members of our churches have enjoyed travel in New Zealand and have worshiped with you in the past; we may expect that this kind of interaction will only increase, and we look forward to welcoming, hosting and having members of your churches worshiping with us as well. We have two churches in Tasmania, one church group in Cairns, and fourteen churches in Western Australia. Although the distance to Western Australia may seem somewhat daunting, we would most heartily welcome you to join us in fellowship and worship. More recently we have seen an increase in the connections between our churches, which is a healthy and welcome development. The organisers of your National Youth Camp graciously extended an invitation to the youth of our churches, and by all accounts this was a mutually encouraging experience. Invitations have been extended to ministers in your federation to come to Australia to give speeches and preach in our churches. Rev. Paul Archbald is no stranger to us, and it is blessing to have him in our midst. It was a pleasure to welcome Rev. Dirk VanGarderen and his wife to our churches, and to benefit from our brother’s insight and experience not only in Western Australia, but also with his extended period of help and support among our church group in

Cairns, Queensland. Organisers for our ministerial conference to be held next month considered that an invitation to a New Zealand minister to come as guest speaker would be an excellent way in which the bonds between our churches could be strengthened. We are delighted that Rev. John Haverland and his wife Harriet are coming to sunny Albany next month, and we look forward to hearing our brother share his insights on 'Longevity in the Ministry'. We have also seen one of our churches, the Free Reformed Church of Southern River, consider for themselves ways to enrich our relationship and allow their minister, Rev. Dirk Poppe, a time to serve in the Silverstream Reformed Church. This was done with the expressed purpose of strengthening the bonds between our churches, and also as deputies for relations with the RCNZ we applaud this initiative taken by local churches.

In this increased interaction there remain differences and there are challenges. It does take time to adjust to these differences and to learn to work with one another. Your deputies' report highlighted a complication relating to the differences between our respective emeritus funds and the way they function. This showcased how some of our respective practices are yet unknown and may take some time to work through. We must each be patient and allow a process of adjustment to smooth some of the small bumps on the road. Having said that, there are many ways in which the practical arrangements and interactions we enjoy have been working well, and we remain optimistic about the way we may work together in the future.

A sister church relationship also implies a *loving* relationship. In this respect we may point to the elements of mutual support and encouragement. This is for us in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia something implicit in the relationship, and is reflected in our rules for sister church relations: "sister relationship shall be used to mutually assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world." At the same time, a loving relationship also necessitates a climate in which we may hold one another accountable, speaking the truth in love. In this way we may stand together and move forward encouraging and warning one another to stay close to

the Great Shepherd and His indispensable Word. This element of care for one another in warning and exhorting is included in our rules for sister church relations, and echoed in your third and fourth rules as well. We are all in and of ourselves weak and sinful people, and the temptation to stray from the path exists in every heart, in every church and every federation. It is truly in *listening* to others that we can the benefit of a loving relationship. History has shown, and sadly recent history as well with the FRCA's rapidly deteriorating relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, that churches of the Lord Jesus Christ have a duty not only to humbly give admonitions to others when necessary, but also to heed them. In this sense we understand in the first place our own need for humility. It is our desire to be held accountable and to receive admonition and warning where necessary. We believe that you share this sentiment, and it is also with that belief in mind that we remind you of an element of the mandate we have received, namely "to continue to monitor the impact of the Ecumenical Fellowship relation of the RCNZ with the CRCA, and to encourage the RCNZ to be consequential in this relationship in light of the concerns expressed in the report to Synod 2015." As was included in the deputies' report to our last Synod, and confirmed in subsequent contacts, there is much that we have been encouraged by in your approach to the CRCA, and we hope and pray that this process may continue.

It is also our calling to use our time wisely so that we may grow in our knowledge of one another for the *deepening* of our relationship. This need for growth in familiarisation is reflected in the mandate we received as deputies at our last Synod: "to promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA by way of exchange of speakers where opportunity arises as well as exchange of publication of articles". Last year our committee had the opportunity to meet with your corresponding deputies at the RTC in Geelong. It was a very informative and beneficial experience in which we could both share and learn about one another.

Perhaps it is also fair to say that we may learn *from* one another as we increasingly learn *about* one another. We both

understand that in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ the command of Scripture is to rule and guide us in our beliefs and practices. We see in your churches people from a variety of backgrounds, yet united with the desire to serve the Lord faithfully and in accordance with His Word, and a spirit of cooperation and grace for one another. That is a delight to witness, and no doubt there will be other elements that those in our churches will discover with thankfulness. There may be aspects of how we operate that in time you find helpful.

Brothers, the road behind us on our separate paths has been lengthy, yet we have shared in the care, the protection and the love of our great King and Shepherd. He has now brought us together in His wondrous wisdom and we rejoice in that! *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!* (Psalm 133:1). We do not know what lies ahead on the road before us, but we may travel together in this new relationship, confident of our destination and with the comfort of God's Spirit and Word to lead and guide us. May our gracious God bless you all.

H. Alkema

Deputies for contact with the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore

Esteemed brothers,

Mandate

Synod 2015 - Baldivis appointed the deputies for contact with the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERCS) with the mandate to:

- a) Contact the FERC of Singapore with the decision of Synod Baldivis 2015
- b) Work through the issues that arise from having a sister church relationship with a single church, such as those arising from Rule c and h of our Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations.
- c) Visit the FERC of Singapore two times in the next three years in order to learn more about them and strengthen our relationship.
- d) Give timely reports concerning the FERC of Singapore to the members of the FRCA.
- e) Offer assistance to the FERC of Singapore where requested and feasible
- f) Report to the next Synod the results of their work.
- g) Invite delegates of the FERC of Singapore to our next Synod.

Report on Activities

In response to the mandate given the deputies provide the following report (following the order of the mandate):

- a) Though representatives from Singapore were present at Synod 2015, an official letter conveying Synod 2015's decision to offer the FERC a sister church relationship was sent on 28 August 2015. This offer was accepted by the FERC by correspondence dated 19 October 2015.

- b) Regarding the issues arising from having a sister church relationship with a single church the deputies felt it best to discuss this during a visit to Singapore and the rules, “c - *The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies....*”, and “h - *The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as advisers, as much as possible*”: We discussed these issues with the FERC during a visit to Singapore. After considerable discussion it was agreed that:
1. It was not always feasible, nor is it always necessary to attend each other's regular meetings.
 2. When the FERC is deliberating important matters such as (1) external relationships with other churches, (2) doctrinal and (3) liturgical issues, the FERC will inform FRCA.
 3. The FERC will send a copy of its annual reports.
 4. The FERC will update FRCA on any important issues every 6 months if needed.
 5. The FERC will invite delegates when there is a special event in the Church.

Note: One example from point 2 above, is that the FERC has since Synod Baldivis 2015 entered into a sister church relationship with the 'Grace Reformed Church of Penang' (Malaysia). This is a small instituted church, the result of years of mission work by the FERC Singapore. Deputies had been made aware of this developing sister church relationship. The FERC continues to provide pastoral and preaching support to this small Reformed Church in Malaysia.

- c) Deputies Rev T VanSpronsen and Br S Fokkema visited FERC in September 2016. (The second visit is being planned for DV early 2018). With great thankfulness we could meet several times with both the Contact Committee and the Board of Elders. There was truly a sense of growing together in trust and brotherly harmony.

One result of our relationship is that the deputies have witnessed more FERC Singaporeans visiting, with some even settling in our midst.

To give some idea of what kind of matters were addressed at our meetings, the following are some of the topics we covered:

- **Missions**, and whether there are areas where the churches could gain by cooperating and sharing of information. The FERC expressed a desire to perhaps become involved in the mission work of FRCA churches. Full information of all mission activities and mission committees was forwarded to them. The FERC have shown an interest in possibly being involved in translation work into Mandarin, for use in the China mission work.
 - **Youth Conferences**, and how to encourage contact between youth organizations (since then, invitations have been sent both ways).
 - **Annual FERC Church Camp**, the FERC welcomed members of the FRCA and will try to give enough notice via invitations to the churches in the future.
 - **Ministerial Conferences**, are a good way to keep up contact and Pastor Nam Tuck Chong was invited to the last one held in Albany. Invitations will also be sent when other conferences are held, e.g. Reformation Day Conference in Singapore.
 - **Mutual Exchange of Literature/Bulletins/Publications**, the FERC requested access to Reformed publications and journals commonly in circulation in the FRCA. Deputies compiled and forwarded to them a descriptive list of reformed publications together with details where and how to obtain subscriptions.
- d) Deputies have published updates and reports in the *Una Sancta* in order to keep members of the FRCA informed

as much as possible. Deputies have also promoted visits to the FERC while on travels elsewhere. Deputies have encouraged inviting each other to family or youth Bible camps. This part of our mandate is an ongoing task.

- e) Assistance to the FERC of Singapore. In January 2016 the Contact Committee officially requested ministerial assistance possibly in the form of a minister-on-loan. Deputies sent letters to all the churches in the FRCA to determine whether they were willing to “loan” their minister to provide assistance or whether they knew of a retired minister that could fill that role. After receiving the responses, the deputies advised the FERC Contact Committee that the active pastors could not see to leaving their congregations for the extended period requested. Contact with a retired minister was made and, with thankfulness, an arrangement could be actualized.

Deputies have also assisted FERC by providing contact names of possible ministers who may be able to spend some time in Singapore to support pastor Chong. There have been several CanRC and FRCA emeritus ministers that upon an invitation by the FERC have served the FERC for extended periods.

Further information

- Due to Rev E Rupke leaving the FRCA, Deputies called on the alternate:
Br Klaas van der Veen to fill the vacancy.
- FERC has also explored a sister church relationship with the CanRC as a result of our discussions. Given the need for pastoral support CanRC is much more numerous and has a greater ability and resources to assist them than the FRCA. However, the recent CanRC Synod declined the request at this time. FRCA was deemed to be better placed to work with the FERC.

Conclusion

With much thankfulness to the Lord, the deputies can report that the FERC Singapore - FRCA sister church relationship continues to be effective and helpful, and will the Lord willing continue to grow for the benefit of both the FERC Singapore and the FRCA.

Recommendations

That Synod

1. Receives this report.
2. Discharges the current deputies.
3. Appoints new deputies with the mandate to continue to maintain and develop the relationship between the FERC Singapore and the FRC Australia.

Your Deputies

Rev TJ VanSpronsen (convenor)

Br SC Fokkema (secretary)

Br K vanderVeen

Deputies for Theological Training

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2. Composition
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Mandate

Synod Baldivis (as recorded in Acts Article 93) gave Deputies Theological Training the following Mandate:

12.1

- a. *Request the churches to contribute AU\$82 per communicant member per annum for the maintenance of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary as from 1 January 2016.*
- b. *Deputies be mandated to, within their report to Synod 2018, report on the amount of contribution paid by our Canadian sisters and propose a level of contribution that matches (as close as possible) such contribution.*

Grounds

- a. *Synod Legana (Act 2009 at Article 17.m, Ground 4) accepted that the FRCA are responsible to ensure that the ministry of the gospel be maintained and ought to take full financial responsibility for this.*
- b. *Until such time as the FRCA develop their own theological training, our support to the CRTS should be for the full amount required within their budget. Our Canadian sisters presently contribute an amount of CA\$82 per communicant member per annum, which equates to around AU\$82.*
- d. *The FRCA churches remain financially blessed and can be expected to bear the increased contribution amount.*
- e. *In the event that we do (at some time in the future) develop our own theological training, the CRTS contribution could be reduced to allow the FRCA to absorb the cost of our own training. This would coincide with our reduced use of CRTS.*

- 12.2 *In relation to the guest lecturer from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary:*
- a. *Set aside \$7,500 per trip (currently \$7,000) from General Synod funds for the costs of a visit to Australia by a guest lecturer from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary;*
 - b. *To invite a guest lecturer once every three years, rather than every two years.*
- 12.3 *To set aside \$4,000 from General Synod funds for travelling and accommodation costs of a delegate of deputies to attend a meeting of Hamilton's Board of Governors and the Convocation between Synod 2015 and Synod 2018.*
- 12.4 *Discharge deputies and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:*
- a. *Continue to collect funds for the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary and forward them to the Seminary;*
 - b. *Continue to correspond with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, in order to maintain contact and obtain information, and to send notification of new deputies for the purpose of communication with "South Africa", "the Netherlands" and "Korea";*
 - c. *Continue to collect funds for theological training;*
 - d. *Continue to ensure that relevant information is published concerning the training for the ministry, so that the churches understand the need to support the colleges and the training of the students;*
 - e. *Continue to arrange the support of theological students whenever required, in accordance with Art 18 CO, and as agreed in Art 50 of Acts of Synod 1992 as amended by Art 56 of Acts of Synod 1994;*

Deputies for Theological Training

- f. *Continue to make arrangements for a guest lecturer from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary once every three years;*
- g. *Continue to be as closely involved, as practically as possible, in the work of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary;*
- h. *Monitor the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary within the Australian churches by seeking feedback from the ministers and students participating in this program;*
- i. *Collect and disburse funds for the Pastoral Training Program in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program; and*
- j. *To investigate the feasibility of establishing an FRCA Theological Seminary, and report back to next Synod. Such a study should consider:*
 - i. *The desire of the churches for such a seminary;*
 - ii. *The potential student numbers that would attend such a seminary;*
 - iii. *The impact the establishment of such a seminary would have on the student numbers and viability of the CRTS; and*
 - iv. *The resources required for such a seminary, and the availability of such resources.*

Grounds

1. *Having only one theological training centre in the world does not prepare us well for the possibility, and may God graciously prevent it, if for any reason the CRTS becomes unavailable due to political, economic or other reasons.*

2. *Article 17 of the CO states that the Churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry.*

12.5 *Continue to oversee the Library Fund.*

12.6 *To cease to investigate the feasibility of offering the freshman (i.e. first) year of theological studies to the churches in Australia and to cease to investigate possible distance education of theological studies to the churches in Australia.*

Deputies met eleven times to discuss and deal with matters concerning the mandate. The majority of time was spent on investigating feasibility for an Australian Theological Seminary. These meetings were held in brotherly and harmonious ways. With thankfulness to the Lord we may report that there was nothing to hinder us in carrying out our tasks.

Composition

Synod 2015 appointed Rev. D. Poppe as convener and the brothers Rev. PKA de Boer, B. Huizinga and J (Jim) Vander Plas as the remaining deputies.

Deputies organized themselves as follows:

- | | | |
|----|--------------------------------------|------------------|
| a. | Convener | Rev. D. Poppe |
| b. | Secretary | Rev. PKA de Boer |
| c. | Treasurer (CRTS) | Br. B. Huizinga |
| d. | Treasurer (Theological Students) | Br J VanderPlas |
| e. | Treasurer (Theological Library Fund) | Br J VanderPlas |

Contact with other Church bond Seminaries

The deputies for theological training of our sister Churches in Canada, Korea, the Netherlands and South Africa were all informed who Synod Baldivis appointed as deputies theological for training.

Canadian Reformed Seminary at Hamilton

Upon invitation, Dr. J. Smith visited Australia. He combined his visit with a study sabbatical. During this visit he held a number of speeches among the Churches. He also had special contact with prospective theological students.

Br. J Vander Plas was initially appointed as a long serving deputy to visit the Canadian Reformed Seminary and Board of Governors. However, due to his children's marriage plans, he was unable to travel at that time. Rev. PKA de Boer went as alternate.

When visiting Canada, Rev. PKA de Boer was given opportunity to briefly pass on the Australian Churches greeting at the annual convocation. He was further welcomed as a guest at the Board of Governors meeting (see his Report as *Document One*).

The CRTS Board and faculty contacted deputies regarding a perceived inconsistency where the CRTS persistently resisted any suggestion of distance learning with the FRCA while it did appear more readily available to the FRSA (see Document Two). They emphasize the unique difficulty regarding theological training in South Africa and pointed out that the FRCSA requested that they, from their side, with CRTS permission, set up the necessary networking for such distance learning.

The Canadian Reformed Churches asked Deputies for information regarding the possibility for Canadian theological Candidates to receive immigration to Australia. This request arose, in part, from the delayed permission for then Candidate D. Winkel to enter Australia.

Deputies responded by:

1. Informing the CRTS that this delay was partly due to immigration laws being changed at the time of application and a child being born in the intervening time.
2. Further investigation into this matter led deputies believe that no further concrete advice can be provided regarding

the best procedure to follow. There are too many variables with continual changing government immigration policies.

3. It was recognized that candidates who need to be examined (peremptory examination) before being ordained into the ministry, may give immigration difficulty for there is no assurance of employment without such an examination.

Kosin Korean Seminary at Busan

Besides informing deputies for theological training who Synod Baldivis appointed as deputies, there has been no further correspondence with these deputies.

Theological University of Kampen, the Netherlands

Besides informing deputies for theological training who Synod Baldivis appointed as deputies, there has been no further correspondence with these deputies.

The FRCA *Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad* requested us, as Deputies for Theological Training, to inform the Theological University in Kampen (TUK) that due to their unscriptural teachings as affirmed at their last Synod, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia no longer are able to direct students to the TUK. Deputies responded to this request by noting that we had no such mandate and any matter relating to Churches Abroad should be dealt with by the Deputies appointed for those relations

Theological Training among the sister-Churches in S. Africa

There has been some communication with the deputies for theological training in South Africa. In an October 2015 meeting one of their deputies met with us. Discussion focused mostly on their special challenges regarding theological training. Attention was given to the differences in needs for ministers in the home congregations compared to those students originating from mission context.

Pastoral Training Program

The Australian churches were privileged to support student David Pol from the CRTS for the Pastoral Training Program (PTP) which he completed in the FRC Southern River. This was done under the guidance of Rev. D. Poppe and conducted for the stipulated ten-week period commencing in June 2015.

All written evaluations, as required upon completion of the program, were provided and submitted.

Close contact was maintained with br. student D. Pol while carrying out his program here in Australia.

Publication and Promotion

Several meetings with prospective theological students were held. Some articles were published in *Una Sancta* about theological training. These meetings were encouraging.

Moreover, there has been some contact with students K. Dekker and A. Plug in relation to their commencement of studies in Hamilton. Further contact was made when they returned home for a visit. Recently, Br. Ruurd Offringa has also commenced studies in Hamilton.

Supporting the Canadian Theological Seminary

Deputies have collected AU \$82.00 per communicant member per year, for the years 2015 through 2017. A total of \$586,439.50 was collected from the churches while \$581,187.06 was sent to the CRTS over this period. A special anonymous donation of \$3,996.85 was also sent to the CRTS to be used for a special project.

These monies were received with much gratitude (see the auditors' report in Document 6 and the full financial report in Document 3).

Furthermore, we can inform Synod that the present amount of contributions among the Canadian Reformed Churches after their 2016 Synod is set at \$90.00 CA per communicant member.

Financial Support for Needy Theological Students

We bring the following points to Synod's attention:

- No request for financial support has been received for the period from Synod 2015 to the date of this report.
- Seeing there was no request for support, the needy student fund has effectively been in a three-year accumulation phase. Consequently, the balance has grown from \$52,000 to over \$105,000. All churches have been levied the annual \$8 per communicant member fee for the duration of this period. The only exception has been the FRC Baldivis. This Church requested exemption commencing 2017 because they are financially supporting their own theology student.
- The main expenditure item of significance was the financial support of Br David Pol who received reimbursement of travel expenses, plus the stipulated weekly payment, in completing the Pastoral Training Program in the FRC Southern River. (See the auditors' report in Document Six and the Report itself as Document Four)
- Even though the accumulated closing balance may seem high, it should be remembered that the \$8 annual levy is a nominal figure that would be likely to increase substantially should there be significant student demand. The present reserve, though substantial by historical standards, is prudent and therefore able to adequately cover the churches' collective obligation in a situation where several students might need simultaneous financial assistance from the churches. It would prevent the churches from potentially being burdened by sudden large levy increases.

Theological Library

This is no longer an active fund, following a past Synod decision to discontinue levying the churches for the purpose of establishing a theological library. Consequently, the fund has increased from \$113,525 at November 2014 to a closing

balance of \$123,152 at November 2017. The fund is invested in a term deposit, for which the rate of return has been low during the past three years (See Document Six for the auditing of this fund and Document Five for full Financial Report).

Distance Education

Recently, late in 2017, The CRTS faculty approached deputies with a suggestion and request for our involvement in again considering distance education. Apparently what South Africa is doing, is working relatively well. Throughout the world there are more and more institutions of higher learning seriously looking into the matter. A CRTS committee under the leadership of Dr. J. Van Vliet has been set up. We expressed some hesitation in view of Synod Baldivis decision *to cease to investigate possible distance education of theological studies in Australia*. Seeing that it was not our initiative but of the CRTS, we agreed to at least be present at the initial video conferences of this committee for observation and possible advice without official involvement until further instruction of Synod.

Feasibility Study

After due consideration the deputies were unable to find complete consensus in relation to the feasibility study. As a result, deputies submit two different reports (proposals) for consideration. These two reports (proposals) do not have majority support of deputies. In addition to this, the financial feasibility report (Document 11) is a standalone report; it provides detail for each proposal, but in itself is not a proposal.

Recommendations

Synod decides:

1. to express appreciation for Dr. J. Smith's visit to the Australian Churches and to mandate deputies to invite a CRTS professor to visit the Australian Churches within the next three-year period
2. to send a deputy (if possible, br. J. Vander Plas) as delegate to attend one Convocation and Board of Governors meeting during the next three-year term

3. to accept the explanation of the CRTS regarding distance education for the FRSA which is quite different from FRCA and express thankfulness for the renewed openness of considering this possibility.
4. to consider the possibility of recommending to the Churches that Canadian candidates called to serve among Churches in Australia, are to undergo a peremptory examination before applying for immigration.
5. that the FRCA can no longer recommend Australian theological Students to study in TUK and inform the RCN as well as all our sister-churches of this decision.
6. Discharge deputies and appoint new deputies (please note that br. J. Vander Plas completed three three year terms) with the mandate to:
 - a. Continue to collect funds for the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary and forward them to the Seminary;
 - b. Notify all our sister-church deputies and governors for theological training of new deputies in order to maintain contact and exchange information.
 - c. Continue to correspond with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
 - d. Continue to collect funds for theological training;
 - e. Continue to ensure that relevant information is published concerning the training for the ministry, so that the churches understand the need to support the colleges and the training of the students;
 - f. Continue to arrange the support of theological students whenever required, in accordance with Art 18 CO, and as agreed in Art 50 of Acts of Synod 1992 as amended by Art 56 of Acts of Synod 1994;

Deputies for Theological Training

- g. Continue to make arrangements for a guest lecturer from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary once every three years;
- h. Continue to be as closely involved, as practically as possible, in the work of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary;
- i. Thank the CRTS for providing faithful, godly theological education for our young men.
- j. Monitor the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary within the Australian churches by seeking feedback from the ministers and students participating in this program;
- k. Collect and disburse funds for the Pastoral Training Program in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program; and reimburse students taking the PTP in Australia, at an increased level to match Can Ref Churches level of support.
- l. to continue to oversee the *Library Fund*.
- m. to investigate the possibility of pursuing distance education with the CRTS, particularly the establishment of the first year of seminary training here in Australia.

Grounds

1. It is beneficial for the Australian Churches to keep close contact with the Theological Seminary where our students Study. (Recommendations 1 and 2)
2. The deputies passed on further information regarding the CRTS and its Board of Governors Faculty past and present position on distant education. (Recommendation 3)

3. When overseas candidates are called for the ministry of the Word in Australia a peremptory examination prior to immigration (Recommendation 4)
 - a. would give greater confidence in immigration application for employment assurance
 - b. would give the Australian Churches (classis) great objectivity in examining candidates without the pressure of immigration and employment issues.
 - c. would give called candidates assurance during time when they are waiting for their immigration papers that there are no ecclesiastical hurdles after immigration. (Recommendation 4)
4. One of the consequences of putting the RCN under suspension is that the FRCA can no longer recommend their theological training. (Recommendation 5)
5. It is good for the FRCA to keep up-to-date with activity regarding theological training among all our sister-churches and in particular with the CRTS to which the FRCA presently send their students. (Recommendations 6.b.c.)
6. There should be equity for PTP student honorarium in Australia with Canada. Canada has added CPI increases. (Recommendation 6.k.)
7. In view of the study investigating the feasibility of a FRC Theological Seminary, it is deemed prudent to retain and manage the Library fund. (Recommendation 6.l.)



Rev. D. Poppe
(Convener)

Deputies for Theological Training

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, sweeping loop at the top and several smaller, more intricate strokes below.

Rev. PKA de Boer
(Secretary)

A handwritten signature in black ink, characterized by a series of connected, fluid loops and a long, horizontal tail stroke.

Br. B. Huizinga
(Treasurer – Hamilton Theological Fund)

A handwritten signature in black ink, showing a series of connected loops and a long, horizontal tail stroke.

Br. J. Vander Plas
(Treasurer – Theological Students and Library Fund)

Documents for Report of Deputies Theological Training

1. Report of Visit to Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Board of Governors' meeting and Convocation
2. Letter from CRTS regarding Distant education and the FRSA
3. Treasurer's Report Support for CRTS
4. Treasurer's Report Needy Students
5. Treasurer's Report Theological Library
6. Audit Report of Deputies' Funds
7. Survey Results
8. Survey Summary of First Two Questions
9. Outline of Survey Answers from the Churches
10. Response from Theological College Board of Governors regarding impact of possible Free Reformed Theological Seminary
11. Projected Finances in view of Feasibility Studies

Document One

Report of Deputies visit to the Canadian Reformed Churches

In agreement with Synod Baldivis decision to send a delegate to visit the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary to sit in on the board of governors meeting and pass on greetings, the undersigned deputy submits this report. This visit was made in September of 2016 in conjunction with these events.

Board of Governors Meeting

This meeting was held in the Seminary building on the afternoon of 8 September. The meeting progressed in a very brotherly and orderly fashion. The *Press Release* of the meeting is added to this report.

Some of the highlights and matters that received attention included the well-being of retired professors and their wives. They were remembered in prayer. Here, as well as throughout the meeting, there was clear evidence of reliance on the Lord for all things in this life including the health and ability of professors, staff and students to carry out their various tasks.

It was further noted that the recent Canadian Synod agree to appoint Dr. J. Van Vliet as principal beginning in September 2017 and that both Dr. van Vliet and Dr. Smith be granted tenure. Actions were put in place to implement these decisions.

The academic committee report shows that the instruction at the seminary is diligently supervised and that the professors teach in a faithful way. Significant attention was given to maintaining academic standards. The Seminary, as a members of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) which sets standards for giving degrees in America and Canada, is careful to adhere to these levels and implement its recommendations.

Further, the Board decided to seek membership in the *Evangelical Fellowship of Canada* and in *Christians in Higher Education* (CHEC).

A significant amount of attention was given to the Seminary *strategic plan*. Seeing that there has been no significant

increase in student numbers, various ways were considered for possible improvement including encouraging local ministers and office-bearers to help direct students towards theological training. This gave an opportunity to mention how we in Australia have a minister that gives courses in the Hebrew and Greek language which appear to help stimulate interest. Mention was also made of the barbeque for prospective students that the deputies organised as well as a special meeting with the visiting professor.

Some attention was given to helping foreign students. In this context it was noted that recently the Canadian laws changed so that foreign students may now take on employment upon entry through student visas. The matter of foreign students needing separate medical insurance was also mentioned. This could be a problem when students or their spouses are expecting. In view of the situation regarding Candidate D. Winkel, the question arose whether it will still be possible for Canadian candidates to be called to Australia. The Seminary would still appreciate an answer regarding this point.

The strategic plan includes an effort to increase the number of non-Canadian Reformed lectures. When asked for the motivation and whether this was with view to sister-churches, the response was that this is to be understood in the academic context. The importance of academic recognition among other academic institutions appears to be important. To achieve this, it was suggested, it would be helpful for professors to receive invitations and for them to be invited, it is helpful to invite others. Having said this, further assurance was given that this matter is not a high priority.

Thankfulness was expressed to the property and finance committee. Thankfulness for the support the Australian Churches have given was voiced along with the request to pass this thankful on.

Meeting with Chairman of the Board of Governors and Principal of the Seminary

When making arrangement for visit in Canada, the undersigned thought it helpful to have some further contact with view to deputies mandate to do a feasibility study. It was agreed to meet in an *unofficial way* with Rev. A. Aasman as chairman of the board and upon his suggestion, also Dr. G. Visscher, the Principal. Seeing that this was an unofficial meeting involving only three people, it was also held in an informal way.

At this meeting it was emphasised that there is no intention of the Australian Churches to begin their own seminary in competition with the Canadian one. Instead, right from the beginning of making plans, there is a real desire among the Australian Churches to work together and remain co-operative in this matter. Two motivations as evident from the most recent Australian Synod were mentioned; 1) to help accommodate students, especially those with families, so that they may study close to home and 2) The recent development among the sister Churches in the Netherlands makes it impossible to encourage students to study there leaving really only one; the CRTS in Hamilton, as the only clear possibility in this world, which is not considered to be sufficiently. The Australian Churches have grown and now also show the desire to train theological students as the Churches have agreed in the *Church Order*.

Although the Seminary's expressed preference for the Australian Churches to still send their students to Canada, some understanding for the Australian desire to have their own Seminary was shown. This led to some further discussion on the importance of academic community, namely, that in the learning process students have close contact with other students to grow in knowledge together. The benefit of student interaction along with the faculty received attention. Mention was made of how recently this matter of academic community had received attention through higher education organizations in the context of distance learning. There is fear that students miss out on this inter-student relation. It was also noted that suggested alternatives to academic community was for students to have a special community with a specific church.

From here the discussion flowed to how in the past the Canadian Seminary had generally resisted Australian suggestions for distance learning. Some inconsistency to how the Canadian Seminary has now shown some willingness for such a program in relation to the South African Churches. The S. African Churches have taken the initiative and it is also they who pay for and install necessary equipment in Hamilton to make it happen. Right now, it is at a very experimental stage with the S. African Churches. There is a clear understanding that at this point the Canadian Seminary is under no commitment or obligation in this matter at all. This is only something they are permitting the S. African Churches to try out. If it does not work, it is their responsibility. It was however suggested that the Australian Churches could perhaps take note of how this develops further and possibly also benefit from it.

There was also some further discussion on registration requirements for permission to issue an academic degree. Without such a degree, there will be no possibility for students to further their studies. Without it there would be no possible allowances foreign students receiving any kind of student visas etc.

Upon request of the undersigned, a syllabus of all the different courses was given along with a warning concerning copy-right privileges etc. but, it should help as a guide for our feasibility study. Near the conclusion of the meeting, with emphasis that nothing is promised or even suggested as such, there was some hint at perhaps considering the Canadian Seminary agreeing to have something set up initially as a satellite campus or seminary which eventually grows into an Australian Theological Seminary. Please keep in mind that was mentioned in very hesitant and careful way. Although the hint was made, it was not really given as a viable suggestion.

PKA dB

Release of the Meeting of the Board Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary held on September 8, 2016

Opening and roll call

The Board of Governors met at CRTS in Hamilton, Ontario, on September 8, 2016. All the governors were at the meeting except Br. B. Hordyk, who was absent with notice. Rev. R. Aasman opened with the reading of Psalm 140 and led in prayer. Sr. Leanne Kuizenga was present as requested to take the minutes of the meeting. Rev. Pieter de Boer from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia was welcomed. Rev. de Boer informed the meeting that the Australian churches intend to send a delegate to visit CRTS once every three years. The new governors Rev. John Louwerse, Rev. Joe Poppe, Rev. James Slaa, Br. Peter Vandersluis, and Br. Kasper Van Veen were welcomed to the meeting. The new governors signed the appliance documentation.

Memorabilia

The following brothers and sisters were remembered in prayer: Srs. K. Deddens, the widow of the late Dr. K. Deddens, Dr. J. DeJong and his wife Margaret, sister W. Faber, widow of the late Dr. J. Faber, Prof. J. Geertsema, Dr. C. Van Dam, Dr. N.H. Gootjes and his wife, Dinie.

Minutes and agenda

The minutes of the Board meeting held on January 14, 2016 were approved. The agenda for the meeting was established.

Receipt of decisions, reports-material agenda items

- a. Article 76 from the Acts of Synod 2016 was reviewed. It was noted that no correspondence was received from the clerk of Synod and therefore the Board does not have enough information to deal with all of the recommendations as found in Article 76. Many of these things will come back on the January agenda. Two recommendations of Synod 2016 were dealt with: The Board appointed Dr. Jason Van Vliet as Principal

beginning September 2017 (Art. 76, Rec. L5), and the Board granted tenure to Drs. J. Smith and J. Van Vliet. (Art. 76, Rec. 4.11)

- b. After a meeting between the faculty of CRTS, the chairman and vice-chairman of the Board, and the Deputies for Theological Training in South Africa, the decision taken by email to allow theological students of our sister churches in South Africa to be long distance auditors of certain courses taught in CRTS was officially approved. The details were spelled out in a Memorandum of Agreement between CRTS and the Deputies for Theological Training in SA. The churches there are at a crossroads. Circumstances are deteriorating at the Theological School in Mukhanyo, so they need to set things on a better track as soon as possible. In order to do that, however, certain technical equipment needs to be put in place. All expenses for that will be covered by SA which means there is no budgetary impact for CRTS.
- c. Strategic Planning. Report on Key Thrust 1 - Promotional Plan Proposal (Dr. J. Van Vliet). This report was received with appreciation. It was suggested that there should be more communication with church councils and ministers to help encourage young men to pursue the ministry.
- d. Report of the Executive Committee. The chairman and vice-chairman met with the Principal and reported he has a good working relationship with the staff and other faculty members.
- e. Report of the Principal. Dr. G. H. Visscher gave an update on the incoming and outgoing students, as well as on the upcoming conference which will commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.
- f. Report on Visits to the Lectures at CRTS on March 17 and 18, 2016 were received from Rev. R. Aasman and Dr. A.J. Pol. These reports gave reason for thankfulness since the students are being taught in faithfulness to the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity.

Deputies for Theological Training

- g. The Governance Committee submitted items with suggested changes and additions (e.g. Privacy Policy, Board-Committee Operating Protocol) to the College Handbook that incorporated previous decisions of the board. These suggestions were adopted.
- h. A Report on Visits by the Professors to churches in Ontario was received with thankfulness. Fourteen out of thirty churches have been visited and the remaining sixteen churches will be contacted in the coming months.
- i. The following Conference Reports were received for information:
 - a. ATLA Conference Report - M. Alkema
 - b. Grand Rapids Conference Report - Dr. T. Van Raalte
 - c. ATS Conference Report - Dr. G.H. Visscher
- j. The Board accepted the recommendation of the Academic Committee to reconsider its earlier decision and accept the recommendation of the Principal that CRTS seek membership in the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada and in Christians in Higher Education Canada (CHEC). In our day and age when colleges and universities are being required to offer same-sex couples housing, admission, and any number of similar "rights" it is prudent to be in contact with organizations that keep us informed about the various political tensions and happenings that may adversely affect CRTS and its missions.
- k. Report of the Finance and Property Committee: The Financial Statements for 2015 and the CRTS Budget for 2017 were approved by the Board. The assessment per communicant members was increased from \$85 to \$90.

New business

The date of the next Strategic Planning Session has been scheduled for Wednesday, September 6, 2017. Frank Oostdyk

was appointed as the Strategic Planning Coordinator. The Board agreed to bring in an outside facilitator.

Date of the next Board Meeting: January 12, 2017 at 1 p.m.

Press release and closing

The completion of the Press Release was delegated to the Vice-Chairman in consultation with the Executive and the Principal, and Rev. J. Louwse closed the meeting with prayer and thanksgiving.

On behalf of the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,

Rev. J. Ludwig,

Vice-Chairman/Corresponding Clerk IN

Document Two



CANADIAN REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TEL 905.575.3688 FAX 905.575.0799
110 WEST 27TH STREET, HAMILTON, ONTARIO L9C 5A1

Explanation of Memorandum of Understanding between CRTS and the FRCSA Deputies for Theological Training

June 22, 2016

To: Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Dear brothers in the Lord,

On May 25-26, 2016 a special meeting was held with the Senate, two guests from the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), Dr. Pieter Boon and br. Ronald Meeske, as well as two representatives of the Board of Governors, Revs. Richard Aasman and John Ludwig. The meeting was arranged at the request of the FRCSA. The purpose of this meeting was to explore ways in which CRTS could help the FRCSA in their need for theological education. As this letter will explain, we have reached a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the FRCSA deputies. This MOU makes it possible for the FRCSA to receive some recorded lecture material from CRTS in order to augment the theological training that some of their students are presently receiving.

Since we have had discussions with you, our Australian brothers, about the possibility of some kind of distance education, we felt it was proper of us to explain to you, clearly and openly, what arrangements have been made with South Africa and the reasons behind our decision. In this way we will hopefully avoid any misunderstandings. Allow us first to explain the situation in South Africa, as it has been presented to us recently by brs. Boon and Meeske. Then we will outline their request and our response. Finally, we will make some comments on how this agreement with South Africa fits in with our previous discussions with you.

A. The unique situation of FRCSA 1. The sources of theological education they have used until now are slipping away from them a. As a federation of immigrant churches after WWII, the FRCSA initially had strong bonds with the Dutch churches (Liberated), also because of the linguistic similarity between Afrikaans and Dutch. However, since 2011 the FRCSA officially decided that theological students are discouraged from going to Kampen, even though many church members still feel a strong bond to Kampen because of their history and language. b. A good number of theological students in FRCSA have come through Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC), so it is an important part of their history and present reality.

MTC is an interdenominational effort, originally headed up by Dr. Flip Buys. Some funding for MTC comes from international sources, but the FRCSA plays a significant role by sending students, lecturers, and finances to MTC. They have noticed the standard at MTC fluctuating. This depends greatly on who is teaching there. There is also a large degree of fluidity at MTC since there are many part-time and guest lecturers. FRCSA does not want to completely break their relationship with MTC, but they realize that they cannot depend on MTC for the long-term. 2. They live in a complex situation that requires somewhat personalized theological education a. The theological students from SA come from diverse backgrounds. Some have been born and raised in a Reformed family, school, and community but others are more recent converts. This needs to be kept in mind for theological education. A one-size-fits-all approach to theological education simply will not work in SA. There is also a great need for mentorship in order to guide these men from very different backgrounds. The SA churches already have this kind of mentorship in place, and they are committed to improving it; however, right now they need good Reformed lecture material to work with. b. Secondary (high school) and tertiary (university) education in SA have fallen on hard times. Therefore, even if a school in SA has government accreditation, one must still look deeper and see if the quality of education is really there in a particular institution. For this reason the deputies look carefully at theological students, evaluate their situations, and develop

personalized paths for them, tailored to their own situations and skill levels. 3. Their churches are at a crossroad and if they do not do something soon their situation may become critical so far as a need for ministers and missionaries is concerned. a. There is a high number of vacancies within the FRCSA and its mission work, and there are many more opportunities for mission work as well, but there simply are not enough missionaries and ministers available. Of the theological students trained via FRCSA about half are ministering in FRCSA and half are ministering abroad in sister churches. However, if one focusses only on the white students in SA, then that statistic jumps to about 90% of the students going on to serve outside of SA. This has a big impact on the SA churches resulting in a higher vacancy rate among the Afrikaans-speaking congregations. An additional challenge among the Afrikaans congregations is that the total membership is less than 1500; therefore, theological students who study abroad are not always so inclined to return to SA where “everyone knows them.” b. If the FRCSA does not train Afrikaans-speaking pastors, they will have to continue to call Dutch or English speaking pastors from overseas, which means that those ministers need to learn to speak Afrikaans. An alternative might be for the Afrikaans speaking to switch to English in worship and they do not want to do this. 4. The present plan of the FRCSA re: theological education Synod Bethal 2014 FRCSA decided that all theological students must follow one of the following trajectories: a. Three-year B.A. with language studies (Hebrew III, Greek III) at an accredited tertiary education institution (university), followed by a four-year M.Div. course at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton. This trajectory will include practical work in South Africa during the CRTS summer recess.

b. Foundation course (an individualized program in order to bring high school education up to the proper standard), followed by a B.A. with languages studies (Hebrew III, Greek III) at an accredited tertiary education institution, followed by a four-year M.Div. at the CRTS. This trajectory will include practical work in South Africa during the CRTS summer recess. c. Foundation course, followed by a B.Th. at an accredited tertiary education institution (currently Mukhanyo Theological College or George

Whitfield Theological College), followed by at least two years of language studies (Hebrew II and Greek II) and at least one year at CRTS.

B. CanRC Synods' mandate and the FRCSA request 1. Three CanRC synods, Burlington 2010, Carman 2013 and Dunnville 2016, have encouraged CRTS to consider carefully the need of FRCSA for theological training. Therefore, the Senate and the representatives of the Board felt it was appropriate to meet with the SA brothers and hear out their request. 2. In general the SA deputies request: a. Can CRTS help students who are on trajectory c) (see A.4 above) by providing lecture material either by: i. Written lecture outlines; ii. Audio recordings of lectures; iii. Video recordings of lectures. 3. Additional notes include: a. FRCSA Deputies will supply technical aids and take financial responsibility for that; b. FRCSA Deputies will appoint a full-time mentor in SA, coaching the students through their studies, making use of material from different sources (preferably as much as possible from the CRTS); c. The study trajectory for each student will be completed by sending them to CRTS for a minimum of 12 months; d. Students from SA on trajectory c) will not graduate at the CRTS, but FRCSA Deputies will take responsibility that they meet the Profile and Outcomes set by the FRCSA; e. SA students who are able (academically and practically) to go to CRTS full-time will still be encouraged to do so. 4. The general request leads to two specific requests: a. to begin a pilot program of lecture recording beginning in Sept 2016 for present theological students; b. to have a CRTS prof come to SA for one week per year in order to build the relationship between FRCSA and CRTS, which at this point is more theoretical than personal for many members in their churches.

C. The agreement On the second day of our discussions a draft memorandum of understanding (MOU) was discussed, finetuned and agreed upon, subject to approval by the CRTS Board of Governors and the FRCSA Deputies for Theological Training. The most pertinent sections of this agreement are the following:

1. The FRCSA deputies understand that CRTS is a seminary that is accredited by ATS, an agency that also has specific regulations concerning extension and distance education programs. The FRCSA deputies agree that when they make requests for assistance they will bear this fact in mind, realizing that as CRTS extends assistance it also has to uphold the integrity of the oncampus educational programs at CRTS and these ATS regulations. 2. CRTS and the FRCSA deputies understand that trajectories a) and b) do not need much further discussion at this point.¹ If there is a South African student who wants to follow either of these trajectories, the normal process of application to the M.Div. program at CRTS will apply. However, concerning trajectory c) the FRCSA has the following specific request: that CRTS begin a pilot project in Sept 2016 in which the lectures and classroom interaction in one or two courses be recorded via the Internet so that the theological students in South Africa can benefit from these courses as the equivalent of virtual auditors. CRTS agrees to implement this pilot project, while the deputies of the FRCSA agree: 1) that they will provide funding for the technology necessary to make this happen; 2) that professors at CRTS will not be expected to do any assessment of the South African students. 3. CRTS understands that at this point the relationship between the FRCSA and CRTS is a reality that is more on paper than it is personal. In order to strengthen this relationship and make it more concrete, the deputies of the FRCSA have the following specific request: that each year for a minimum of one week a professor from CRTS will come to visit and give lectures to the FRCSA and their theological students. CRTS agrees to this request for a period of five years, after which time the arrangement will be re-evaluated. The FRCSA agrees to carry the costs for these visits.

D. How does the agreement with South Africa fit with previous discussions with Australia To this point CRTS has used the key phrase “cautiously open” to the whole matter of distance education.² This remains our overall perspective. The ministry of the Word is a high calling and all of us involved want to give our prospective ministers the very best training we possibly can. It is generally recognized that the best learning environment is

still face-to-face, in a classroom, surrounded by a community of learners that interact with each other not only during class-time but also outside of the classroom.

Moving beyond this general perspective, there are certain specific points that should have our mutual attention:

1. The ecclesiastical situation in South Africa is different than Australia. Their rate of vacancy is much higher than Australia. Indeed, some of their congregations are concerned about the longterm potential for them to continue worshiping in their native language that is so dear to them, namely, Afrikaans. Historically, they have had two streams of theological education, Kampen and Mukhanyo, both of which are slipping away from them. In short, their situation is very urgent.

1 See A.4 above. 2 see the “Discussion Paper re: Distance Education” that we sent to you in the past.

2. The FRCSA recognizes that the ideal for theological education is a four-year, on-campus M.Div. degree and they have affirmed this ideal at a synod (see trajectories a) and b) in A.4 above). This fits well with the general perspective articulated above. 3. Concerning trajectory c) the FRCSA is not asking for distance ed. courses but rather for an arrangement that might be compared to virtual auditors who wish to benefit from receiving Reformed lecture material. This is a crucial distinction. South African students on trajectory c) will not be enrolled as students in the M.Div. program at CRTS. They will not be assessed by CRTS professors and they will not receive credit. In short, they will not be taking a distance ed. course. Instead, they will receive video resources that can enhance their knowledge, or as one of the South African delegates said, “We are asking you to share some of your intellectual property with us.” If South Africa were actually asking for distance ed., this would have involved much more work to ensure that all the proper requirements are met, also as this is outlined by ATS. The South Africa deputies are fully aware of this distinction. 4. Recently, CRTS asked the Australian deputies if the visits to Australia could be scaled back slightly from every two years to every three years. It may seem that we are saying something

different to the South Africa churches by agreeing to send a professor for a week or so every year. However, as stated in the agreement, this is a special initiative for a five-year period. As the South African brothers explained to us, their synod has taken a decision to turn toward CRTS for their theological education but CRTS does not have a place in the hearts of many in their federation simply because they have had very little or no prior contact with professors from CRTS, other than Dr. A.J. De Visser who used to live and work there. Given the urgency of their situation overall, it was felt that extra effort was needed for a short period of time to build up a personal relationship with our brothers and sisters in South Africa.

E. Conclusion

We hope that this letter provides at least some background and context to our decision. Undoubtedly we have not been able to explain everything as clearly as we might have hoped. Therefore, if you have any more questions or lingering concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us. Also here at CRTS we appreciate the blessings we have in our fraternal relationship with the churches in Australia and South Africa. Under the Lord's continued guidance, we hope to serve both federations in the best possible way that we can.

In Christ and on behalf of the Senate,

Dr. J. Van Vliet
(vice-principal)

Document Three**Deputies for Training for Ministry
Hamilton Theological Fund**

*Treasurers Financial Report
Statement of Income and Expenditure
10 December 2014 to 28 November 2017*

Opening Balance**\$7,812.55**

Income	2014	2015	2016	2017	Note	Totals
Albany		\$ 15,730	\$ 19,335	\$ 19,188		\$ 54,253
Armadales		\$ 17,485	\$ 20,992	\$ 20,910		\$ 59,387
Baldivis		\$ 10,530	\$ 15,990	\$ 17,548		\$ 44,068
Bunbury		\$ 4,810	\$ 6,478	\$ 6,888		\$ 18,176
Busselton		\$ 3,835	\$ 5,166	\$ 5,166		\$ 14,167
Byford	\$ 4,325	\$ 14,430	\$ 19,926		* #	\$ 38,681
Darling Downs		\$ 10,205	\$ 12,710	\$ 13,612		\$ 36,527
Kelmscott		\$ 14,430	\$ 16,174	\$ 16,400		\$ 47,004
Launceston		\$ 8,840	\$ 12,792		#	\$ 21,632
Legana			\$ 11,302	\$ 6,314		\$ 17,616

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Melville	\$ 2,832.50	\$ 5,525	\$ 6,232	\$ 6,068	*	\$ 20,657.50
Mt Nasura		\$ 9,490	\$ 11,972	\$ 12,792		\$ 34,254
Mundijong		\$ 11,380	\$ 13,860	\$ 10,000	#	\$ 35,240
Rockingham		\$ 12,805	\$ 16,236	\$ 16,154		\$ 45,195
Southern River		\$ 13,325	\$ 18,665	\$ 19,024		\$ 51,014
West Albany		\$ 13,390	\$ 17,302	\$ 17,876		\$ 48,568
Synod Treasury			\$ 7,306.31			\$ 7,306.31
Special Donations				\$ 3,996.85		\$ 3,996.85
Interest		\$ 239.17	\$ 64.36	\$ 61.21		\$ 364.74
Total	\$ 7,157.50	\$ 166,449.17	\$232,502.67	\$191,998.06		\$ 598,107.40

Total Income **\$ 598,107.40**

Expenditure	2014	2015	2016	2017		Totals
Transfers to CRTS		\$ 166,500	\$ 222,337.06	\$ 192,350	^	\$ 581,187.06
Special Donations to CRTS				\$ 3,996.85	@	\$ 3,996.85
Transaction Fees	\$	96	\$ 120	\$ 114		\$ 330
DTM travel to CRTS convocation			\$ 2,327.00			\$ 2,327.00
Dr Smith Tour travel costs			\$ 4,979.31			\$ 4,979.31
Dr Smith gift			\$ 400.94			\$ 400.94
Total	\$ -	\$ 166,596	\$ 230,164.31	\$196,460.85		\$ 593,221.16

Deputies for Theological Training

Total Expenditure **\$ 593,221.16**

Closing Balance

****** **\$ 12,698.79**

Notes

- * These two churches paid in Dec 2014 after the audit on 10 Dec 2014
- # Churches not yet paid 2017 assessment prior to audit (total of \$37,182)
- @ To be used for special project by CRTS
- ** These books were audited on 28 November 2017
- ^ Transfers still owing to CRTS in 2017 totalling \$32,736.94

Deputies for Theological Training

Document Four

Needy Students Fund
Statement of Receipts and Payments
November 2014-November 2017

	Date	
Opening Balance	10/11/2014	\$52,017.48
Receipts		
FRC Albany		\$5,696.00
FRC Armadale		\$20,392.00
FRC Baldivis		\$5,721.55
FRC Bunbury		\$1,896.00
FRC Busselton		\$1,480.00
FRC Byford		\$5,360.00
FRC Darling Downs		\$3,824.00
FRC Kelmscott		\$4,936.00
FRC Launceston		\$3,450.00
FRC Legana		\$1,864.00
FRC Melville		\$1,896.00
FRC Mt Nasura		\$3,584.00
FRC Mundijong		\$2,560.00
FRC Rockingham		\$4,736.00
FRC Southern River		\$5,312.00
FRC West Albany		\$5,080.00
Interest		\$226.83
	Total	\$78,014.38

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Payments

Student Support (PTP)	
Travel Reimbursement	\$2,179.79
10 weeks payment	\$7,500.00

Repayments:

Armada (overpayment)	\$12,000.00
Baldivis (overpayment, own student)	\$2,865.55

Postage	\$32.00
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Total	\$24,577.34
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Closing Balance	10/11/2017	\$105,454.52
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Document Five

Treasurer's Report: Deputies Training for the Ministry

Australian Theological Library Fund
Statement of Receipts and Payments, Funds
November 2014-November 2017

Opening Balance **\$113,525.33** (1)

Receipts \$0.00

Term Deposit Interest

2015 \$4,086.91

2016 \$3,007.32

2017 \$2,533.10

Expenses \$0.00

**Closing Balance of
Fund** **\$123,152.66** (2)

Note 1 Term Deposit. Lodgement Date 14 May 2014

Note 2 12 month Term Deposit maturing 14 May 2018

Document Six

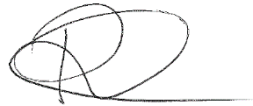
29th November 2017

Dear Deputies,

We have audited the financial books for Training for Ministry, Needy Student Fund & also Theological Library Fund. We have found the books to be in good order and the statements represent a true reflection of the accounts. The audit was completed on the 28 November 2017.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Schoof', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Matthew Schoof

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Jongeling', with a large circular flourish and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Rodney Jongeling

Document Seven

SURVEY SUMMARY RESULTS

Desirability of establishing an Australian Theological Seminary

Below is a summary of the results of the survey, sent to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, regarding the desirability of establishing an Australian theological seminary.

Question 1

Do you, as consistory, think that it is desirable for the FRCA to work towards the establishment of a theological seminary at this time?

Half of the churches (8 out of 16) think it is desirable and half (8 out of 16) think it isn't desirable to work towards establishment of a theological seminary at this time.

Churches in favour of working towards the establishment of a seminary generally pointed to Article 17 CO as substantive grounds. The strengthening of ties with sister churches, the increased attractiveness for potential students locally, the need for a plan should the CRTS become inaccessible, immigration issues, the prosperity we enjoy in Australia, and increased accessibility to training and resources were other reasons these churches gave.

Churches not in favour of working towards the establishment of a seminary suggested the economical infeasibility of such a venture for our smaller federation. They highlighted the great experience and resources provided by the CRTS for our students and the quality of the training currently provided by the staff of the CRTS. Additionally some churches pointed to the potential financial and student impact on the CRTS such an establishment would have, the increased isolation, and the unnecessary eroding of our ties with the CanRC.

Question 2

Do you think it is feasible for us to establish our own seminary at this time?

Do you think that our federation is currently large enough to have its own seminary?

25% of the churches (4 out of 16) think that it is feasible to establish our own seminary at this time, and that our church federation is large enough. 50% of the churches (8 out of 16) think that the size of the federation is not currently large enough to establish our own seminary at this time. One (1) church is unsure as it is too difficult to assess. Three (3) churches – who do not desire the FRCA to work towards the establishment of a seminary – gave no indication as to the feasibility of establishing a seminary at this time.

The main arguments in favour make mention of the fact that the CanRC were about our size when the CRTS began, that we are richly blessed as churches, and that we could easily draw on our retired pastors. Ultimately the feasibility depends on our desire and whether or not we acknowledge the need.

The main arguments against point to our lack of financial capacity to sustain such a seminary, the insufficient size of our federation in regards to communicant members and the continued benefits to the students attending CRTS overseas in regards to the experience they gain.

Do you think it is feasible for us to establish our own seminary at this time?

Right now the churches pay \$82 per communicant member for theological training. At what total level per-communicant member would your church be able to sustain support for theological training?

4 of the churches said it was not viable, 3 churches chose \$100, 3 churches chose \$150, 3 churches chose \$200 and 1 church chose \$250 per communicant member, as a level that the church would be able to sustain in supporting theological training.

Question 3

Are you aware of any young brothers in your congregation that are aspiring to study theology within the next five years?

9 churches are aware of brothers, 7 churches are not.

Question 4

If you answered Yes to Question 3, please give an estimate of the number of young brothers in your congregation aspiring to studying theology within the next five years.

A total of 20 young brothers are aspiring to study theology in the next five years.

Question 5

In your opinion, to what extent would the feasibility of a theological seminary depend on the number of students that would study there in the future?

- A. Greatly; it is a key factor
- B. Somewhat; it is important, but not critical
- C. Minimal; it isn't that important

Most churches see the numbers of students as important, but not critical: 5 churches chose greatly, 5 chose somewhat and 1 chose minimal. The comments bear out the fact that with no student body, there is no seminary. Although it is a necessary requirement, it doesn't necessarily constitute an excellent reformed seminary. There will be the possibility of procuring students from RCNZ. Perhaps the reality of establishing a seminary will encourage more young men to consider studying for the ministry.

Question 6

In your opinion, to what extent would the feasibility of a theological seminary depend on the number of students from Singapore, Indonesia and/or New Zealand who would study there in the future?

- A. Greatly; it is a key factor
- B. Somewhat; it is important, but not critical
- C. Minimal; it isn't that important

Most churches indicated that the feasibility of the theological seminary does not so heavily depend on students from Singapore, Indonesia and/or New Zealand who would stay there in the future: 1 church chose greatly, 7 churches chose somewhat and 4 churches chose minimal. It was indicated a number of times that having a diverse background of students is desirable but not essential. Although it is nice to have foreign students, we should not expect them to attend; primarily (but not exclusively) it is for Australian students. It was indicated, however, that it would benefit the FRCA to cooperate with the RCNZ in the training of theological students, as this would strengthen ties. Additionally, reformed churches in a country like the Philippines represent an opportunity for us to partner with in the future.

Question 7

Presently the Australian Churches give financial support to the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) at 82.00 per communicant member. In the context of considering an Australian Free Reformed Seminary, do you think that we should continue giving financial support to CRTS along-side of support for a theological seminary in Australia?

- A. Yes
- B. No

A slight majority of churches (5 out of 9 churches) indicated that we should continue giving financial support to the CRTS should an Australian seminary eventuate (albeit at a reduced rate or maybe with an eventual phasing out period). A slightly fewer number (4 out of 9) indicated that we cannot support both, should it eventuate, some churches referring to Synod decisions to only support CRTS whilst we don't have our own seminary.

Question 8

When considering a Free Reformed Theological Seminary how important do you consider an Australian government accredited Master of Divinity degree?

Deputies for Theological Training

- A. Essential
- B. More desirable
- C. No, it is irrelevant

It is clear that accreditation is important; it is a legal requirement in fact. 5 churches said it was essential, 6 said desirable. It is clear that the churches see the importance of accreditation (and what that entails) as lying somewhere in the spectrum between essential and desirable. From the commentary from the churches, attaining an accredited M.Div. degree is important for protecting academic credibility, for immigration purposes, for pursuing further (doctoral PhD) studies – future professors, and also for some missionary work.

Question 9

If you are in favour of working towards establishing our own seminary, when do you think that we should seek to do so?

- i) Following Synod 2018
- ii) Following Synod 2021
- iii) Following Synod 2024
- iv) Beyond Synod 2027

The churches in favour of working towards establishing our own seminary generally desire this to take place in the medium to long term future; they are evenly spread between 1, 3 and 4 synods time. More specifically, 1 church chose as soon as possible (ASAP), 3 churches chose following Synod 2018, 3 churches chose following Synod 2024 and 3 churches chose Synod 2027. Some churches indicated that there is much work that needs to be done and that this preparatory period gives time for the student numbers to increase as well as other planning to be done properly. Others highlighted the need for suitable teaching staff to be sought. Some churches indicated that we can just as easily start small; hence an earlier date is better. An earlier starting date would be suitable if we favoured the choice of utilising retired/current pastors at the seminary. Equally an earlier starting date would suit the medium to large

size student body that we currently have. However there continues to be the question of whether our federation size is sufficient; waiting gives opportunity for financial viability to be attained.

Question 10

Please rate the following aspects of the establishment and on-going maintenance of a theological seminary from what you consider to be the least important (1) to most important.

	Average
A. Human resources (professors, lecturers, etc.)	5.3
B. Finances	4.3
C. Governance (Academic & Management)	4.3
D. Student body	4.7
E. Accreditation	3.4
F. Facilities (buildings and otherwise)	2.8
G. Curriculum (programs)	4.9
H. Other	

Many churches found this question difficult to answer, and some declined to rank these aspects. Some churches, correctly, indicated that they are all important aspects of a seminary and thus ranking them would be misleading.

It is clear that of greatest importance are the human resources – the professors of the seminary (even a cursory examination of the CRTS leads one to notice the essential role the godly, reformed men who take charge of this institution play in the training of the young men who attend. The influence of the professors to guide, teach and train the young in a reformed, godly manner in their task is paramount). Secondly, largely out of necessity, is the student body – without this you do not have students to teach. The implication of this secondary rank is that it is more desirable to have a solid, reliable faculty with a smaller student body than the opposite scenario. Thirdly, it is then the curriculum (although the rank of which varied from

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most important to second least important), the governance and the finances. Lastly prioritised are accreditation and facilities.

This ranking is not meant to relegate one aspect to a low, unimportant status, but to merely highlight what is critically important and to ensure that it is done and done well. It is clear that all of the aspects (notably except facilities) are very important, for various good reasons.

Of particular note is the high importance of attaining wise, godly, qualified, pedagogically sound professors to lead in this task.

Document Eight

Church Comments (a collation of common ideas)

Question 1

<i>Yes (desirable)</i>	<i>No (not desirable)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Immigration is more difficult with Canada</i> • <i>Developments with Kampen in the RCN show it's wise to consider feasibility; this leaves us only with one option (CRTS) – it would be good to have another option</i> • <i>Although the federation is not currently large enough, we could draw on the support from RCNZ, Singapore</i> • <i>Article 17 CO sanctions it</i> • <i>We have unprecedented prosperity</i> • <i>Other churches (such as China,</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A large resource is required to support a seminary; not economically feasible</i> • <i>It broadens the horizons of students to study overseas; it is a great learning environment; students who go to CRTS get to interact with peers from a diversity of backgrounds and experience life in another federation of churches – this is very helpful for the student's development and understanding.</i> • <i>The students have access to fantastic resources (library, librarian) at the CRTS.</i> • <i>Student numbers are limited in Australia.</i>

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<p><i>Indonesia) have their own seminary</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It will make it more attractive for students to take up theological training</i> • <i>We need a backup plan</i> • <i>Grounds given in the Synod Baldivis 2015 decision:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>1. Having only one theological training centre in the world does not prepare us well for the possibility, and may God graciously prevent it, if for any reason, the CRTS unavailable due to political economic or other reasons.</i> ○ <i>2. The CO states that the Churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training of the ministry.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Should the Hamilton's Seminary be struggling to cope that would change the scenario.</i> • <i>If Aust. were to commence the Canadian seminary would lose a lot of financial support.</i> • <i>It may also be seen to yet another step towards full isolation; we are geographically quite isolated; it is beneficial to use a common training facility with the CanRC.</i> • <i>A previous Synod (1990) stated it to be good stewardship to support the Hamilton seminary; historical ties / it remains our mutual obligation</i> • <i>CRTS supplies us with excellent pastors; it meets our needs</i> • <i>Students studying in Australia will be more isolated</i>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Our church is growing in terms of sister relations (with RCNZ and Singapore)</i> • <i>Young men will not need to leave their home to study abroad, thereby making theological studies more accessible.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The professors are faithful men who offer excellent training and nurture godly spirit among the students; it would take many years to build up a similar program of study</i>
<p><i>Other Comments</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Deputies should monitor developments in Canada about the theological challenges facing the CRTS.</i>

Question 2

<i>Yes (large enough)</i>	<i>No (not large enough)</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>CanRC about our size when the CRTS began</i> • <i>Our standard of living is greater than the CRTS at commencement</i> • <i>We are richly blessed as churches; we could easily afford it</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Not economically feasible; our financial strength is too small</i> • <i>Students graduating would be better suited to serving in the CanRC as our churches are clumped in the SW of W.A.</i> • <i>The \$82 per c.m. w is substantial</i>

Deputies for Theological Training

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We could draw on our retired pastors</i> • <i>As shown in church history, it does not require large numbers for churches to train students for the ministry – the feasibility depends on us [FRCA] acknowledging the need (or desirability) and then “putting our shoulders to the wheel”</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It takes a lot of resources for a small bond</i> • <i>The CRTS still serves the needs of the FRCA</i> • <i>Our federation is too small (16 churches, approximately 2700 communicant members).</i> • <i>Currently running the CRTS costs about five times the \$82 per c.m. that we pay.</i> • <i>Asking current ministers to contribute to a theological seminary would come at the cost to their work to their local congregation</i>
<p><i>Unsure</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Too difficult to assess; there are too many unknowns at this stage</i>

Document Nine

Survey Summary Results

Survey Questions		Albany	Armadale	Baldvis	Bunbury	Busseton	Byford	Darling Downs	Kelmscott	Launceston	Legana	Melville	Mt. Nasura	Mundijong	Rockingham	S River	W. Albany	Summary
1	Desire FRCA Seminary?	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	8/16 Yes 8/16 No
2	Is FRCA federation large enough?	No	No answer	Implied "No"	No	No answer	No	Yes	Yes	No answer	No	No	Yes	?	Yes	No	Implied "No"	4/10 Yes 5/10 No
2	Possible levy?				?		100 - 150	150	200		100	100	250	150		100		\$147
3	Possible students?	No	Yes		No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	8/15 Yes 7/15 No
4	How many students?		2	1			2	2	4			1		1	5	2		20 5 Greatly
5	Does feasibility depend on number of students?		Some	Greatly	Greatly	Greatly	Greatly	Some	Some	Some	Some	Some	Minimal	Some		Greatly		7 Some 1 Minimal 1 Greatly
6	Does feasibility depend on foreign students?	No		Some	Greatly	Minimal	Some	Some	Some	Minimal	Some	Some	Minimal	Minimal		Some		7 Some 4 Minimal
7	Should we continue support for CRTS?	N/A		No*	Yes* ¹		No* ²	Yes* ¹	No			Yes* ³	Yes	No		Yes		5 Yes (conditional) 3 No
7	How much support for CRTS?			Full*							* ¹			* ¹		Full * ¹		2 Full
8	Is accreditation important?			Yes, Desirable	Yes, Essential	Yes, Desirable	Yes, Desirable	Yes, Desirable	Yes, Essential	Yes, Essential	Yes, Desirable	Yes, Essential	Yes, Desirable (Careful)	Yes, Desirable		Yes, Essential		5 Essential 6 Desirable (be careful)

Deputies for Theological Training

9	Which year should we work towards?	N/A	2027	2024	2024	ASAP	2018	2024 – 2027	2018	2018	2027	1 ASAP 3 2018 3 2024 3 2027		
10	Importance of:													
	a. human resources		4	2	1	6	6	All equal	6	8	6	7	7	5.3
	b. Finances		3	5	6	5	4		5	6	2	4	3	4.3
	c. Governance		1	1	7	4	2		8	7	3	6	4	4.3
	d. Student body		2	7	4	7	5		3	4	5	5	5	4.7
	e. Accreditation		7	4	5	1	3		4	2	?	3	2	3.4
	f. Facilities		6	6	3	3	1		2	3	1	2	1	2.8
	g. Curriculum		5	3	2	2	7		7	5	4	8	6	4.9
	h. Other								1* ⁴	1		1		1.0

Notes:

Albany and Kelmscott (Kelmscott does indicate, in favour of) intend to send response later; W. Albany first wants to scrutinize Synod's decisions before replying.

* Cannot support both; but so long as we do not have our own, will fully support CRTS

*¹ possibly phase out

*² Refer to decision only to support while not having our own

*³ Possible reduce rate

*⁴ The only qualification is that it must be academically sound

Document Ten



CANADIAN REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TEL 905.575.3688 FAX 905.575.0799
110 WEST 27TH STREET, HAMILTON, ONTARIO L9C 5A1

September 8, 2017

Dear brothers,

Thank-you for your letter dated March 15, 2017. We would have answered sooner, however, as you know, the Board of Governors of CRTS only meets twice a year, in September and January, so this was our first opportunity to respond.

Allow us to begin by expressing our gratitude for the fruitful working relationship we have in seeking to educate men for the great privilege and responsibility of serving as ministers of the holy gospel. It is a noble endeavour to be involved in and we constantly need the Lord's blessing to do it to the best of our abilities. With this in mind we also understand that the matter of theological education and the possibility of starting a seminary in Australia continues to have a place on the agendas of your general synods.

Although we all trust in the Lord's provision for the future, at this time you have asked us to comment on "what impact the establishment of a FRCA seminary would have on CRTS." Indeed, we will answer that question to the best of our ability below but may we first respectfully make a couple of opening comments. As you mention in your letter, the word *feasible* or *feasibility* features prominently in your mandate. Would it not be good, though, if the word *optimal* would also have a central place in this discussion. In other words, the question should not only be "Can the FRCA start their own seminary in the near future?" but more importantly "Is starting an FRCA seminary in the near future *the very best way* to prepare Australian and Canadian students for the ministry?"

Furthermore, it seems to us that the discussion should not only include Australia and Canada, but also our mutual sister churches in South Africa. In a previous letter, dated June 22, 2016, we made you aware of the memorandum of understanding that CRTS and the FRCSA have in order to supply them with some lecture material in digital format to help especially their Sotho-speaking students. As mentioned previously, this is not distance education as such, since these men are not students of CRTS. It is simply a small way in which we can help South Africa in their present circumstances. As a federation you also have strong ties with FRCSA and in our discussions about theological education we need to keep their needs in mind as well. In addition, although it is not our central focus at this moment, our three federations have all been involved in mission work and, under the Lord's blessing, some of these mission efforts have flourished to the point of needing some kind of theological education as well. All this to say, we have a lot on our collective plate and we do well to consider carefully how we go forward from here.

Returning now to your question about the impact a possible FRCA seminary would have on CRTS, we see three major impacts, two of which you already anticipated in your letter: student numbers, finances, and the availability of men to serve as professors. We'll comment about each one in more detail below.

Loss of Australian students

As you mention in your letter the number of Australian students studying at CRTS so far has averaged about one every other year. That is not a very high number; nevertheless, the loss of such students in the future would have a much greater impact than the numbers might suggest. Australian students come to the seminary from a different ecclesiastical situation. Their presence allows them to contribute to the overall student body, not just in terms of numbers, but also in terms of their different background, experiences, and perspectives. Be assured that the contributions of these Australia students have been a great blessing to the learning community at CRTS, and our student body would definitely be weakened in character if they would no longer come.

Added to this, the interchange of Canadian and Australian students and pastors has benefited both federations. Without the presence of Australian students at seminary, Canadian graduates and pastors may not have been nearly as inclined to go and serve in the Australian churches or vice-versa. In short, CRTS has been an institution that has helped to bond our federations together. In this way we are privileged to give concrete expression to Christ's catholic, church-gathering work.

May we also be so bold as to comment that from an Australian perspective, it is important to note the benefits of having students study in Canada. For one thing they are exposed to a different Reformed federation and their horizons are broadened. Beyond that, though, the Scriptures speak about a prophet not being welcome in his own hometown. It is striking to note how many Australian students have not taken their first call in the Australian churches, even if they may return to the FRCA at some later point. In many ways this has been healthy, both for men starting out in the pastorate, and also for the churches. The establishment of an Australian seminary would likely change this: most seminary students in Western Australia would end up serving in a local church where they may be fairly well known and that is not necessarily healthy.

Financial costs

The Australian churches currently contribute to CRTS at the same level per communicant member as the Canadian churches. In the 2016 financial year that was at a rate of \$85 per communicant member, which resulted in a contribution of about \$220,000 AUD, which is approximately the same amount of Canadian dollars. Given the number of communicant members in our federation, if Australian support would be withdrawn, there would be about a 20% increase in the assessment for Canadian churches.

We certainly do not want this discussion to rest on financial matters. At the same time, we would ask that you bear in mind that particularly in some places in Canada, such as Ontario, there is no government support for Christian education and it is not uncommon for families with children in elementary and high school to be paying \$1300 per month for Reformed education. Therefore,

increases to assessments such as the seminary do have a greater impact on these families.

Need for seminary professors

There is one more major impact and it requires our careful attention. One of the greatest challenges in establishing a seminary is the need for theological professors. These men generally need to have a doctoral degree, to have ministry experience, and to be well respected in the churches. While it is undoubtedly possible to recruit and appoint more men to serve as professors, we need to seriously ask ourselves whether or not this is the best allocation of our ministerial resources, if we may use that term.

To explain further, setting up a new seminary in Australia would require, at a minimum, three full-time professors plus some part-time lectures, and an additional professor would be needed as soon as that would be feasible. To start with any less instructors than that would be to risk burning out the men who would be asked to serve in those capacities. There are already five professors in Hamilton now, and the South African churches have recently decide to appoint one anchor theologian to guide their theological training, especially for their black students. If Australia needs three or four more professors in the near future, we are quickly moving in the direction of needing 10 professors from within our three federations. Naturally, this need carries forward into the long term as professors retire. Do we have, and can we sustain, supplying 8-10 professorial positions in our midst?

Yet the problem is compounded by the present vacancy rates in our federations. According to our calculations the CanRC has a present vacancy rate of around 20% (12 vacancies) and Australia has around 15% (2 vacancies). Given the number of ministers slated to retire in the coming years, there is the potential that this vacancy rate could rise significantly higher yet. We need to seriously consider whether or not it is good stewardship to establish a second seminary for the same constituency of churches that currently supports CRTS. Are the benefits of doing this so great that it justifies pulling some of our best men out of the ministry or away from the mission field? Again, even if it is

feasible, is this the optimal way of approaching theological education at this time?

As you can tell from the paragraphs above, we do have some serious concerns about the impact on CRTS and the CanRC federation, if the FRCA would start their own seminary. Instead we would like to suggest another way. Back in 2013 we published a discussion paper on distance education which was summed up in the phrase “cautiously open.” A recent submission to your next synod, which originated with the Rockingham consistory, stated that “After much effort was put in the attempt to persuade the Seminary in Hamilton to help facilitate such a proposal, Synod Baldivis unfortunately had to conclude that Hamilton has effectively closed the door to such an idea.” We are not sure why and how Synod Baldivis came to that conclusion. We could not find much detail in the acts of that synod. However, in fact, we have *not* closed the door to such an idea. We remain cautiously open to the whole matter of distance education and the use of technology to shrink distances in education—*open* because technology continues to advance rapidly and *cautious* because it is so important to maintain the quality and integrity of training for the next generation of preachers.

For example, our principal, Dr. G.H. Visscher, has attended conferences on distance education. We are tracking the developments and pilot projects in ATS that is soon making room in its regulations for the greater use of technology and distance education. This may well open possibilities for us that did not exist four years ago. Moreover, this week, on September 6th, this whole topic of technology and distance education was the central point of discussion at our strategic planning session. In fact, at the end of the day, the strategic planning session gave the highest level of support for focussing on this area in the next 3-5 years. As Board we have now decided to: “appoint an ad hoc committee to study how CRTS could use the possibilities and potential of technology within the context of distance education with a primary focus on serving our supporting churches, as well as their mission works, in the best possible way without sacrificing the integrity and quality of training for the ministry.”

Deputies for Theological Training

This committee has been asked to propose a more detailed mandate to the Board in January 2018. We would like to invite two brothers from Australia to join this committee. We believe that at this point when our mandate is being formed, your input would enhance our discussion and lead to a better and more well-rounded outcome. We also intend to invite representatives from our sister churches in South Africa to join the committee for this exciting exploration of how we can together find a way that moves theological education forward for each of our federations.

We sincerely hope that you will join us in this venture. The light of the holy gospel is needed so much in this dark world. We have the opportunity to stand together and put our collective shoulders underneath this all-important task, to the benefit of Christ's church and the glory of his name.

Summing up then, we do have three significant concerns about the possibility of the FRCA starting your own seminary at this time. First, we feel it would weaken our student body by making it less diverse. Second, it would cause about a 20% increase in seminary assessments for the Canadian churches. Third, and most importantly, it would generate a significantly larger demand for ministers with advanced degrees who could serve as professors while at the same time increasing the vacancy rates in our federations, which are already high, especially in Canada. More positively, though, we see an opportunity to improve, and perhaps even expand, the reach of theological education through technology in the context of distance education. This has the potential to make things better for our respective federations in Australia, South Africa, Canada, as well as their mission work.

Please let us know at your earliest convenience if you would like to have some brothers from your midst on the proposed committee. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Once again, brothers, thank-you very much for support of, and involvement in, training ministers of the gospel for the church of our Lord.

In Christ,

On behalf of the Board of CRTS,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JL', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev. John Ludwig
Vice-Chairman and Corresponding Clerk

Document 11

Financial Feasibility

Preamble

In determining the financial feasibility of a theological college, it was decided to consider two scenarios from a financial perspective. We present these two fairly different scenarios, so that the aspect of financial feasibility of the establishment of a college can be determined. These are not the only two scenarios which might be pursued. Synod may decide to interpolate between these scenarios, or adopt a different structure altogether.

As with any future planning, there are unknown aspects which are often difficult to estimate. However, as much as possible, deputies have endeavoured to be accurate and reasonable in making assumptions.

The Two Scenarios

The two scenarios that are considered are presented below, with the major assumptions.

Scenario 1	1.	Use of church-affiliated buildings for facilities in the short term.
A short to medium term plan ⁴	2.	Accreditation is not pursued as a matter of high importance.
	3.	There is a gradual phasing out of support for CRTS over a period of a number of years, following the establishment of a theological college. The reduction in support for CRTS could either be done prior to or after commencement of a college.
	4.	Few full-time staff is employed,

⁴ Scenario 1B is scenario 1 with the option of phasing out CRTS support during the first four years.

with more emphasis placed on the use of part-time staff (e.g. retired ministers as lecturers).

Scenario 2
A medium to long
term plan⁵

1. The establishment of an independent venue and facility for the college.
2. The FRCA are primarily responsible for the subsidy of student tuition fees
3. No use FEE-HELP would occur.
4. Support for the CRTS would discontinue as from establishment date of a theological college. The intended establishment date would be made known to the CanRC well in advance so that they could plan financially for when the support from FRCA would cease.
5. As a consequence (of previous assumption), the levy applied to FRCA would increase over a number of years prior to the establishment of a FRCA Theological College, so as to save funds for establishment.
6. Accreditation is obtained prior to establishment, by the premediated appointment of a Board of Governors who would be mandated to obtain accreditation prior to commencement.

⁵ Scenario 2B is scenario 2 with the option of phasing out CRTS support during the first three years.

7. Establishment of a full Board of Governors, Senate, Principal and Staff.

Rationale

Scenario 1 rationale

1. Existing church buildings have many rooms which are often unused and would serve the functions of a small fledgling college well.
2. Accreditation would be an additional cost and may come with hidden restrictions in terms of structural operations and/or curricula.
3. A smaller college with few full time professors could also make use of the retired ministers in our federation (as lecturers).

Scenario 2 rationale

1. There is much preparation work to do, in regards to a fully functioning college. Prerequisite criteria, such as governance, accreditation, curricula, financial reserves and the financial carrying capacity of the FRCA tend to imply a medium to long term establishment date.
2. An independent, dedicated venue would be ideal for the delivery of quality accredited theological courses of study.
3. An independent venue would potentially foster a community of learning both for the student body as well as for the broader FRCA federation. Although the first task of a theological college is to serve the churches in the training of young men with the learning environment which fosters this, a theological college could also serve the churches through information evenings, production of written material and via other means.
4. The FRCA are primarily responsible for the training process.

5. The FRCA would clearly articulate to the CanRC of any intended establishment, so that the CanRC could increase their financial commitments to absorb the eventual loss of the support from the FRCA.
6. The FRCA would increase the church assessment levy gradually by \$6 per year over a nine year period to collect for the purchase of land and building of a venue.

Budgets

Below are the proposed budgets for the above four scenarios.

Deputies for Theological Training

Scenario 1 (Begin in 2022, local premises, no CRTS support)					
Income	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Church Assessments (1)	564,230	573,384	582,660	592,040	601,344
Student Fees (17% ACT tuition max.) (2)	4,234	6,351	8,468	10,585	8,468
Total Income	568,464	579,735	591,128	602,625	609,812
Expenses					
Salaries - Professors (4)	330,000	336,600	343,332	350,199	357,203
Salaries - Part time staff (5)	60,000	61,200	62,424	63,672	64,946
Salaries - Administration (6)	30,000	30,600	31,212	31,836	32,473
Superannuation (7)	39,900	40,698	41,512	42,342	43,189
Emeritus Fund (8)	32,235	32,880	33,537	34,208	34,892
Online resources (ATLA, Logos) (11)	6,000	6,120	6,242	6,367	6,495
Lease/Rent (13)	40,000	40,800	41,616	42,448	43,297
Supplies & General Administration (14)	4,000	4,080	4,162	4,245	4,330
Utilities (15)	3,000	3,060	3,121	3,184	3,247
IT services (16)	3,000	3,060	3,121	3,184	3,247
Professional Development (17)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Other Expenses (18)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Total Expenses	558,135	569,298	580,684	592,297	604,143
Profit / Loss	10,329	10,437	10,444	10,328	5,669
Cashflow	10,329	20,766	31,211	41,538	47,207

Deputies for Theological Training

Scenario 1B (Begin in 2022, local premises, phased out CRTS support 4 years)					
Income	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Church Assessments (1)	746,775	706,491	663,390	613,700	575,360
student Fees (17% ACT tuition max.) (2)	4,234	6,351	8,468	10,585	8,468
Total Income	751,009	712,842	671,858	624,285	583,828
Expenses					
CRTS support (3)	217,726	167,920	115,128	59,204	-
Salaries - Professors (4)	330,000	336,600	343,332	350,199	357,203
Salaries - Part time staff (5)	30,000	30,600	31,212	31,836	32,473
Salaries - Administration (6)	30,000	30,600	31,212	31,836	32,473
Superannuation (7)	37,050	37,791	38,547	39,318	40,104
Emeritus Fund (8)	32,235	32,880	33,537	34,208	34,892
Online resources (ATLA, Logos) (11)	6,000	6,120	6,242	6,367	6,495
Lease/Rent (13)	40,000	40,800	41,616	42,448	43,297
Supplies & General Administration (14)	4,000	4,080	4,162	4,245	4,330
Utilities (15)	3,000	3,060	3,121	3,184	3,247
IT services (16)	3,000	3,060	3,121	3,184	3,247
Professional Development (17)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Other Expenses (18)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Total Expenses	743,011	703,710	661,635	616,641	568,585
Profit / Loss	7,998	9,132	10,224	7,644	15,243
Cash flow	7,998	17,129	27,353	34,997	50,240

Deputies for Theological Training

Scenario 2 (Begin in 2028, no continued CRTS support)

Income	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Church Assessments (1)	581,048	597,624	614,496	631,960	650,016
Student Fees (17% ACT tuition max.) (2)	8,468	10,585	14,819	16,936	16,936
Total Income	589,516	608,209	629,315	648,896	666,952
Expenses					
Salaries - Professors (4)	330,000	336,600	343,332	350,199	357,203
Salaries - Part time staff (5)	50,000	51,000	52,020	53,060	54,122
Salaries - Administration (6)	75,000	76,500	78,030	79,591	81,182
Superannuation (7)	43,225	44,090	44,971	45,871	46,788
Emeritus Fund (8)	32,235	32,880	33,537	34,208	34,892
Affiliation fee (9)	3,476	2,476	2,476	2,476	2,476
Affiliation Admin fee (9.5% tuition) (10)	4,732	5,915	8,281	9,464	9,464
Online resources (ATLA, Logos) (11)	7,000	7,140	7,283	7,428	7,577
Maintenance (12)	20,000	20,400	20,808	21,224	21,649
Supplies & General Administration (14)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Utilities & Insurances (15)	7,000	7,140	7,283	7,428	7,577
IT services (16)	3,000	3,060	3,121	3,184	3,247
Professional Development (17)	7,500	7,650	7,803	7,959	8,118
Other Expenses (18)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Total Expenses	593,168	605,050	619,350	632,705	645,120
Profit / Loss	- 3,652	3,159	9,965	16,192	21,832
Cashflow	- 3,652	- 493	9,472	25,664	47,496

Deputies for Theological Training

Scenario 2B (Begin in 2028, phased out CRTS support 3 years)					
Income	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Church Assessments (1)	836,238	767,220	693,384	619,150	636,840
Student Fees (17% ACT tuition max.) (2)	8,468	10,585	14,819	16,936	16,936
Total Income	844,706	777,805	708,203	636,086	653,776
Expenses					
CRTS Contribution (3)	241,449	165,558	85,116	-	-
Salaries - Professors (4)	330,000	336,600	343,332	350,199	357,203
Salaries - Part time staff (5)	50,000	51,000	52,020	53,060	54,122
Salaries - Administration (6)	75,000	76,500	78,030	79,591	81,182
Superannuation (7)	43,225	44,090	44,971	45,871	46,788
Emeritus Fund (8)	32,235	32,880	33,537	34,208	34,892
Affiliation fee (9)	3,476	2,476	2,476	2,476	2,476
Affiliation Admin fee (9.5% tuition) (10)	4,732	5,915	8,281	9,464	9,464
Online resources (ATLA, Logos) (11)	7,000	7,140	7,283	7,428	7,577
Maintenance (12)	20,000	20,400	20,808	21,224	21,649
Supplies & General Administration (14)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Utilities & Insurances (15)	7,000	7,140	7,283	7,428	7,577
IT services (16)	3,000	3,060	3,121	3,184	3,247
Professional Development (17)	7,500	7,650	7,803	7,959	8,118
Other Expenses (18)	5,000	5,100	5,202	5,306	5,412
Total Expenses	834,617	770,608	704,466	632,705	645,120
Profit / Loss	10,089	7,197	3,737	3,382	8,656
Cashflow	10,089	17,286	21,023	24,405	33,061

Deputies for Theological Training

Budget Notes

1. **Church Assessment**

Current church assessment is dependent on two things: number of communicant members and the levy at which the church is assessed per communicant members.

Currently our federation has 4,760 members, with 2,754 communicant members.

FRCA Population

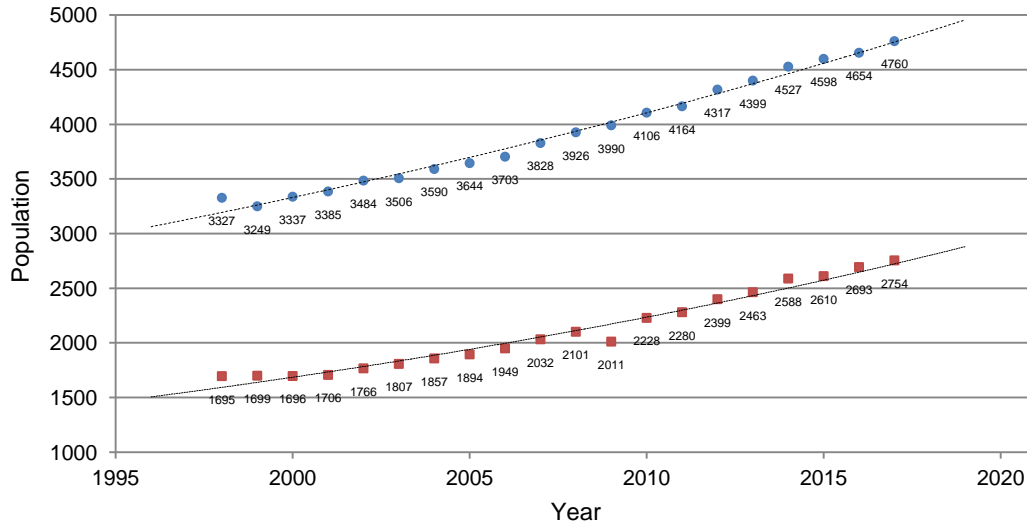


Figure 1 Historical FRCA Populations

Based on the church statistics provided the deputies each year, past populations were analysed as in the Figure 1. It was determined that from 1998 to 2017 there is a 2.09% growth in total membership p.a. and a 2.82% growth in communicant membership p.a.

At these rates the following forecast populations were made in Table 1.

Table 1 Forecast FRCA Population (Total and Communicant Members, CM)

Year	Total	CM	CRTS commitment (at \$82 pcm)
2019	5,171	3,052	\$250,264
2020	5,281	3,138	\$257,316
2021	5,393	3,227	\$264,614
2022	5,507	3,319	\$272,158
2023	5,624	3,413	\$279,866
2024	5,744	3,510	\$287,820
2025	5,865	3,610	\$296,020
2026	5,990	3,712	\$304,384
2030	6,515	4,152	\$340,464
2035	7,236	4,776	\$391,632
2040	8,037	5,494	\$450,508

For the purposes of this analysis, it was assumed that both versions of Scenario 1 begin in 2022 (short-term) and that both versions of Scenario 2 begin in 2028 (mid to long-term).

The assumptions, in terms of communicant members for both versions of Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 are summarised in the Table 2 below.

Table 2 FRCA communicant members (CM)

Scenario 1		Scenario 2	
Year	CM	Year	CM
2022	3,319	2028	3,926
2023	3,413	2029	4,038
2024	3,510	2030	4,152
2025	3,610	2031	4,270
2026	3,712	2032	4,392

In terms of the assessment per communicant member, this levy is indicated in Table 3.

Table 3 FRCA Historical Levy

Synod Year	Levy (PCM)
2003	\$40
2006	\$50
2009	\$65
2012	\$65
2015	\$82

The assumed levy assessment for each scenario is given in the Table 4 below. These levies were chosen mostly to ensure a break even margin in each scenario.

Table 4 FRCA Assumed Levy (\$ pcm)

Scenario 1		Scenario 1B	
Year	Levy	Year	Levy
2022	\$170	2022	\$225
2023	\$168	2023	\$207
2024	\$166	2024	\$189
2025	\$164	2025	\$170
2026	\$162	2026	\$155

Scenario 2		Scenario 2B	
Year	Levy	Year	Levy
2028	\$148	2028	\$213
2029	\$148	2029	\$190
2030	\$148	2030	\$167
2031	\$148	2031	\$145
2032	\$148	2032	\$145

Church Assessment & College Premises

In relation to both versions of Scenario 2, it is assumed that a dedicated facility (land has been purchased and a suitable venue has been built) has been established prior to 2028 and the commencement of the college.

Further to scenario 2, if the levy were to increase from the current \$82 pcm, as outlined in Table 5, then it is envisaged that close to \$1.1 million (\$1,132,816) could be raised for the purpose of purchasing land and building premises for the college. It would mean that the current levy would increase at a rate of \$7 per year for the next nine years. Table 5 shows the contributions to CRTS as well as the progressive saving for establishing premises.

Table 5 Scenario 2 proposed levy (2019 – 2032)

Year	CM	Levy (PCM)	Total Levy	CRTS Contribution	Saving
2019	3,052	\$89	\$271,628	\$250,264	\$21,364
2020	3,138	\$96	\$301,248	\$257,316	\$43,932
2021	3,227	\$103	\$332,381	\$264,614	\$67,767
2022	3,319	\$110	\$365,090	\$272,158	\$92,932
2023	3,413	\$117	\$399,321	\$279,866	\$119,455
2024	3,510	\$125	\$438,750	\$287,820	\$150,930
2025	3,610	\$132	\$476,520	\$296,020	\$180,500
2026	3,712	\$139	\$515,968	\$304,384	\$211,584
2027	3,818	\$146	\$557,428	\$313,076	\$244,352
2028	3,926	\$148	\$581,048	Total	\$1,132,816
2029	4,038	\$148	\$597,624		
2030	4,152	\$148	\$614,496		
2031	4,270	\$148	\$631,960		
2032	4,392	\$148	\$650,016		

2. Income from Tuition

Fees

As a guide, educational institutions affiliated with the ACT (Australian College of Theology) can set fees at no more than \$8,302 per semester (equivalent to 16 credit points) for a Master of Divinity program, which runs for 3 years full time (3Y FT). It is assumed that the FRCA would considerably reduce the cost of tuition to the student, such that students would be required to pay only 17% of the actual tuition fee set by the ACT. Since the program of education at the college would run for 4 years, this would mean that the total tuition fee would be

spread out over the four years, hence effectively paying 75% per year. Students would thus pay \$2,117 per year. Table 6 summarises this information.

Table 6 Tuition Fees for FRCA and students

	Yearly Tuition (3Y FT)	Total Tuition (3Y FT)	Yearly Tuition
Maximum ACT Tuition	\$ 16,604	\$ 49,812	\$ 12,453
FRCA Student Tuition	\$ 2,823	\$ 8,468	\$ 2,117

Student Body

The estimates of student population are given in the Table 7, Table 8 and Table 9 below, for each version of each scenario. Whilst it is difficult to determine an exact number, there are a number of reasons as to these estimates:

- i) CRTS population is typically around 10 students. A college of the FRCA, with a smaller federation size of about 50%, would conceivably have a smaller student body.
- ii) Currently deputies have a list of 11 young men intending to study theology with a view to entering the ministry. Realistically not all of them end up doing so.
- iii) Establishing a college earlier would conceivably mean a lower stable population, due to graduation. Hence versions of scenario 1 assume a slightly lower population.
- iv) If a college is established, the profile of the ministry would become more tangible. It is reasonable to expect a slow but gradual increase in the number of men interested in studying.

Table 7 Anticipated Student Body (Scenario 1)

Students	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Current enrolments		AB	ABC	ABCD	CDE
New enrolments	AB	C	D	E	
Total student body	AB	ABC	ABCD	ABCDE	CDE
Graduating students				AB	C
Totals	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Current enrolments		2	3	4	3
New enrolments	2	1	1	1	1
Total student body	2	3	4	5	4
Graduating students				2	1

Table 8 Anticipated Student Body (Scenario 2)

Students	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Current enrolments		ABC	ABCD	ABCD EF	DEFG
New enrolments	ABC	D	EF	G	H
Total student body	ABC	ABCD	ABCD EF	ABCD EFG	DEFG H
Graduating students				ABC	D
Totals	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Current enrolments		3	4	6	4
New enrolments	3	1	2	1	1
Total student body	3	4	6	7	5
Graduating students				3	1

Table 9 Anticipated Student Body

Scenario 1		Scenario 2	
Year	Students	Year	Students
2022	2	2028	3
2023	3	2029	4
2024	4	2030	6
2025	5	2031	7
2026	4	2032	5

3. Support for CRTS

In terms of support for the CRTS the assumptions for each scenario are given in Table 10.

Table 10 Support for CRTS

Scenario 1	Scenario 1B	Scenario 2	Scenario 2B
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No support for CRTS Sudden cessation of support prior to establishment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for CRTS in first 4 years at 80%, 60%, 40% and 20% of full support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No support for CRTS Prior to establishment, support as per Table 5 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for CRTS in first 3 years at 75%, 50% and 25% of full support

Due to the more imminent establishment of a college in versions of Scenario 1, Scenario 1B assumes support for 4 years, reducing linearly, as opposed to support for 3 years in Scenario 2B.

4. **Salaries – Professors**

The proposed arrangements regarding academic staff are given in Table 11 below.

Table 11 Arrangements Regarding Academic Staff

Scenario 1	Scenario 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 FT professors • \$110,000 salary p.a. • 2% increase p.a. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 FT professors • \$110,000 salary p.a. • 2% increase p.a.

5. **Salaries – Part time staff**

The assumed arrangements regarding part time staff as they relate to the different versions of scenarios are given in Table 12 below.

Table 12 Arrangements Regarding Part Time Staff

Scenario 1	Scenario 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 PT staff • \$30,000 salary p.a. • 2% increase p.a. • Retired minister or qualified person • Based on 1.5 – 2 days per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 PT staff • \$25,000 salary p.a. • 2% increase p.a. • Retired minister or qualified person • Based on 1 – 1.5 days per week

6. **Salaries – Administration**

The assumed arrangements regarding administration staff as they relate to the different versions of scenarios are given in Table 13 below.

Table 13 Arrangements Regarding Administration Staff

Scenario 1	Scenario 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 admin staff • \$30,000 salary p.a. • 2% increase p.a. • 2 days per week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 admin staff • \$75,000 salary p.a. • 2% increase p.a. • Full time position

7. Superannuation

Superannuation calculations in all scenarios are based on 9.5% of the annual salary.

8. Emeritus Fund

The Theological College would be responsible also for contributing to the emeritus fund for the professors in its employment, when they retire. Currently this amount is set for churches at \$10,745 per minister per year. CPI of 2% is applied to this amount in subsequent years.

9. Affiliation Fee

The cost of affiliating with an educational institutional such as the ACT is a one off \$1,000 application fee and an ongoing \$2,476 per annum.

10. Affiliation Administration Fee

The administration cost of affiliation is 9.5% of the tuition set by the ACT (which is \$8,302 per semester per student for three years). The cost to the college would therefore be \$1,183 per year per student (9.5% of the equivalent yearly maximum fee set by ACT of \$12,453). This amount represents about 1–2% of the annual budget.

11. Online Resources

This is an approximate cost for online resources such as Logos or ATLA library resources.

12. Maintenance

In both versions of Scenario 1 there is no maintenance cost as the premises are leased or rented. In both versions of Scenario 2 the cost of maintenance assumes ownership of our own premises.

13. Lease / Rent

The lease of a suitable premises or the rent of church building is an estimated average cost. If a church building is used, the rent may be significantly less initially.

14. Supplies & General Admin

This is an estimated cost.

15. Utilities & Insurances

In both versions of scenario 1 utilities would only include gas, water and electricity. This is an estimated cost.

In both versions of scenario 2 utilities & insurances would include gas, water, electricity and any building insurances associated with owning the building. This is an estimated cost.

16. IT services

This is an estimated cost.

17. Professional Development

Professional development would cost approximately \$2,500 per full time staff member.

18. Other Expenses

This is a nominal amount which might cover and unforeseen expense.

Financial Feasibility

Scenario 1

Since the levy of \$170 assumes no support for CRTS and is quite a lot higher than the interpreted value of \$136 pcm, this option seems less feasible. Although the required levy decreases by \$2 per year, this is in fact due to the anticipated increase in communicant members.

The issue of accreditation, financially, is insignificant. Financially it only represents 1–2% of the annual budget and could easily be included in this scenario. However, from recognition for learning perspective and further study possibilities perspective, accreditation is very important. In essence, not obtaining accreditation is financially possible/feasible, but not educationally advisable.

Scenario 1B requires a dramatic increase in levy for the churches (\$225, \$207, \$189, \$170 and then ongoing amount of \$155 pcm) to phase out support for the CRTS and support the establishment of an Australian college.

Overall, Scenario 1 is expensive, primarily due to our small federation size. Consequently it is unfeasible.

Scenario 2

The estimated required levy to support a college under Scenario 2 beginning in 2028 is approximately \$148 per communicant member. This represents an increase of 80% over our current levy.

The financial capacity of the FRCA to support a college is a difficult thing to gauge. In the survey to the churches, 7 out of 11 churches responded that they could sustain a weighted average of \$164 per communicant member per year. 4 churches responded that it simply wasn't viable to support a college. Assuming this means the current levy of \$82 per communicant member is the limit, this would imply a weighted average across the 11 churches of \$134 per communicant member as a maximum sustainable levy. It would seem that a

maximum sustainable level for the levy would lie somewhere near \$130 – \$140 per communicant member.

An independent venue would require a gradual increase in the levy applied to the churches, estimated at \$7 per year increase. Whilst there may be land available in certain forms (e.g. at schools or other church properties), it is estimated that approximately \$1.1 million could be raised by such an increase to procure land and erect a suitable venue.

Scenario 2B is not financially feasible as it involves a number of years operating at unsustainably high levy amounts (\$213, \$190, \$167 and then an ongoing \$145 pcm) or at significant losses. It also achieves very little other than delaying the phasing out of support for CRTS.

Estimated frugally at \$148 pcm overall, Scenario 2 is the most feasible option, although it does represent an increase in 80% over the current levy.

Considerations

1. Our church federation is generally blessed financially, however still relatively small.
2. We have a small contingent of young men keen to study theology.
3. Geographically we have the opportunity to explore possibilities with both RCNZ and Reformed church in Singapore, as well as the Philippines.
4. Currently the FRCA contribute approximately 15% of the annual budget for the CRTS. If the FRCA would stop support at a particular date this would mean that the CanRC would need to increase their levy by approximately 18% in order to maintain their income as before.
5. Although nebulous, our churches can afford an average of \$134 per communicant member per year. As can be seen in Scenario 2, an approximate estimate of the required levy is \$148 per communicant member, while

ramping up to this amount over a period of about 10 years.

6. If a decision is made to work towards the establishment of a theological college, it might be prudent to gradually increase the FRCA levy for theological training at a lower rate, than what was suggested in Scenario 2 (\$7 per year), of (for example) \$3 or \$4 per year, and to set this money aside as a tangible reminder of that commitment. The rate at which money is saved would depend on the anticipated establishment date. If sooner, the increase in levy per year would need to be higher, and the opposite also true. Even at \$3 per year set aside per communicant member, close to \$600,000 (\$596,994 exactly, based on anticipated populations) can be saved.
7. A potential major factor in estimating financial feasibility is the ability to account for CPI (the general increase in the cost of living). In each scenario all line items except the Affiliation Fee include CPI of 2% already. However the cost of living prior to any potential establishment has not really been taken into consideration, since, in some respects, many of these estimates are estimates of what it might cost today. Hence, in an attempt to be more realistic, and less frugal, Table 14 and Table 15 outline the total expenses and cost per communicant member in applying 2% CPI to each scenario.

Table 14 Forecast of applying 2% CPI to anticipated expenses, Scenario 1

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Scenario 1	\$604,143	\$616,226	\$628,551	\$641,122	\$653,944
Total CM	3,319	3,413	3,510	3,610	3,712
Cost per CM	\$182	\$181	\$179	\$178	\$176
Scenario 1B	\$804,259	\$761,719	\$716,174	\$667,472	\$615,455
Total CM	3,319	3,413	3,510	3,610	3,712
Cost per CM	\$242	\$223	\$204	\$185	\$166

Table 15 Forecast of applying 2% CPI to anticipated expenses, Scenario 2

	2028	2029	2030	2031	2032
Scenario 2	\$723,069	\$737,553	\$754,984	\$771,263	\$786,397
Total CM	3,926	4,038	4,152	4,270	4,392
Cost per CM	\$184	\$183	\$182	\$181	\$179
Scenario 2B	\$1,017,394	\$939,367	\$858,740	\$771,263	\$786,397
Total CM	3,926	4,038	4,152	4,270	4,392
Cost per CM	\$259	\$233	\$207	\$181	\$179

Taking into account the increased cost in living prior to the establishment, both Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 have similar anticipated minimum required levies of approximately \$180 pcm. This is mainly due to the fact that Scenario 2 has had 2% compounded for 10 years, whereas Scenario 1 has only had 2% compounded for 4 years. In reality the actual cost levied to the churches may fall somewhere between \$150 and \$180 pcm.

Financial Options

1. At this point in time, it seems that it is financially unfeasible to establish a fully resourced theological college for the FRCA.
2. However, if it is decided to work towards the establishment of a theological college in the future, then it is recommended that preference is given to the essence of Scenario 2; that is, a fully resourced college, in all respects, and that it be established in the medium to long term. In regards to this, it seems that the establishment of a fully resourced college becomes financially feasible in a time period of between 3 and 5 synods time (9 – 15 years).

Reasoning for Financial Options

In relation to option 1:

1. In order to support a fully functioning theological college today, with expenses in the order of approximately \$600,000 – \$650,000, it would require a levy of between \$218 – \$236 pcm. This is clearly exorbitant.
2. The FRCA still have a considerable financial support for the CRTS. To reduce or stop that financial support imminently, whilst not critical, would be felt by the CRTS.

In relation to option 2:

3. In relation to option 2 a number of scenarios might be considered:
 - a. Supporting a fully resourced college in approximately 10 years, based on estimated populations of 3,926 CM in 2028 to 4,392 CM in 2032 may involve:
 - i. expenses between \$600,000 and \$650,000, which would require a levy of between \$154 and \$167 pcm.
 - ii. expenses between \$700,000 and \$750,000 which would require a levy of between \$179 and \$192 pcm. This estimate applies CPI to the estimates of expenses in scenario 2 at 2% p.a.
 - b. Supporting a fully resourced college in approximately 15 years, based on estimated populations of 4,516 CM in 2033 to 5,047 CM in 2037, may involve:
 - i. expenses between \$600,000 and \$650,000, which would require a levy of between \$119 and \$144 pcm.
 - ii. expenses between \$798,000 – \$868,000, which would require a levy of between \$171 and \$176 pcm. This estimate applies CPI to the estimates of expenses in scenario 2 at 2% p.a.
 - c. Both of the above scenarios assume a sole responsibility by the FRCA for the establishment and maintenance of a college. Strengthened ties of local sister church federations (such as RCNZ, Singapore and others) in the medium to long term, and subsequent shared support by these federations for an Australian Theological college, would considerably reduce the cost to the FRCA

due an increased support base. By way of example, if the FRCA in cooperation with the RCNZ (assuming about 1,500 communicant members in 2028) were to begin a college in the medium to long term, with annual expenses of between \$600,000 and \$700,000, would require a levy of between \$111 and \$129 pcm. This is not exorbitant and fairly feasible.

- d. Another consideration is the parity between the levy of the CRTS and the levy required to establish an Australian Theological college. In the future these two values would become more similar and may provide a good indication of feasibility of establishment when they do so. For example, in 20 years the CRTS would be paying approximately \$122 pcm (assumed 2% CPI on the current \$82 pcm levy). This anticipated CRTS levy is similar to the levy required (between \$128 and \$138 pcm) by the FRCA in order to establish a college and support expenses of between \$650,000 and \$700,000 p.a. Additionally, if support from RCNZ is attained, it would require a levy of between \$99 and \$107 pcm, in order to support expenses of between \$650,000 and \$700,000, in 20 years. This is clearly quite feasible.

**Feasibility Study for an
Australian
Free Reformed Theological
Seminary**

Proposal One

Concluding that such a Seminary is Feasible

Synod 2015 Baldivis gave Deputies the Further Mandate

To investigate the feasibility of establishing an FRCA Theological Seminary, and report back to next Synod. Such a study should consider:

- i. The desire of the churches for such a seminary;*
- ii. The potential student numbers that would attend such a seminary;*
- iii. The impact the establishment of such a seminary would have on the student numbers and viability of the CRTS; and*
- iv. The resources required for such a seminary, and the availability of such resources.*

Grounds

- 1. Having only one theological training centre in the world does not prepare us well for the possibility, and may God graciously prevent it, if for any reason the CRTS becomes unavailable due to political, economic or other reasons.*
- 2. Article 17 of the CO states that the Churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry.*

Background

To carry out this mandate Deputies took decisions of previous FRCA Synods into account, including:

1. The extensive Deputies Report to Synod 2003.

We noted that in response to this report Synod 2003 decided (Acts Article 88) to;

Recognise that establishing our own seminary may be out of reach for the present time but not to despise the day of small things (Zech 4:10), and thus to keep this matter in the mandate for deputies, ad art 17, C.O.

In its mandate to deputies, it decided to direct them to:

continue to investigate the possibility to start up our own theological training for the ministry, including the possibilities of theological training by extension (IT)

2. Synod 2006, Acts Article 17 again renewed this mandate, requiring deputies to:

continue to investigate the possibility to start up our own theological training for the ministry, including the possibilities of theological training by extension

3. Synod 2009, Acts Article 17 narrowed this mandate down by deciding that the deputies are to:

investigate the feasibility of offering a basis year of theology to the churches in Australia, for the purpose of establishing a Theological University in the future

4. Synod 2012, Acts Article 68 shows that deputies are no longer to investigate starting the freshman year in Australia when it decided to:

Delete recommendation 4k “continue to investigate the feasibility of offering the Freshman (i.e. First) Year of theological study to the churches in Australia”.

Activities

To fulfil this part of our mandate, we:

1. surveyed the churches, asking them about their desire for such a seminary, their understanding of feasibility for a seminary, potential student numbers and several other matters. Please find the results of this survey with a summary of the Churches in the related Documents Seven
2. communicated with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) asking them to assist us to understand the impact establishment of a FRCA seminary would have on student numbers and continuing viability of the CRTS. We received a written response in the related Documents Ten

3. made preliminary investigation into possible resources that a seminary would require, including the availability of these resources.

Prologue

1. It may be taken for granted that all the Churches agree
 - a. from 2 Timothy 2:2 that when the Lord Himself, through the Apostle Paul instructs Timothy saying; *the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, are to be committed to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* places the Churches under obligation to provide for continuing faithful ministry of the Word.
 - b. with the *Church Order*, (Article 17) that; *The churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry. The task of the professors of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to defend the sound doctrine against heresies and errors, so that the churches may be provided with ministers of the Word who are able to fulfil the duties of their office as these have been described above. The churches together are obliged to provide properly for the professors of theology and for their widows and orphans.*
2. We understand a study of *feasibility* to combine the question of *possibility, practicability* and *timing*. In the context of a FRCA Seminary this can become quite subjective. To maintain an institution for the training of ministry depends on available finances and personnel. This in turn depends on perceived urgency and expectations. If no suitable alternative for theological training can be found anywhere, urgency would require immediate attention regardless of expected academic excellence. At the same time, if the expectation for such training is equivalent to academic excellency found in such centres throughout the world, it may always appear impossible to achieve.

3. The question of timing includes;
 - a. So long the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary serves the Australian Churches well, lessening the perceived need and immediate desire for a FRCA Seminary *at this time*.
 - b. That there is no longer a perceive acceptable alternative to the CRTS tends to increase the perceived need for a FRCA Seminary.

Introduction

1. It should be noted that decisions of previous FRCA Synods quoted above (in the *Background*) already shows a desire for a FRCA Seminary. This desire is again renewed and expressed in the grounds Synod Baldivis gives for this feasibility study.
2. In the Survey Questionnaire sent among the Churches, some attention was given to various implications of an FRCA Seminary, such as: What happens to supporting the Theological College in Hamilton (CRTS)? Can the Churches reasonably pay for such a Seminary? What should such a Seminary look like? including, how important should civil government registration be considered? These questions and responses will receive further attention in this report.
3. Half, that is, eight of the sixteen Churches think it is *desirable to work towards establishment of a theological seminary at this time*.
4. When asked whether the Churches *think it is feasible for us to establish our own seminary at this time* along with the question whether *you think our federation is currently large enough*, four of the sixteen Churches responded positively. Some of the others give no indication. As for whether *our current federation is large enough*, again *eight out of the sixteen churches* responded in a negative way.

5. Some further attention will be given to this survey throughout this Report as well as to the CRTS Board of *Governors Impact Report*. It may be initially noted here that the Board of Governors considers theological training to be *a noble endeavour* and an understanding for *how the matter of theological education and the possibility of starting a seminary in Australia continues to have a place on the agendas of your general synods*.

Set-up and Personnel

In this investigation, we suggest the following possible set-up – please note; this is only a suggestion for this Report. It is modified form of the CRTS. Some of the CRTS items relating directly to accreditation requirements have been either modified or left out (for example, under Canadian requirements, a CRTS Board of Governors member must be a Canadian citizen). Other ways of setting up a Theological Seminary may be looked at and seriously considered.

1. Board of Governors
 - a. The General Synod of the Free Reformed Churches appoint three governors from each classical region for a total of nine. Each Classis should include at least one minister of the Word. Each of the governors are to serve a maximum of nine years.
 - b. The mandate of the Board of Governors
 - i. Take care of the daily running and supervision of the Seminary
 - ii. To do this, a committee of management is to be chosen with the task to look after the finances and the use and maintenance of a venue
 - c. To give account of their work to the General Synods of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

2. Senate
 - a. The General Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia appoint six older and more experienced ministers of the Word or retired professors of theology to form a Senate.
 - b. The mandate of the Senate
 - i. Assist in establishing and maintaining agreed curricula.
 - ii. Assist the principal
 - iii. Supervise the teaching
 - iv. Assist in evaluating students ongoing progression in academic knowledge and faithfulness to the Lord.
 - d. Give account of their work to the Board of Governors.
 - e. If there ever is any conflict of teaching or action between the Board of Governors and Senate, the final decision will be made by the General Synods of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia
3. Principal
 - a. The General Synod will appoint one of the full time Professors as principal.
 - i. The mandate of the principal
 1. Assist Faculty
 2. Organise the time-table
 3. Take care of the daily teaching
 - b. Give account to the Senate
4. Faculty and Staff
 - a. The General Synod shall appoint at least three full time professors for

Deputies for Theological Training

- i. Old Testament Studies
 - ii. New Testament Studies
 - iii. Doctrinal Studies
- b. The Board of Governors, along with the Senate, shall appoint
 - i. An administrator
 - ii. Part time lecturers as required

Notes

- a. This proposed set up follows the original set-up of universities that mimic civil government with Parliament parallel to Board of Governors and Senate parallel to Senate.
- b. While the principal of a Church run Seminary must be maintained, this proposed set-up may need to vary, pending the Churches preferences and possible accreditation requirements.

Rationale

1. For the Theological Seminary to be truly run and operated by the bond of Australian Churches,
 - a. The General Synods should appoint governors to form a Board which is accountable to the Churches.
 - b. The General Synod should appoint the Senate to assist the Board of Governors
 - c. The General Synods should appoint all full-time teaching staff.
2. The Board of Governors run the Seminary and should have enough latitude to continue operations between Synods
 - a. The Senate is meant to assist the Board of Governors in all educational matters.

- b. The Senate task includes to guard the Reformed character of the Seminary, both teaching staff and students. If there is any conflict in this regard between the Board of Governors and Senate, the matter should be resolved by the Churches through its General Synods.
3. It should be noted here that the CRTS Board of Governors express concern about lack of ministers in the Canadian and Australian bond of Churches and suggest that a Theological Seminary in Australia will exacerbate that lack even further.

Feasibility

Possibility

1. There are sufficient number of capable men within the bond of Australian Churches to set up and maintain this proposed form of governance.
2. There are presently sufficient number of older and/or emeritus ministers of the Word to be Senators and with time retired Professors could be added.
3. There are sufficient number of qualified minister within the bond of Australian Churches and the bond of overseas sister Churches (eg. Canada) to make the appointment of full time professors possible.
4. Active or emeritus ministers of the Word can be appointed as part-time lecturers.

Practicability

1. Men within the bond of Australian Churches are capable of serving the Churches in setting up and running a Theological Seminary. They could use their time and ability to serve among the Churches in various ways. Everyone can only do so much. The question here includes where these men can serve to the best advantage of the Lord's Churches in Australia.

Deputies for Theological Training

2. Humanly speaking, older men and emeritus ministers will be able to serve in a limited way depending on increasing weaknesses of age and health.
3. A FRCA Seminary may initially mean that some men who are now active in the ministry, will serve full time at the Seminary. The Lord willing, with time, graduates from both, the Canadian Reformed and the Australian Free Reformed Seminary will help alleviate the concern expressed by the CRTS Board of Governors.

Accreditation

The following possibilities have been considered:

1. No accreditation

Advantages

- a. No civil government or other outside regulations.
- b. The entire content of curricula can be determined by the Churches.
- c. No registration costs

Disadvantages

- a. There will be no issuing of legally accepted (i.e. by the civil government) higher education degree.
- b. Completion of courses, conferred degree or diploma will not necessary receive recognition outside of the Church community.
- c. Those students seeking further education will not necessarily be accepted elsewhere, it depends entirely on the institution where application for enrolment is made.
- d. Any overseas student will be ineligible for student visa while taking courses at the seminary.

2. Independent Act of Parliament⁶

Advantages

- a. Receive the ability to confer civil government recognized degree.
- b. Assurance of recognizable standards of education.
- c. Students who study on at other institutions have a “recognized degree”.
- d. Independent from any other theological school.
- e. Oversea students can apply for a student visa while following courses at the Seminary.

Disadvantages

- a. Costs – every course needs to be inspected through the government education department at the cost of the Seminary.
- b. While the government education department leaves the Seminary freedom for curricula content, standards of education levels are set. This may include certain social perimeters.
- c. Sufficient number of courses must be accredited for the government to grant degree giving privileges.

3. Association to other of Institute of learning⁷

Advantages

- a. Receive the ability to confer civil government recognized degree.
- b. Assurance of recognizable standards of education.

⁶ See <http://www.teqsa.gov.au/> for details.

⁷ See http://study.com/associate_degree_requirements.html for further details.

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- c. Students who study on at other institutions have a “recognized degree”.
- d. Oversea students can apply for a student visa while following courses at the Seminar.
- e. Will receive more aid in establishing curricula.
- f. Cost much more reasonable than Independent Act of Parliament.

Disadvantages

- a. Costs, while significantly cheaper than an independent Act of Parliament, still some costs involved.
- b. Dependent on other educational institution.
- c. Less Seminary freedom for curricula content, standards of education levels are set. This may include certain social perimeters.
- d. Sufficient number of courses must be accredited for the government to grant degree giving privileges.

Rationale

- 1. In response to the survey, a majority of Free Reformed Churches place accreditation high on the list of priorities. A number of Churches speak of it as a legal requirement.
- 2. There is no legal requirement for accreditation. Please note:
 - a. Churches set the standard for ministers of the Word’s education. This is guarded by Classical examinations. No further degree is necessary.
 - b. In the past, as well as in more recent times, Church bonds have trained ministers through casual education by sending students to study with active ministers (for example, in Canada, before the Seminary was established and more recently in S. Africa).

- c. Experiences show that civil government registration can lead to various restrictions. This is evident especially in the Netherlands and also in a much lesser way, in Canada.
3. There are advantages to civil government registration, but one may question whether the advantages outweigh the disadvantages.

Feasibility

Possibility

It is possible to have a Seminary without accreditation.

Practicality

There are some practical advantages and disadvantages to registration.

Student body

1. The survey from among the Free Reformed Churches shows that nine of the sixteen Churches were aware of 20 young men considering to study for the ministry.
2. Most of the Free Reformed Churches did not think that the establishment of a Free Reformed Theological Seminary should depend much on foreign students.
3. Deputies are aware of approximately 25 young men that have expressed some interest in studying for the ministry.
4. Deputies had a list of 11 young men who were working towards theological training. Two are already studying in Hamilton and a third one is on his way there.
5. This list is fluid.
6. The CRTS Board of Governors also have a list of potential Canadian students, but acknowledges that it is struggling to find students and would like to see an increase in numbers.
7. The CRTS Board of Governors stress the advantage of Reformed students from various backgrounds learning

together, including how it may be difficult for ministers to serve Churches close to where they have been born and raised up.

Rationale

1. There is some indication that potential married students would find it difficult, or even a hindrance, to travel overseas for studies.
2. There will be some savings to the needy student fund if students need not travel overseas.
3. Even though students presently studying in Hamilton may have employment in Canada while studying, there appears to be greater possibility for part-time work while staying closer to home where they have grown up.
4. For students, especially with families, temporary migration to Canada is difficult when considering the need for housing, vehicle, for wife and children to adjust to another country. Medical insurance is of a concern. Right now, an Australian student family are residing in Canada without health insurance.
5. Although the CRTS would like to have more students and an Australian Seminary will likely diminish these numbers, it is difficult to estimate the exact numbers.
6. There may be some advantages to have students from various backgrounds and countries studying together for they can hear and learn how the gospel is applied in various contexts. There may also be various disadvantages, including the time taken to understand those that come from a background with a different language.
7. With recent Church numbers and members growth, the concern of theological students serving in the areas where they have grown up, is diminishing.

Feasibility

Possibility

1. There appear to be sufficient number of Australian students to form a student body and support one another.
2. There is some hint of potential students, especially those married and with families, who would see greater possibility for study, if such a Seminary is in place.

Practicality

1. It is difficult to predict how sustainable student numbers will be. However, with the growing number Churches and members, on a percentage basis of those who express a desire to enter the ministry, one can only expect an increase. Moreover, a local Seminary promoting this study may help stimulate young men to desire this office.
2. Students, especially those who are married and have families, do not have to worry about moving costs, medical and other insurances, finding places to live and other family adjustments.

Physical Facilities

1. There are a number of Church buildings in the metro Perth area with meetings rooms that are not used during the day-time hours of the working week.
 - a. There will be a limited number of students and courses offered.
 - b. The meeting rooms of various Church buildings are more than adequate for class-room use.
 - c. The auditorium of the various Church buildings can be used for homiletical courses.
2. Concerning Library, see under that point.
3. Ministers of the Word are already used to having a home-based study. This can also apply to Professors.
4. A Seminary campus could be built and maintained.

Rationale

1. The meeting rooms of various Church buildings are more than adequate for class-room use.
2. The auditorium of the various Church buildings can be used for homiletical courses.
3. A Seminary Campus would have the advantage of having a named location and centralized facilities

Feasibility

Possibility

There is no need for the Seminary to have its own buildings.

Practicality

1. It would be possible to combine special Seminary facilities to a specific Church building.
2. Special Seminary facilities can always be built at a later date.

Curriculum

1. It would be best to initially model the curriculum after standard Reformed practices found at the Theological Seminaries in Kampen and Canada upon their institution. With time, the Board of Governors, along with the Professors and Lecturers, can make adjustment to the curricula.
2. Suggested courses:
 - a. The preparatory year (given prior to entering the cycle of the academic years;
 - i. Introduction to theological studies
 - ii. Intermediate to Senior Hebrew
 - iii. Intermediate to Senior Greek
 - iv. Symbolics

- v. Introduction to the “church fathers”
- vi. Philosophy and its impact on theology
- b. Academic year one (to be part of a three-year cycle).
 - i. Old Testament Canonics
 - ii. Old Testament exegeses (historic passages)
 - iii. New Testament Canonics
 - iv. New Testament exegesis (historic passages)
 - v. Dogmatics (Scripture Revelation and De Deo)
 - vi. Homiletics*
- c. Academic year two (to be part of three-year cycle)
 - i. Old Testament exegesis (poetic passages)
 - ii. New Testament exegesis (passages from the letters)
 - iii. Dogmatics (De peccata and De Christo – eschatology)
 - iv. Church history
 - v. Catechetics
 - vi. Homiletics*
- d. Academic year three (to be part of three-year cycle)
 - i. Old Testament exegesis (prophetic passages)
 - ii. New Testament exegesis (pastoral letters/apocalypse)
 - iii. Dogmatics (De Sancta Spiritus and sacramentology)

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- iv. Ethics
- v. Poimenics (Counselling)
- vi. Homiletics*

*Homiletics – for students in their first year of the cycle; (one New Testament sermon proposal) for student in their second year of the cycle (one Old Testament sermon proposal and one based on the Heidelberg Catechism) for students in their third year of the cycle (one New Testament, one Old Testament and one Heidelberg Catechism sermon proposal).

Study Resources (Library)

1. A limited theological Library was established a number of years ago and stored in the support office of the JCCC.
2. Today with internet and electronics
 - a. There are several Bible Programs, for example, Logos Bible Program, that gives access to extensive electronic Libraries.
 - b. There are Libraries through-out the world to which one can connect electronically.

Rationale

1. In the present age, the use of electronic libraries should be part of student training.
2. Especially electronic Dictionaries and Lexicons have made printed copies obsolete.
3. In the future, instead of encouraging students to build up their own libraries, Churches could provide Ministers of the Word with electronic Library subscriptions.

Feasibility

Possibility

1. There is already a limited Theological Library.

2. With ever increasing use of electronic Libraries, much is possible.

Practicality

1. Cost of electronic libraries varies. With ever expanding electronic material available, the cost has been reducing.
2. Extensive electronic theological libraries are available for yearly subscription fees.

Finance

Please see the projected Finances in View of Feasibility Studies in Documents Eleven.

Rationale

1. If the Seminary begins with three full-time professors and five part time teaching staff, the total estimated budget would be 558,135. See attached financials (Scenario One) This would be 170.00 per communicant member at the current membership level.
2. Synod could decide to phase out support of CRTS over the next three years by cutting the current support by a third per year, this would free funds for an opening of the Seminary in 2022.
3. Synod could decide to increase the level per communicant member, beginning in mid 2018 to 100. per communicant member, 2019 to 125.00 and 2020 to 150.00. If a decision is made to aim for opening an Australian Seminary in say, 2022, there will be a substantial initial fund available. The raising expense due to inflation can be covered by increased membership. For example, by 2022 with a communicant membership of 3,319 a 450,000 budget would mean an assessment of 135.60 per communicant member.

Feasibility

Possibility

1. While the aim for the important task of minister of the Word should always be aimed at the best possible, the result of students studying at smaller institution is not necessarily inferior.
2. While CRTS continues to enjoy and appreciate Australian financial support, it does not critically depend on this support.

Practicality

1. Like all education, the smaller less institutionalized schools, often show good results. In the context of training for the ministry, the training in godliness is an important element in preparing men. A school with small number of professors and teachers lend well to good relations and rapport between professors and students.

Recommendations

Synod decide that an Australian Seminary is feasible at this time in the follow manner;

1. by working towards setting up a Free Reformed Theological Seminary for opening in January 2022
2. decide not to pursue government accreditation at this time.
3. Synod appoint a Board of Governors with the mandate to:
 - a. Draw up proposed constitution for a Free Reformed Theological Seminary according to the pattern of this report.
 - b. Propose suitable men to be appointed as Professors for Old Testament, New Testament and Doctrine.
 - c. Evaluate and appoint part-time lecturers as required.

- d. Appoint a Theological Seminary administrator.
 - e. See to available students.
 - f. Contact Churches for rooms possible available for daytime use as class rooms.
 - g. Take care of budgets and finances.
4. Synod appoint Senators with mandate to: - professors and some experienced ministers.
- a. Draw up curricula for the courses outlined in this report (as adopted by Synod)
 - b. Assist Board of Governors to propose suitable men to be appointed as Professors for Old Testament, New Testament and Doctrine.
 - c. Assist the Board of Governors by proposing suitable men as part time lecturers as required.
 - d. Assist Board of Governors by evaluating student applications for admission; this should include
 - i. Positive feedback from consistory of where the prospective student is a member.
 - ii. Evidence of good prior studies (minimal of a Bachelor's degree).
 - iii. Sufficient level of knowledge in Hebrew and Greek language.

Grounds

1. Deputies report shows that it is feasible to establish FRCA which will be able to adequately prepare men for the office of Minister of the Word.
2. Half of the Churches in the bond have expressed a desire for an Australian Seminary
3. Past Synods of the Free Reformed Churches have acknowledged the Church Orderly agreement, Article 17 that it will, *if possible, maintain an institution for the*

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training for ministers and the deputies have adequately shown it to be possible.

4. Although most of the Churches consider accreditation important or essential, in fact it is not essential and has both advantages and disadvantages. Making no decision regarding this matter at this time gives the Churches more time to carefully consider this matter. It also alleviates possibly unnecessary costs.
5. Next Synod of the Free Reformed Churches will DV be held in 2021 which should give a Board of Governors and Senate necessary time to complete its mandate.
6. Synod 2021 can then DV adopt a Free Reformed Theological Seminary Constitution.
7. Synod 2021 can then DV appoint at least three Professors.
8. The Board of Governors is left with the freedom to appoint part-time lecturers and an administrator.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'PKA de Boer', written in a cursive style. The signature is enclosed in a faint, light-colored rectangular box.

Rev. PKA de Boer

**SHOULD THE FREE REFORMED
CHURCHES
PURSUE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A
SEMINARY AT THIS TIME?**

PROPOSAL 2

Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 gave the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry the following mandate 12.4.j:

To investigate the feasibility of establishing an FRCA Theological Seminary, and report back to next Synod. Such a study should consider:

- i. The desire of the churches for such a seminary;*
- ii. The potential student numbers that would attend such a seminary;*
- iii. The impact the establishment of such a seminary would have on the student numbers and viability of the CRTS; and*
- iv. The resources required for such a seminary, and the availability of such resources.*

Grounds

- 1. Having only one theological training center in the world does not prepare us well for the possibility, and may God graciously prevent it, if for any reason the CRTS becomes unavailable due to political, economic or other reasons.*
- 2. Article 17 of the CO states that the Churches shall support or, if possible, maintain an institution for the training for the ministry.*

Activities

In order to fulfil this part of our mandate, we:

1. Surveyed the churches asking them about the desire of the churches for such a seminary, their understanding of the feasibility of a seminary, potential student numbers and several other matters. Please find the survey attached with a summary of the churches' responses.
2. Met with the prospective students interested in the ministry on three occasions.

3. Communicated with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) asking them to assist us to understand the impact the establishment of a FRCA seminary would have on the student numbers and viability of the CRTS.
4. Made a preliminary investigation of the resources that would be required for such a seminary and the availability of these resources.

Introduction

Is it feasible for the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to establish a seminary at this time? The answer to this question depends on the need or the urgency that exists. If there was great urgency and we had no other way of training men for the ministry, then we could start a program very quickly and at little expense. We could ask any aspiring young men to visit various experienced ministers to learn different course material from each of them. This is the model that was followed, for example, in the Netherlands following the Succession of 1834, and more recently in the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa.

If the situation was urgent, but this model was judged unacceptable, we could likely establish a seminary in a relatively short time (about 3-5 years). We could ask one of the churches for some space in their building, and appoint 3 professors and several part time lecturers to teach the students. We would not necessarily need to have external accreditation since ultimately the ability to preach in the churches is something that is decided by the churches themselves. In this report this is referred to as scenario 1.

If the need is not urgent, then we might consider either planning for a seminary in the medium or long term or else conclude that we can continue sending our students to the CRTS for the foreseeable future. In this report, this is referred to as scenario 2. In planning for the future, we acknowledge our utter dependence upon God, who alone knows and controls the future.

1. Summary of findings from the survey of the churches

Key findings from survey of the churches:

- Half of the churches think it is desirable to work towards establishing a seminary at this time.
- One quarter (4 out of 16) of the churches think that it is feasible to work towards establishing a seminary at this time. Half of the churches (8 out of 16) do not think that it is feasible. One church said they didn't know. Three churches, who do not think it's desirable, did not comment.
- All of the churches who responded to this question think that accreditation is either essential or desirable in order to protect academic credibility, for immigration purposes, for being able to pursue future studies (PhD) and serving as future professors and for some missionary work.
- The churches in favour of working towards establishing our own seminary generally desire this to take place in the medium to long term future.
- Almost half of the churches note that establishing a seminary at this time is not necessary because our students get excellent training at the CRTS.

2. Potential student numbers

In our history up to this time, we have sent approximately one student every other year to the CRTS.

Since synod Baldivis 2015, we have had three meetings with prospective students interested in the ministry. In the first meeting in 2015, we had about 24 students who were thinking about possibly pursuing the ministry of the gospel. (The churches' response to our survey indicated that they knew of 20 students). At our next meeting together with Dr. J. Smith in April 2016, we had about a dozen men present. At our most recent meeting in August 2017 we had seven men who were present. We are also aware of one other brother, who is currently overseas, who is considering going to the seminary.

Since synod Baldivis 2015, three men have gone to CRTS.

Based on these numbers, with the LORD's blessing, it seems possible that we could send 1-2 men per year to seminary for the next four years.

3. Letter from the CRTS

In order to understand the impact the establishment of a seminary would have on CRTS, we wrote the Board of Governors a letter and received a response. Please find their letter attached. Some highlights:

- Perhaps we should not only consider the feasibility of a seminary, but whether starting an FRCA seminary in the near future is optimal.
- In deciding the best way forward we would do well not to forget the needs of our mutual sister churches in South Africa, the FRCSA.

1. Loss of Australian students

- The students who come to the CRTS from the FRCA have been a great blessing to the seminary since they come from a different background with different experiences and perspectives. The student body would be weakened in character if they would no longer come.
- The CRTS has helped to bond our federations together and the interchange of Canadian and Australian students and pastors has benefitted both federations.
- Many Australian students have benefitted from studying in Canada. They are exposed to a different Reformed federation and their horizons have been broadened. Furthermore, the Scriptures speak about a prophet not being welcome in his hometown. Many young men from Australia have not taken their first call from an Australian church. This has been healthy both for

the men starting in the pastorate and also for the churches.

2. *Financial Costs*

- If Australian support would be withdrawn, there would be about a 20% increase in the assessment for the Canadian churches.
- While they do not wish this decision to rest on financial matters, they ask us to bear in mind that in some places in Canada, such as Ontario, there is no government support for education and it is not uncommon for parents sending children to elementary and high school to be paying \$1,300 per month for Reformed education.

3. *Need for seminary professors*

- One of the greatest challenges in establishing a seminary is the need for theological professors. These men need to have a doctoral degree, ministry experience and to be well respected among the churches. While it is undoubtedly possible to recruit and appoint more men to serve as professors, is this the best allocation of ministerial resources?
- A seminary would require three full-time and two part-time professors. Since there are already five professors in Hamilton and the churches in South Africa have decided to appoint one anchor theologian to guide their theological training, together we would need ten professors between our three federations. This need will carry on as professors retire. Can we sustain supplying 10 professors in our midst?
- There is currently a 20% vacancy rate in Canada and a 15% vacancy rate in Australia (12 in Canada and 2 in Australia). This will likely increase dramatically in the future with the number of ministers retiring unless there is a substantial

increase in the enrollment at the seminary. Is it optimal at this time to pull more of our best men out of ministry to the churches?

4. *Further reflections*

- The CRTS informed us that they continue to remain cautiously open to distance education. They are open because technology continues to advance rapidly and cautious because it is important to maintain the quality and integrity of training for the next generation of preachers.
- They are diligently investigating the possibility and potential of technology for serving the supporting churches and mission work with distance education. This is the number one initiative the board of governors at the CRTS is pursuing at this time. They have also asked us to be a part of this discussion.

4. **Resources required for an FRCA seminary**

In order to establish a seminary in Australia, it seems that we would need:

1. a board of governors to carry out the decisions and instructions of synod for theological education
 2. a senate who is responsible to the board to establish and administer the curriculum
 3. professors who are responsible to teach the students
 4. accreditation
 5. finances
 6. library
1. Board of Governors
 - A board of governors would ideally be comprised of six ministers and four other men who would be

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responsible to synod for the establishment and running of the seminary.

- Feasibility: This is possible, although we should recognize that this additional commitment for six of our ministers will limit their ability to complete other responsibilities.

2. Senate

- A senate would be comprised of the actively serving full-time professors, the principal and any other retired professors who are still able to assist.
- Feasibility: This is feasible since it would be a part of their task.

3. Professors

- A seminary would need three full-time professors, along with at least two other part-time professors and possibly a few other lecturers.
- Feasibility: While it may be possible to appoint the equivalent of four full time ministers to teach at the seminary, this would come at great cost to the churches. If three of the experienced and well respected ministers of our federation would give up their ministry, this would lead to a very high vacancy rate among the churches. Furthermore we would require two part time professors, which could put strain on the work in two other congregations. We should also recognize that if we establish a seminary, these professors will not only be needed for the present time, but for the future as well. This will mean that a significant number of our ministers will leave the ministry to pursue further studies and serve as professors.

4. Accreditation

- Scenario 1: If we decided to establish a seminary in the short term, we could decide not to pursue accreditation.
- Feasibility: Yes, since it's not necessary.
- Scenario 2: We could decide to establish a seminary in the medium to long term and pursue accreditation. In order to grant a Master of Divinity degree, the seminary would have to either pursue the ability to grant a degree from the government or else associate itself with another seminary and grant degrees under their authority.
- Feasibility: At this point it would be prohibitive to pursue government permission to grant a degree because of the cost and legislative hurdles. It seems likely that we could associate ourselves with the Australian College of Theology (ACT) and grant a degree through them. The cost of associating ourselves with the Australian College of Theology and granting a degree through them would be approximately \$2,500 per year plus an additional \$1,575 per student per year. We would have no trouble paying the ACT the cost associated with accreditation. We will also have to meet certain standards the ACT sets for curriculum, the number of professors with doctoral degrees, a building and a library. Accreditation seems possible as long as we are willing to appoint three full time professors with advanced degrees, adopt a curriculum similar to that at the CRTS and spend some money on adequate facilities and a library.

5. Finances

- If we wish to pursue scenario 1, the operating cost of employing three full-time professors, several part-time professors, a part-time administrator,

maintaining a building and other normal expenses would be modestly estimated at \$560,000. With our current membership this would work out to be about \$170 per communicant member. Please note that is a very frugal budget and it doesn't take CPI between now and start up into consideration. Total costs could be significantly more. Please also note that we are not including any significant funds for a library, librarian or building. Please see the accompanying report.

- If we wish to pursue scenario 2, the operating cost of employing three full-time professors, two part-time professors, an administrator, maintaining a building and other normal expenses would be modestly estimated at \$590,000. With anticipated membership this would work out to be about \$148 per communicant member. Please note that is a frugal budget and it doesn't take into consideration CPI between now and start up. Total costs could be significantly more. Please also note that we are not including any significant funds for a library, librarian or building. Please see the accompanying report.
- Feasibility: Establishing our own seminary would be a very significant financial commitment for the churches, particularly for some of the smaller congregations in our midst.

6. Library

- If we wish to provide good seminary training, we need to have a good library. Books and periodicals are the tools of the ministry. Thankfully the churches have recognized this need in the past and have collected over \$120,000 for a library. This will give us a good start. We can also be thankful that access to periodicals is increasingly possible via the internet. Nevertheless, we will need to buy, store and look after many books and

also some periodicals that are not available over the internet. Developing a good library will be an important ongoing project.

Discussion

When synod mandated us to investigate the feasibility of establishing a seminary, they mandated us to answer this question by investigating four matters:

- the desire of the churches;
- potential student numbers;
- the impact such a seminary would have on the CRTS; and
- the resources required for such a seminary and the availability of these resources.

Desire of the churches

Do the churches think that it is desirable for us to begin to pursue establishing a seminary at this time? Half of the churches do and half of the churches do not. Those in favour say we should do so primarily on the basis of principle grounds, namely that we have agreed in CO article 17 that we should support, and if possible, maintain a seminary. Those who are opposed to establishing a seminary, say we should not pursue this because our students receive an excellent education at the CRTS and because of our limited finances and personnel.

We also note that only one quarter of the churches think that it is feasible for us to do so because of our limited finances and personnel.

Since only half of the churches think it's desirable for us to pursue a FRCA seminary at this time and only one quarter of the churches think it's feasible with our limited finances and personnel, the initial reaction of the churches seems to be that this is not the time to pursue the establishment of a seminary.

Potential student numbers

Up to this point in our history, we have sent approximately one student every other year to the CRTS. In the past three years, we have sent three students to the CRTS. At this point in time, we have 8 students who have expressed an interest in pursuing training for the ministry. The reality of our current situation is that we have a relatively small federation of churches from which to draw students. If we work towards establishing a seminary at this time, we need to be prepared for the fact that we will likely have from one to two students per year for the foreseeable future.

We should note that some young men have indicated that it would be easier to pursue the ministry if we had a seminary in Australia and they may be more likely to do so if that were possible.

The impact such a seminary would have on CRTS

The CRTS has asked us to consider not only if establishing a seminary is feasible, but if it is optimal. Is starting an FRCA seminary the very best way to prepare Australian and Canadian students for the ministry? If we set up our own seminary, the CRTS would miss our students. The Australian students have contributed meaningfully to the learning community at the CRTS. Furthermore both federations have been blessed by the interchange of students and pastors. If our students received their training in Australia, they would miss out on the broadening experience of living and studying in another federation of churches. They may also find it harder to start in the ministry due to the limited size of our federation and the fact that a prophet is often not welcome in his own home. In addition, the close ties we have with Canada would also likely diminish. From this perspective, starting a FRCA seminary is not optimal.

Starting a seminary would also lead to considerable additional financial costs for the churches in Canada. We currently contribute about 20% of their budget. The churches in Ontario would feel this pressure most acutely since they already pay a lot of money for Reformed education. While they do not ask us

to hold back from establishing an FRCA seminary for financial reasons, out of love and concern for our brothers and sisters, we should not treat this matter lightly.

One of the greatest challenges in establishing a seminary is the need for theological professors. While we may be able to supply the necessary men to serve in these positions, they point out that we need to ask ourselves whether this is the best allocation of ministerial resources. This is a serious concern which leads us to question whether it would indeed be best to establish a FRCA seminary at this time.

From these comments it is clear that the CRTS is urging us not to establish a FRCA seminary at this time. We would do well to take these comments to heart. We should only pursue the establishment of a FRCA seminary if the benefits of doing so clearly outweigh these costs.

At the same time the CRTS reminds us that they are cautiously open to distance education and asks us to investigate with them the possibility of using technology for distance education. Past synods have mandated us to investigate this possibility. Synod Baldivis 2015 no longer mandated this since they thought that this was not possible any longer. We may do well to investigate this more closely.

The resources required for a seminary and the availability of these resources

In order to establish a seminary in Australia, we would need a board of governors, a senate, professors, accreditation, finances and a library. While it should be possible to appoint six ministers as governors, we should recognize that this appointment will limit their ability to serve in other ways in the churches. If the senate is comprised of current and retired professors, they would be available as long as we can find professors.

The more difficult question is whether we have the resources to appoint three full-time and two part-time professors along with some additional adjunct lecturers. This would be a major commitment for our churches. If three of our experienced and

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well respected ministers were to be taken out of the churches, this would have a serious impact on the life of the congregations. If either of the two part-time positions or adjunct lecturers were filled by actively serving ministers, this would also limit their ability to serve in their congregations. We currently already have three vacancies in the churches (and one more vacancy in mission). If we appointed three of our full time ministers to the seminary, we would have a total of six out of 17 vacancies. It does not seem that this is the best allocation of our resources at this time.

We should be careful that we do not burn out our ministers. If we establish a seminary, we should be sensitive to the fact that the professors will be busy. The CRTS pointed out that if we have less than the equivalent of four full-time professors these men may get burned out. Furthermore we should recognize that asking several of our ministers to serve as part-time professors or adjunct lecturers alongside their regular work in the congregations will lead them to do less work in the congregations or may lead them to burn out. The reality is that establishing a seminary at this time would come at a significant cost to the ministers of our churches and therefore also to our congregations.

The churches indicate that it would be best to pursue accreditation. In the first place, this would protect academic credibility. It would also be necessary for immigration purposes if we wish to make our seminary available to foreign students, which many in our church see as desirable although not absolutely necessary. Accreditation would also be necessary in order to make it possible for seminary graduates to pursue doctoral studies and serve as future professors or for further missional studies.

If we desire to achieve accreditation, we should recognize that this will take a significant commitment from the churches. While the financial cost of being accredited with the Australian College of Theology seems manageable, we should be aware that the time commitment in securing this accreditation will likely be significant. When the CRTS went through this process in the past ten years, it was a major commitment for the professors

(especially the principal), the administrative staff and the board of governors.

At the outset we should also be aware that an accrediting body may, in the future, place requirements on us which are untenable. We should be clear that a seminary is established by the churches for the churches. It is a means by which the churches can train men to serve in the ministry of the gospel. If an accrediting body were to place onerous requirements on the seminary or if it would compromise our ability to faithfully train men for the ministry we may have to sacrifice accreditation in order to fulfil our mandate.

Establishing a seminary will also bring with it substantial additional financial costs to our churches. Modestly estimated, the costs will be between approximately 1.8-2.8 times what we currently pay. Only one quarter of the churches think it is feasible to establish a seminary at this time. Before going ahead with the establishment of a seminary, we would do well to garner widespread support among the churches. We do well to remember that at this time our students receive wonderful training at CRTS at a minimal cost.

We would also need a library. If we spend the money already collected, that would give us a good start. We will want to continue to invest in the library and will need to look at getting a librarian to look after our collection.

Several churches have pointed out that we are currently the same size as Canada when they established the CRTS. This is not correct. When the CRTS was opened in 1969, the Canadian Reformed Churches had 25 congregations and approximately 7,500 members. Currently the FRCA only have 16 congregations and 4,800 members. If the LORD continues to bless our churches with the growth rate we have had in the past 20 years, we will not reach the size of the Canadian Reformed Churches when they established their seminary until approximately 2037, some 20 years from now!

The reality is that we are a small federation of churches and establishing a seminary is a major endeavor. If we had no other options for training our ministers, we would have to bear the

Deputies for Theological Training

burden and make it happen. Since CRTS offers a faithful, godly theological training and they eagerly desire to work together with us in this training, it does not seem best to pursue the establishment of a seminary at this time.

Recommendations

1. Synod decide that it is not feasible to establish a Free Reformed Theological Seminary at this time.
2. Synod decide to thank the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry for fulfilling this part of their mandate.
3. Synod decide to mandate the Deputies to investigate the possibility of pursuing distance education with the CRTS, particularly the establishment of the first year of seminary training here in Australia.
4. Synod may also wish to consider mandating the committee to present a report to the next synod outlining a plan for the establishment of a seminary in the medium to long term (9-15 years).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Poppe', written in a cursive style.

D. Poppe

Deputies for the Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

Report to General Synod Bunbury 2018

Introduction

The Deputies for the Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* hereby submit a report on their activities regarding the mandate given by Synod Baldivis, 2015. Throughout the report references to the deputies' mandate are provided based on the *Acts of the 2015 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia – Baldivis, WA, 2015*.

During the past three years, deputies have worked – within certain restricted time limits – to fulfil their mandate for the edification of the churches. To prepare the version based on the New King James Version (NKJV), they have studied every Psalm and Hymn and every sentence of the non-musical part of the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* – the book which Synod Baldivis, 2015, encouraged the churches to use – and have determined which pronouns referred to God. They have also noticed that this work was not fool proof because upon rechecking the work errors were found.

Deputies are thankful that they can present a report dealing with the versions Synod Baldivis, 2015, had requested. The version based on the English Standard Version (ESV) was easy and straightforward to prepare. Deputies have made the decision to present a **Sample** of the *Book of Praise* based on the NKJV. Deputies have also discussed the 19 hymns which had been added to the 1984 edition of the *Book of Praise* and we present the results of our deliberations.

We are thankful to our heavenly Father that he has enabled us to fulfil this task in a spirit of brotherly unity. It is our hope that this report will be well received by Synod and that it will support them in their final decision. We pray that our work will be part of the great joy Christ's Church expresses in singing to the glory of his holy Name.

Humbly submitted by Deputies for the Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*

G Groenewold
G M Spyker
D J Swarts
Rev C Vermeulen (convener)

OVERVIEW OF REPORT:

Below Deputies have briefly outlined the various elements of the mandate they have received.

1.0 Implementation of Synod Baldivis 2015 decisions regarding the Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*

- 1.1 Acts, Article 76 V Proposal + Grounds
- 1.2 Preparations of Version I of the *Book of Praise*
 - 1.2.1 Capitalisation of all pronouns referring to God in Psalms and Hymns
 - 1.2.2 Capitalisation of all pronouns referring to God in the non-musical section of the *Book of Praise*
 - 1.2.3 Changing all Bible text references in the non-musical section of the *Book of Praise* from the English Standard Version into the New King James Version
 - 1.2.4 Implementation of previous Synod decisions in the non-musical section
 - 1.2.5 Further required changes
 - 1.2.6 Use latest updated version of Australian Church Order
 - 1.2.7 Prepare a Sample of the changes mentioned under 1.2.2 and 1.2.3

- 1.3 Preparations of Version II of the *Book of Praise*
 - 1.3.1 Changes in the non-musical section of the *Book of Praise* have been decided upon by previous Australian Synods
 - 1.3.2 Further required changes
 - 1.3.3 The latest updated version of the Australian Church Order
- 1.4 Discussion of the 19 Hymns which had been added to the 1984 edition of the *Canadian Book of Praise*
 - 1.4.1 Acts, Article 25 VIII + Grounds
 - 1.4.2 Acts, Article 76 V Ground 3
 - 1.4.3 Decision deputies to study the 19 Hymns
 - 1.4.4 How did Deputies approach the matter?
 - 1.4.5 Result of our discussions
- 2.0 Contact with the churches**
 - 2.1 Our correspondence to the churches
 - 2.2 Input from the Australian churches
 - 2.3 Suggested names for the Australian Version of the *Canadian Book of Praise*
 - 2.4 Recommendation
- 3.0 Contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise***
 - 3.1 Deputies' contact with Prof Dr J Smith
 - 3.2 Written contact with SCBP
 - 3.2.1 First contact by Deputies
 - 3.2.2 First response from SCBP
 - 3.2.3 Query from Deputies to SCBP
 - 3.2.4 Response from SCBP

3.3 Results of these contacts re copyright

4.0 Contact with Premier Printing

4.1 Correspondence

4.2 Feasibility of printing both Versions

4.3 Possible outcomes

5.0 Contacts regarding copyright

5.1 Dr W Helder

5.2 Rev G van Popta

5.3 Hope Publishing

6.0 Our options to move forward

6.1 Version I, 19 extra hymns included

6.2 Version I, without 19 extra hymns

6.3 Version II, 19 extra hymns included

6.4 Version II, without 19 extra hymns

6.5 Version I with only a number of extra hymns included

6.6 Version II with only a number of extra hymns included

6.7 Version III – 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise*
+ separate booklet of Australian Church Order

6.8 Table

7.0 Legal and practical matters

7.1 Printing and distribution

7.2 Recommendations

7.3 Timeline and costings

8.0 Appendices

8.1 Appendix I – **Sample** of Version I

8.2 Appendix II – Results of discussion on the 19 new hymns

1.0 Implementation of Synod Baldivis 2015 decisions regarding the Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*

1.1 Acts Synod Baldivis 2015 Article 76 V Proposal + Grounds

The Mandate for Deputies of the Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* is as follows:

1. To thank the deputies and discharge them from their duties.
2. To encourage the churches to use the 2014 Canadian *Book of Praise* for the interim.
3. To appoint new deputies and mandate them to:
 - a. To develop an Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* and present it to the next Synod that:
 - i. contains the Psalms and Hymns of the 2014 Canadian *Book of Praise* that are approved for use in the FRCA and not to include any unapproved hymns;
 - ii. incorporates changes to the creeds, confessions and liturgical forms as made by the FRCA, as well as the Australian Church Order;
 - iii. to prepare two versions, one using the NKJV for all Scripture quotations and capitalising all pronouns referring to God, the other retaining the ESV without capitalisation;
 - iv. contains a list of all hymns with the corresponding numbers of the hymns in the Canadian *Book of Praise*.

Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

- b. To work through all legal as well as practical matters including but not limited to:
 - i. arranging that copyright permissions be granted to an appropriate legal entity within our churches;
 - ii. proposed size(s), covers and bindings;
 - iii. working with one or more printers to set scope and priority if any, as to alternate edition/formats, e.g. printed with a Bible, large text etc. or digital editions;
 - iv. determining the need and/or usefulness in appointing an Australian standing committee for the *Book of Praise*.
- c. To solicit feedback from the churches and propose suggested names for an Australian version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*.
- d. To maintain good contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* of the Canadian Reformed Churches, alerting the churches of any proposed changes.

Grounds

1. Submissions from the churches indicate a clear desire to move towards an Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*.
2. Great care ought to be taken in the preparation of a *Book of Praise* and it would be expedient for the final product to be approved by Synod prior to publication.
3. Synod Baldivis 2015 decided to further investigate the adoption of the 19 additional hymns in the Canadian *Book of Praise* (art. 24). Should any of these hymns be adopted for use they should be incorporated in the Australian version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* before it is published?

Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

4. Only those Psalms and Hymns as approved for public worship should be in a definitive song book for the churches.
5. Both the ESV and the NKJV are approved Bible translations in the FRCA.
6. Although the capitalization of pronouns for God is not a principle issue, it is a good tradition and seen by many to serve as a constant reminder of the fact that God is worthy of great honour and respect.
7. A list of all hymns with the corresponding numbers of the hymns in the Canadian *Book of Praise* would be of great benefit e.g. when using sermons produced by Canadian Reformed ministers.
8. The deputies' report advises that a new name would be required for an Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*.
9. The Synod of the CanRC 2013 Art. 197 indicate that they welcome close cooperation with Australia.
 - 4.1 *To express its regret to the FRCA that due to the circumstances listed above, the degree of cooperation and consultation re: the work on the Book of Praise was limited;*
 - 4.2 *To instruct the SCBoP to continue contact with the Australian Deputies for the Book of Praise in order to assist the FRCA's pursuit of a possible Australian version of the Book of Praise.*
10. Both Byford and Kelmscott requested that Synod provide direction to ensure that in the interim the Australian Churches use the same *Book of Praise* and so remove the discrepancies and confusion occurring between churches (and schools). Kelmscott proposed that in the interim the Canadian *Book of Praise* (2014 edition) be used.

1.2 Preparations of Version I of the *Book of Praise*

Synod asked Deputies to prepare a version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* using the NKJV for all Scripture quotations and capitalising all pronouns referring to God.

1.2.1 Capitalisation of all pronouns referring to God in Psalms and Hymns

The first task Deputies set themselves was to divide all Psalms and Hymns in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* – the '19 new hymns' were included – and compile lists of all changes necessary when capitalising all pronouns referring to God. These lists were discussed in meetings and decisions were made whether, e.g. the word 'name' referring to God should be capitalised. The decision was not to do it because the NKJV text did not do it either. Individual members of the Deputies double-checked their work and often found a number of errors or omissions. All files were placed in a Dropbox and were updated when required.

1.2.2 Capitalisation of all pronouns referring to God in the non-musical section of the *Book of Praise*

Next, Deputies allocated sections of the non-musical section of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* to each other and also made lists of changes when capitalising all pronouns referring to God. These lists were discussed in their meetings and often required some thorough discussion to ensure a common approach. Some of these sections were double-checked and errors were found again.

1.2.3 Changing all Bible text references in the non-musical section of the *Book of Praise* from the English Standard Version into the New King James Version

At the same time Deputies were also required to change all Bible text references of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* from the ESV translation into the NKJV translation. Decisions were made whether some texts should be italicised – when they were a literal quotation – or not when the NKJV text was somewhat changed to ensure that the sentence maintains a proper syntax.

Take, for example, the second paragraph of article 37 of the Belgic Confession. There the text in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* reads as follows:

‘Indeed, all people will give account for every careless word they speak (Mt 12:36), which the world regards as mere jest and amusement.’

This ESV text has been completely italicised.

The NKJV text reads:

‘that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account.’

Deputies have changed this section as follows:

‘Indeed, all people will give account for every idle word they may speak (Mt 12:36), which the world regards as mere jest and amusement.’

Please note that the NKJV text reference, which is not a literal one, has not been italicised.

See the **Sample** mentioned under 1.2.6.

1.2.4 Implementation of previous Synod decisions in the non-musical section

Previous synods of the FRCA decided upon some changes regarding the non-musical section of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.

Deputies made the following changes:

- The word '*Christian*' was deleted from the Apostles' Creed. The changes are on the following pages in the Canadian *Book of Praise*:
 - 493 in the Apostles' Creed
 - 524 in Lord's Day 7, Question/Answer 23
 - 535 in Lord's Day, Question 54
- The charge of the deacons in the *Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons* was updated. In the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* we read:

'Do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith.'

This sentence has been changed into:

'Encourage the congregation to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith.'

These changes are kept in the Dropbox archives.

1.2.5 Further required changes

The following changes are required:

- In the first sentence of the preface to The Belgic Confession the reference to the *Canadian Reformed Churches* was changed into the *Free Reformed Churches of Australia* (page 499).
- In the fourth paragraph of the preface to the Church Order the reference to the *Canadian Reformed Churches* was changed into the

Free Reformed Churches of Australia (page 647).

- The text of the Forms of Subscription used in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia are kept in the Dropbox archives. These Forms need to replace the ones mentioned in the *Book of Praise* 2014 edition (page 661).
- The following pages of the *Book of Praise* 2014 edition need to be updated as well:
 - i – title page,
 - iii - title,
 - iv – rewrite certain information,
 - v – change *Book of Praise* into new title,
 - vi – rewrite and add information about Australian Synods,
 - viii – change *Book of Praise* into new title,
 - ix – change page numbering,
 - 356 – change list of hymns,
 - 357 – change list of hymns,
 - 673 – change list of index of first lines,
 - 674 – change list of index of first lines,
 - 675 – change list of index of first lines,
 - 676 – change list of index of first lines,
 - 681 – change *Book of Praise* into new title.Change the front cover.

1.2.6 Use latest updated version of Australian Church Order

A copy of the latest Australian Church Order has been obtained and is also kept in the Dropbox archives.

1.2.7 Prepare a Sample of the changes mentioned under 1.2.2 and 1.2.3

Initially, Deputies planned to present a complete copy of Version I to Synod. Deputies soon understood that a complete printed book of Version I similar to the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* that is being used in all congregations of the FRCA was not feasible. Some reasons that Deputies have not been able to fulfil this part of their mandate are:

- The amount of changes was quite staggering. It would be an enormous task for the person who was going to update a pdf document of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*, if such a document would become available.
- Who would give us permission to use this document?
- Who would own copyright of this document?
- Due to the fact that the SCBP does not meet often, it took quite some time to establish contacts with them. After Deputies received their input, contact with Premier Printing was quickly established.
- Deputies even considered the option to produce a special Lever Arch File with all changes and produce it. This file would contain 400+ pages. To make 500 copies of this file – the number mentioned by those who print the Deputies' Reports to Synod

Bunbury 2018 – we considered as unacceptable and too expensive.

It was decided to compile a **Sample** of the changes required and to present this **Sample** to the churches and to Synod Bunbury. This Sample contains two Psalms, two Hymns, two Creeds, two articles of the Belgic Confession, two Lord's Days, two parts of the Canons of Dort, one Form and two Prayers. This **Sample** is attached to this report as Appendix I.

In this **Sample** all changes have been highlighted in red and – in the first version of Psalm 22 – also in green.

1.3 Preparations of Version II of the *Book of Praise*

Synod also asked Deputies to prepare a version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* based on the ESV without capitalisation of pronouns referring to God. This task was not as time consuming as Version I was. Use was made of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* because Synod Baldivis 2015 had encouraged the churches to use it. None of the Psalms and Hymns required any change.

1.3.1 Which changes in the non-musical section of the *Book of Praise* have been decided upon by previous Australian Synods?

Previous synods of the FRCA decided upon some changes regarding the non-musical section of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.

The changes Deputies made are mentioned in point 1.2.4 of this Report.

These changes are kept in the Dropbox file.

1.3.2 Further required changes

The following changes are required:

- In the first sentence of the preface to The Belgic Confession the reference to the

Canadian Reformed Churches was changed into the *Free Reformed Churches of Australia* (page 499).

- In the fourth paragraph of the preface to the Church Order the reference to the *Canadian Reformed Churches* was changed into the *Free Reformed Churches of Australia* (page 647).
- The text of the Forms of Subscription used in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia are kept in the Dropbox archives. These Forms need to replace the ones mentioned in the *Book of Praise* 2014 edition (page 661).
- The following pages of the *Book of Praise* 2014 edition need to be updated as well:
 - i – title page,
 - iii - title,
 - iv – rewrite certain information,
 - v – change *Book of Praise* into new title,
 - vi – rewrite and add information about Australian Synods,
 - viii – change *Book of Praise* into new title,
 - ix – change page numbering,
 - 356 – change list of hymns,
 - 357 – change list of hymns,
 - 673 – change list of index of first lines,
 - 674 – change list of index of first lines,
 - 675 – change list of index of first lines,
 - 676 – change list of index of first lines,

681 – change *Book of Praise* into new title.

Change the front cover.

1.3.3 The latest updated version of the Australian Church Order

A copy of the latest Australian Church Order has been obtained and is also kept in the Dropbox archives.

1.4 Discussion of the 19 Hymns which have been added to the 1984 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise*

Deputies noticed that in their Mandate no specific mention was made that it was their task to consider the 19 Hymns which had been added to the 1984 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* and which were part of the 2010 edition.

1.4.1 Acts, Article 25 VIII + Grounds

Synod Baldivis 2015 adopted the following proposal under article 25 VIII:

To further investigate the adoption of the 19 additional hymns from the 2010 Authorised Provisional *Book of Praise* (including changes as made by Synod Carman in 2013), for use within the churches, taking into account the investigations that have already been done.

Grounds

1. Synod Legana 2009 Art 42 decided to invite the churches to scrutinize these hymns because they are a "needed addition". Art 42 Ground 1. *"These new hymns, as the printed version explains, are a needed addition to supplement the sections of the Apostles' Creed which do not receive enough coverage in the present edition. (The hymns are arranged according to topics of the Apostles' Creed.) Thus they are not loosely*

selected hymns but they have a definite purpose".

2. Synod Armadale 2012 noted that the additional hymns were not adopted because the churches had not specifically requested them (Art 106 Ground 4). Thus this proposal comes to Synod in the church orderly way from a local church via the route of Classis and so Synod Armadale 2012's ground for not accepting the hymns is no longer applicable.
3. The Canadian Reformed churches have printed a final edition of the *Book of Praise*, and have taken steps to reduce the addition of more hymns. Thus the fear of significant increases to the hymnal section is no longer warranted.
4. The investigations made concerning these hymns prior to Synod 2012 (Standing Committee CanRC; ad hoc Committee of CanRC and previous deputies *Book of Praise* FRCA) should be taken into account when further investigating these hymns (including table attached).
5. Synod Legana 2009 Art 42, Ground 3 reads: "If possible we should try to keep a common *Book of Praise*. The influence of our larger Canadian sister churches as a bond on us as a smaller bond is very healthy".

1.4.2 Acts, Article 76 V Ground 3

Synod Baldivis 2015 decided to further investigate the adoption of the 19 additional hymns in the Canadian *Book of Praise* (art. 24). Should any of these hymns be adopted for use they should be incorporated in the Australian version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* before it is published?

1.4.3 Decision Deputies to study the 19 Hymns

As is shown under 1.4.1 and 1.4.2, the *Acts* did mention that the adoption of the 19 hymns should be further investigated without stipulating who should do it. Deputies have taken it upon themselves to do this investigation.

1.4.4 How did Deputies approach the matter?

Deputies made use of the following *Principles and Guidelines* which Synod Chatham 2004 of the CanRC had given to the SCBP – and which were adopted by Synod Armadale 2012, *Acts* Art. 106, Ground #6 – when considering the new 19 hymns:

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. (Ps 147:1)*
2. *The Book of Psalms is foundational for the Church's songs. Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the Church's songbook.*
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. (2 Tim 3:16)*
4. *In the case of songs other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teaching of Scripture as summarised by our Reformed confessions. (Prov 30:6)*
5. *The songs of the Church must be intelligible and edifying to the body of Christ. (1 Cor 14:15; Col 3:16)*
6. *The songs of the Church must reflect and preserve the language of the Church of all*

ages rather than accommodating current secular trends. (Rom 12:2a)

7. *In content and form, the songs of the Church must be free from artificiality, sentimentality, and individualism.*
8. *The music of the song must 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 suggest places and occasions other than the Church and the worship of God. (Eph 5:18-21)*
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.*

Deputies decided that each member should study every new hymn and provide their input based on the *Principles and Guidelines* mentioned above. Many discussions ensued where we tried to find a uniform opinion about the 19 hymns. Where there was disagreement, both opinions were noted.

1.4.5 Result of our discussions

The result of our discussions can be found in Appendix II.

2.0 Contact with the churches

2.1 Our correspondence to the churches

Deputies sent on 16 November 2016 a letter to all consistories of the FRCA with the following two requests:

1. *Synod Baldivis encouraged the churches to use the 2014 BOP in the interim. Do you have any feedback about this 2014 edition which would be useful for our deputyship as we prepare two Australian versions of this book (one with NKJV quotes and the other with ESV quotes)? Furthermore, some of the churches have invested time outside the worship services to practice the 19 extra hymns. Has this led to any feedback about these hymns which would be helpful to our deputyship as we review them? If you have any feedback, please send it through to us.*
2. *As Australian churches we are not allowed to use the title 'Book of Praise' for the Australia version of the Canadian Book of Praise. We would appreciate your suggestions on possible alternative titles so that we can present a recommendation to Synod Bunbury 2018.*

Synod Baldivis 2015 gave the churches the opportunity to further investigate the adoption of the 19 additional hymns (Acts, Art. 25). The churches should also be requested input regarding a title.

During October 2016, Deputies informed the membership of the work they are doing in an article in the magazine *Una Sancta*.

2.2 Input from the Australian churches

The following responses from the FRCA churches were received:

1. From the FRC Melville, dated 19-12-2016, informing that they are happy with the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* they are using in the worship services. Consistory is in favour of a version that contains Scripture texts based on the ESV that has been adopted for use in the services.
2. From the FRC Armadale, dated 10-03-2017, informing that they are still using the APV.

Consistory is reconsidering the use of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* (which has been in use since 1 October 2017).

3. From FRC West Albany, dated 2-6-2017, resubmitting their comments regarding the Authorised Provisional Version (APV) of 2010. The comments had been forwarded to Synod Armadale of 2012.
4. From the FRC of Busselton, dated 25-7-2017, informing that they *are in favour of using the Canadian Book of Praise with some amendments to reflect Australian Synod decision effecting the creeds, confessions and liturgical forms as well as including the Australian Church Order*. Consistory also informed that they have been practising the 19 new hymns before the worship services. Consistory supports the feedback from the congregation that these new hymns were well received and that they should be included in the new *Book of Praise*.
5. From Classis Central, dated 21-10-2016, informing Deputies that three proposals from FRC Rockingham to change the text of Psalm 2, of Psalm 8 and of Psalm 130 have been approved by Classis and that these proposals *have been forwarded for tabling at the next Synod*. Deputies would like to draw the attention of Synod to what has been commented under 3.2.2 regarding changing the text of Psalms.
6. From Classis Central, dated 30-5-2017, informing Deputies that a proposal from FRC Rockingham to change the text of Psalm 150 has been passed *on to the FRCA Synod Bunbury 2108*.
7. From FRC of Southern River, dated 2-12-2017, informing that they have been busy investigating the 19 new hymns *for the past two years. We have sung through the provisional hymns prior to the*

worship services, soliciting feedback from our congregation about these hymns. We have decided to submit a proposal regarding this matter to Classis – North – who decided to pass it along to Synod Bunbury 2018. Consistory also informed Deputies that they have adopted the use of the ESV as from 4th of February, 2018. This means that in effect, we would be in favour of using the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise, with of course our own church order and two minor changes to the forms (the Apostles' Creed and the Form for ordination of elders and deacons.

2.3 Suggested names for the Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*

Deputies received from individual members of the Free Reformed Churches some suggestions for a name of the Australian Version of the *Book of Praise*. A number of churches indicated that they had not received any suggestions from their members.

Suggestions received were as follows:

1. Praise Book
2. Book of Worship
3. Praise and Worship
4. Praise Him
5. Glory to God
6. Praise to the Lord
7. Sing to the Lord: Anglo-Genevan Psalter
8. Sepher Tehillim = Book of Praises. The book of psalms was gradually collected and perhaps due to the great variety of material known as the Sepher Tehillim. Also because every Psalm contains some note of praise to God.

9. Psalmoi – Greek word for this book, also meaning “Poems, Sung to Accompaniment of Musical Instruments”. This word is the basis for the term “Psalter”.
10. Liber Psalmorum – The Latin word for Book of Psalms.
11. Psalm and Hymn Book
12. Sing ‘Glory to Him’ Book
13. Book of Praise and Faith (‘Faith’ pointing to our confessions)
14. Book of Praise and Unity (Also pointing to our confessions)
15. Reformed Book of Praise
16. Reformed Psalter Hymnal
17. Reformed Book of Worship and Praise
18. Song and Praise Book
19. Songbook of Salvation
20. Power-of-Praise Book
21. Australian Book of Praise

2.4 Recommendation

Deputies recommend that the name ***Sing to the Lord: Anglo-Genevan Psalter*** is accepted for the Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*. This suggestion was accompanied by the following explanation:

To justify our suggestion, we first point out that historically, many Christian songbooks and hymnals have used phrases similar to “sing to the Lord” as their titles. For example, there have been songbooks called Sing His Praise, Worship the Lord, Worship in Song, Rejoice and Sing, among others.

Secondly, the phrase “sing to the Lord” is a Biblical phrase that often describes the worship of the Lord’s people. Interestingly, it occurs in one of the first songs that is recorded in Scripture, the song of Moses and Miriam in Exodus 15:1,21. Similarly, it is found in Deborah’s song in Judges 5:3, and in David’s song of thanksgiving in 1 Chronicles 16:23. There are also numerous examples in the Psalms where God’s people are invited to “sing to the Lord,” or where they call on others to do the same (see Pss 13:6; 30:4; 95:1; 96:1; 104:33; cf. also Isa 42:10; Jer 20:13). This phrase is also repeated in the rhymed version of the Psalms in the Book of Praise, such as in Psalm 30:2, “Sing to the Lord, you saints of his” (see also Pss 96:1,8; 98:1; 147:1; 149:2).

3.0 Contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise

3.1 Deputies’ contact with Prof Dr J Smith

Deputies met, during their meeting of 29-4-2016, with Prof Dr J Smith, a member of the SCBP. A number of questions had been passed on to him beforehand and he could discuss them with Rev G VanPopta, who was a member of the SCBP at the time and who had been convener of the SCBP for fifteen years through the entire process of producing the new *Book of Praise*. Some of the points discussed were soon followed up by the Deputies in their official contact with the SCBP. We will mention a few:

1. SCBP holds the copyright of the Book of Praise. They have a written agreement with Premier Printing to be the publisher; Premier holds the final files the Australian Deputies would need.
2. Australia should be allowed to make an ‘evaluation copy’ of both versions; these copies should be clearly marked as a ‘provisional’ edition. It would be advisable that these copies are durable so that

they can last long enough – as example was mentioned the binding of the APV of 2010.

3. The biggest challenge in producing the new version was *the copious amount of proof-reading that needed to be done and then still find small errors*. Prof Smith mentioned that after Premier had incorporated the changes decided upon by the previous synod and had sent the proofs to the SCBP *we went through the proofs, found a lot of mistakes – some new ones , some generated by Premier – and made a new list of changes. We did this 10x before the final edition came out in 2014.*
4. Prof Smith provided us with some notes to the questions asked. According to him the most unexpected challenge was

probably the change to the ESV in the prose section – we learned that you cannot simply cut and paste, cutting out the NIV and pasting in the ESV – often just a phrase is quoted within a sentence, so when you take out the NIV phrase and insert the ESV phrase, the sentence no longer flows – you have to make sure you have the right part of the quotation – you sometimes have to adjust the sentence so that it flows – sometimes the new translation is completely different and doesn't work at all, so then you have to find a different solution such as a paraphrase, and all of these things have to be discussed and agreed upon and included in the report to synod.

Deputies have provided an example under point 1.2.3 of the Report to Synod.

5. A general advice to the Deputies was to *set up an archive to preserve all of your minutes, reports, correspondence, and advice, otherwise you will lose track of what you have done and why you*

have done it – appoint someone to be an archivist. This advice was followed up by Deputies. The complete archive is ready to be handed over to the next archivist.

Another advice was that if your mandate is too large to fulfill all of it, then limit yourself to what you can do well with the resources you have.

3.2 Written contact with SCBP

3.2.1 First contact by Deputies

Deputies' first written contact with the SCBP was dated 21-05-2016. In this letter we presented ourselves as *Deputies Australian Book of Praise*, appointed by Synod Baldivis. We informed the SCBP of the mandate we had received regarding two versions of the *Book of Praise*, and the new name for our new 'songbook'. We also mentioned that we will present to Synod Bunbury 2018 our findings regarding the 19 new hymns. At the time of contact we informed the SCBP that we had *completed the 'capitalisation' of the complete Book of Praise and adjusted Scripture references from the ESV to the NKJV. When there are references to the Canadian Reformed Churches we have changed these to refer to the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.*

Deputies approached the SCBP as *copyright holders of the Book of Praise 2014 edition*. We also wrote: *We understand that you have a written agreement with Premier Printing who are the publisher of the 2014 edition and that they also hold the final electronic files. Our request is if we as Australian Deputies are permitted to receive a copy of these final files so that we can complete our mandate for synod 2018 of the FRSA.*

Finally, we mentioned: *The copies we must prepare for Synod will not be available for church*

members in general but will be part of the Deputies report to Synod. These copies will be clearly marked as "Evaluation Only" to be reviewed by Synod 2018.

This first contact clearly shows that Deputies were initially planning to prepare the two complete versions as requested by Synod Baldivis.

3.2.2 First response from SCBP

Deputies received their first response from the SCBP on 4-4-2017 after our request had been discussed at their meeting of 12-10-2016. In this response it became apparent that first Premier Printing as publishers of the *Book of Praise* and various copyright holders had to be approached. After these contacts had been established by them their comment was:

We are willing to share the content of the 2014 Book of Praise with you to assist you in your preparation for Synod 2018. However, we would like you to be aware that Premier Printing as publisher has produced the electronic layout files as part of the process of publishing the book and digital versions of the Book of Praise, and has borne the cost of that work. They recoup their costs through sales of the book and digital versions of the Book of Praise. We feel that it would be appropriate for Premier to be properly compensated and recognized for that work. For this reason we encourage you to contact Premier Printing directly and negotiate with them to obtain these files.

The following considerations were passed on:

1. *Receiving these files does not entail that the SCBP relinquishes its copyright to the Book of Praise, or that the SCBP shares such*

copyright with you. In other words, the SCBP retains copyright to the text in the files that Premier would share with you.

2. *The several individuals who hold copyright to the text of the songs likewise retain their copyrights. These include William Helder (many songs), Hope Publication (Hymns 38, 50, 66 & 79), George van Popta (Hymn 63), and the SCBP (the rest of the songs), as laid out on pages 679-681 of the Book of Praise.*
3. *In light of points 1 and 2 above, you are not permitted to make changes to the text of the songs unless such permission is secured in writing from the individual copyright holders.*
4. *Please be aware that Hope Publication receives royalties for the four hymns (Hymns 38, 50, 66 & 79) that we have included in the 2014 Book of Praise. The SCBP will not charge royalties for the individual songs to which it holds copyright (see pages 679-681). Whether the other copyright holders (Helder and Van Popta) charge royalties for their songs is for them to decide.*
5. *The music notation of the psalms and hymns is in the public domain, except for Hymn 1 (Credo) for which copyright is owned by the SCBP, Hymn 66 (Faithfulness) for which copyright is owned by Hope Publications, and Hymn 79 (Eastview) for which copyright is owned by the United Reformed Church.*
6. *As for the non-musical portions of the Book of Praise (e.g., confessions, liturgical forms, or prayers), no pretence is made by the SCBP of ownership, as these belong to the churches of the Reformation. However, the SCBP asks you to include (a) credit(s) to the*

effect that the particular document(s) is (are) the translation found in the Book of Praise.

7. *Please note that the copyright stipulations above apply not only to the latest versions but also to any earlier versions of the 2014 and 2010 editions of the Book of Praise that you may have been using to fulfil your mandate. Further, the SCBP retains ownership of previous editions of the Book of Praise (1984, 1972, etc.), and Dr. William Helder retains copyright to his several works contained in them.*

Regarding changing the text of Psalms or Hymns, the SCBP informed us that

we as committee are also not permitted to make any changes to the text of Psalms and Hymns unless instructed to do so by the churches. Hence it would be inconsequent of us to authorize you to make changes that we as copyright holders do not even have the authority to make.

3.2.3 Query from Deputies to SCBP

On 22 May 2017 Deputies responded to the SCBP with the following queries sent by email:

The Australian Deputies would like to clarify that the matters raised in Point 3 “In light of points 1 and 2 above, you are not permitted to make changes to the text of the songs unless such permission is secured in writing from the individual copyright holders.”

Deputies would like to clarify that this includes altering the text by (1) capitalising pronouns that in the “Canadian” Edition are not capitalised, and (2) additionally precludes the altering of spelling to adjust from current Canadian/North American

English spelling to reflect Australian English spelling.

Please know that we ask these questions with a view to be able to furnish our Synod 2018 with a precise understanding of what can or cannot be reasonably achieved.

By way of keeping you and the other members of the SCBP informed, please note that as your letter suggested, we are in the process of discussion with Premier Printing.

3.2.4 Response from SCBP

On 30 May 2017 Deputies received the following email response from the SCBP:

- 1. The SCBP grants permission to alter the text by capitalizing pronouns that are not currently capitalized. However, we do so carefully, since capitalization of pronouns involves exegetical decisions (e.g. in Psalms 2, 72 and 110) that could alter the interpretation of the text. If we may be so bold, we would encourage you to review the decisions taken by the Canadian Reformed Synods 2010 and 2013 (cf. Acts General Synod Burlington 2010, Article 109, and Acts General Synod Carman 2013, Article 178 – both available on the canrc.org website) to understand why we did not capitalize the pronouns in the Book of Praise. In any case, we realize that this will be a difficult (and time-consuming!) venture for you should you decide to proceed, and we wish you well in that endeavour.*
- 2. The SCBP has no objection to the altering of spelling to adjust from current Canadian English spelling to reflect Australian English spelling.*

Please note that this response pertains only to the text of the Psalms and Hymns for which the SCBP owns copyright.

Deputies were again reminded to contact Dr Helder, Rev VanPopta and Hope Publishing.

3.3 Results of these contacts re copyright

It became apparent that the SCBP holds copyright for the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* with the proviso that there are some authors who hold copyright to specific Psalms, Hymns and melodies, viz. Dr W Helder, Rev G VanPopta, Hope Publishing and the United Reformed Church and would request royalties for their versifications/music.

If the FRCA want to publish an Australian version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* then they are subject to these copyright rules.

4.0 Contact with Premier Printing

4.1 Correspondence

On 20-7-2017, Deputies sent a letter to Br William Gortemaker from Premier Printing informing him of the task Synod Baldivis 2015 had given to the Deputies, namely present next Synod with two versions of the *Book of Praise*. We explained that we *envisage that it will be sufficient for us to present to synod a binder with the books still in loose leaf form.*

The following request was passed on: *In order to produce such a book, we are coming to seek your help. Granted that we had copyright permission, would you be able to make the changes we have identified and print a limited number of copies for us.*

Deputies passed on to Premier Printing a sample of documents which contained *the changes to certain Psalms, Hymns and non-liturgical sections of the BOP* with the request to inform us of the time and cost involved to complete the required changes.

Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

On 22-7-2017, Br William Gortemaker responded by mentioning the following points:

- Copyright for the *Book of Praise* belongs to the SCBP. The task of Premier Printing is *to guard that copyright*.
- Deputies were asked about the different sizes of a *Book of Praise* and our preferences and the quantity required.
- *Will your committee be prepared to proofread each proof in a timely manner? Likely we need a few rounds of proofs to complete the project, so the timeline also depends somewhat on you.*

On 12-8-2017, Deputies replied: *We really don't have time to prepare for Synod 2018 a well-edited version of the Book of Praise, incorporating all our changes.* We also mentioned that the SCBP had given us permission to use some Psalms and Hymns in our **Sample** for Synod. Finally, we mentioned three options we were discussing, viz. to have eventually Premier Printing producing the books entirely or *to purchase a locked pdf from Premier and having it printed here, or maybe even purchasing an editable file which we could then edit and print here.*

On 8-9-2018, Br William Gortemaker responded to the three options:

- *The first scenario – Premier does the printing – is in some ways simplest to arrive at.* The costing will be easily calculated.
- *The second and third scenarios get into murkier waters, since Premier is by contract the sole publisher of the SCBP content in the English language.* Br Gortemaker did express his wish to help the Australian churches but *we need to consider how Premier's interests are affected by the relinquishing of these rights.* He mentions

intellectual property, costs that have not been recouped and the loss of potential revenue.

On 1-11-2017, Deputies passed on Br William Gortemaker two files: one with the proposed changes to Psalms 1-25 and to the Belgic Confession. We requested the following:

- Costings for either 1000, 5000 or 10,000 copies of books based on the NKJV and those based on the ESV.
- Costings if the size of the books is similar to the 1984 edition.
- The additional cost of producing an electronic version.

The response from Br Gortemaker can be found under 7.2 of this Report.

4.2 Feasibility of printing both Versions

Within the time constraints Deputies had before writing and completing this report for Synod Bunbury 2018 it soon became apparent that it was not feasible to print complete versions.

4.3 Possible outcomes

1. Deputies decided to make a **Sample** of the NKJV version and present that one to Synod. Thus, Synod will receive something tangible which gives the brothers an impression what this version will look like and what the challenges are which Deputies have encountered (see for example the two versions of Psalm 22).
2. The ESV based version will be quite straight forward and its description can be found under section 1.3.

5.0 Contacts regarding copyright

5.1 Dr W Helder

On 8-7-2017, Deputies received a letter from Dr W Helder – no contact had been sought by us as yet – which read as follows:

Indirectly and unofficially it has come to my attention that your Synod Baldivis 2015 gave you the mandate to proceed with the publication of an Australian version of the Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter. I understand that in this connection Synod instructed you to come to an agreement with me regarding permission to use texts to which I hold the copyright.

A request received from your committee in 2002 concerned the use of my copyrighted material as found in the 1984 Book of Praise. In view of all the revisions and substitutions incorporated in the 2014 edition, whatever agreement was tentatively reached in 2002 (and tentatively confirmed in 2008) obviously no longer applies. Requests regarding the older versions of my versifications will no longer be considered.

If it is indeed your intention to make use of my work in its present form, please note the following stipulations:

- 1. Full copyright will be retained by the author.*
- 2. No changes are to be made without the author's written consent.*
- 3. Authorship and copyright information is to be included in the proposed Australian publication in a form similar to what appears on pages 679-81 of the 2014 Book of Praise.*
- 4. Prior to the publishing date, a fee of \$120 (US) per Psalm or Hymn is to be paid*

directly to the publisher of the New Genevan Psalter in order to subsidize efforts to promote greater awareness of Genevan psalmody in the English-speaking world.

5. *The author will receive one free copy of the proposed publication.*

Deputies responded to this letter on 22-8-2017 by explaining to Dr Helder the mandate they had received from Synod Baldivis 2015 to provide next Synod with two versions. We informed him that we do not have sufficient time to present these two versions and that we will only use those Psalms and Hymns for which we received copyright permission from the SCBP. Deputies will take note of the stipulations he has mentioned in his letter. Depending upon what Synod will decide we wrote the following:

no changes are to be made without your written consent. Therefore we request from you written permission to use Australian spelling, and to capitalise pronouns referring to God in the Psalms and Hymns to which you hold copyright, in whichever Australian Version of the Book of Praise Synod should decide to produce.

Soon after, Dr Helder responded by email as follows:

The written permission to which you refer should be understood to apply only to textual changes. As far as I am concerned, you should feel free to use Australian spelling and capitalization of pronouns referring to God.

The following 44 Psalms are copyrighted by Dr Helder: 1 2 3 4 17 19 23 27 32 34 38 39 47 49 51 60 63 66 67 73 76 79 81 84 85 92 96 100 101 103 108 112 113 117 118 119 120 121 122 126 135 138 147 148

The following 15 Hymns are copyrighted by Dr Helder: 2 3 11 12 13 14 17:2-6 18 22 23 24 36 48 49 74

5.2 Rev G VanPopta

Deputies introduced themselves in a letter dated 22-8-2017 and explained the mandate they had received. Deputies also informed Rev G VanPopta that we do not have the time to furnish Synod with the required two versions. The following request was addressed to him:

We request from you written permission to use Australian spelling, and to capitalise pronouns referring to God in the Hymn to which you hold copyright, in whichever Australian Version of the Book of Praise Synod should decide to produce.

Rev G VanPopta's response, on the same day, was as follows:

In connection with your use of Hymn 63 of the Book of Praise you recognize that no changes are to be made without my written consent. You then requested from me written permission to use Australian spelling, and to capitalise pronouns referring to God in the Hymn to which I hold copyright, in whichever Australian Version of the Book of Praise Synod should decide to produce.

Hereby I grant this request, with the reiteration that no other changes be made without my written permission.

5.3 Hope Publishing

Hope Publishing has copyright on four new hymns, viz. 38, 50, 66 and 79. It became apparent that regarding Hymn 79 the music – tune *Eastview* – was copyrighted in 1959 by the United Reformed Church.

Deputies decided not to include any of these four Hymns in the **Sample** that has been presented to Synod.

After our contacts with Premier Printing, Br William Gortemaker wrote the following regarding dealing with Hope Publishers:

With respect to copyright approval from Hope Publishing, we as Publisher have not been involved directly with Hope Publishing, other than the submission of royalties for the books we produce. The SCBP arranged for approval and would be in the best position to answer questions on obtaining approval. From my dealings with them on royalty questions, I find them quite open to working with us and easy to deal with.

To provide Synod with as much information as possible, Deputies made contact with Hope Publishing on 6-11-2017. The following question was asked:

If we as Australian Churches develop the Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise what are the royalties we are expected to pay to Hope Publishing? Do we have pay separate royalties to the United Reformed Church for use of the music of the hymn We come, o Christ, to you or are they include in the royalty we have to pay to you?

The following day, Deputies received an email with a standard letter attached. In the email the following was mentioned regarding the music of Hymn 79:

Regarding your question about the James Lee music, you will need to pay royalties for that tune separately. When we own a text but another copyright owner controls the tune, the text would qualify for a half-share and the tune would also receive a half-share of pro rata royalty.

The attached letter detailed the copyright ownership and the costs involved when certain Hymns are being used.

In an email, dated 13-11-2017, the following comment was made regarding capitalisation of pronouns:

We would normally have no problem with updating pronouns as you have suggested, but it would be best to point out such changes when sending in proofs of the hymns.

After receiving further clarification from Hope Publishing, Deputies understand that the amount of royalties to be paid to Hope Publishing is rather minimal, viz. less than \$100 AUD for 1000 copies of the song book. It seems that every time a new set – say 1000 copies – is printed this amount should be paid to Hope Publishing.

Deputies have not contacted the United Reformed Church yet regarding their copyright when we use Hymn 79. Deputies have been informed by the SCBP on 7-12-2017 that they did not have to pay any royalties to the URC. However, we have not verified this with the URC regarding the possible use of this hymn in our song book.

6.0 Our options to move forward

6.1 Version I, 19 extra hymns included

The following points should be considered:

1. Deputies have made lists with the required textual changes based on the NKJV and the capitalisation of all pronouns referring to God. These lists are available in the Dropbox archives belonging to the Deputies. The lists have not been double-checked by the brothers so errors could still exist.
2. A **Sample** of these changes has been presented to the churches and to Synod to provide an impression of what has been and is involved.
3. To proceed with Version I, Deputies need to purchase from Premier Printing a locked pdf or an editable file belonging to the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* if someone in Australia is to make the changes to these files (see 4.1). Another option is that someone at Premier Printing is making the changes.

4. The updated files need to be checked and re-checked by Deputies to ensure there are no errors.
5. Before the final copy will be presented for printing, US\$120 need to be paid per copyrighted Psalm or Hymn to the publisher (Premier Printing) of the *New Genevan Psalter* (see 5.1 sub 4). There are 60 Psalms and Hymns to which Dr Helder and Rev VanPopta hold copyright. No royalties need to be paid for the Psalms and Hymns for which Dr Helder and the SCBP have a joint copyright arrangement (see the lists on pp 679-681 in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*).
6. No information has been obtained yet from the United Reformed Church. Hymn 79 shows that the music was copyrighted in 1985, before the URCNA – with whom the Canadian Reformed Churches have a fraternal relationship – had their first synod in 1996. It seems that this United Reformed Church is the one in the United Kingdom according to information received from the SCBP.
7. Information has been obtained from Premier Printing regarding the costs involved of eventually publishing this version. See 7.3 of this Report.
8. This edition will require the most preparation for it to be print-ready. The biggest time cost will be for proof-reading. Deputies have prepared detailed lists of changes that will need to be made. In order to prevent cut and paste problems (see section 3.1.4 of this report), those lists include the precise wording needed in each case to properly incorporate the NKJV into the prose. Deputies also note that any proof reading errors in the Psalms and Hymn sections will only be minor (i.e. forgetting to capitalise a pronoun), and will not affect singability.
9. It will be difficult to determine how many copies should be printed initially because all churches of

the FRCA – and the schools – use the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise*.

6.2 Version I, without 19 extra hymns

Nearly all comments, mentioned under 6.1, apply here as well. None of the new 19 hymns are copyrighted by either Dr Helder or Rev VanPopta. No payment of royalties to Hope Publishing – the texts of Hymns 38, 50, 66 and 79 – and to the United Reformed Church regarding the music of Hymn 79 will be required.

6.3 Version II, 19 extra hymns included

The following points should be considered:

1. As mentioned under 1.3, some minor changes need to be made to the non-musical section of the *Book of Praise* and the Canadian Church Order needs to be replaced by the Australian one. This task could be done by Premier Printing who have the file in their possession.
2. The cost of royalties will be the same as mentioned under 6.1.
3. The time of producing a copy of Version II will be brief, in particular if Premier Printing is requested to do the printing.
4. It is envisaged that initially not many copies of Version II will be purchased because all churches of the FRCA are using the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise*.

6.4 Version II, without 19 extra hymns

The comments mentioned under both 6.2 and 6.3 apply here.

6.5 Version I with only a number of extra hymns included

Depending upon which new hymns are included, all comments as mentioned under 6.1 apply here. The

ultimate cost factor could be somewhat less if only a few of Hymns 38, 50, 66 and 79 are chosen by Synod.

6.6 Version II with only a number of extra hymns included

The comments mentioned under 6.3 and 6.5 apply here.

6.7 Version III –2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* + separate booklet of Australian Church Order

As mentioned before, all churches in the FRCA use the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise*. Individual members either received a free copy from the church or purchased a new one. It became apparent that many members bought the deluxe edition because it is not so 'bulky' and lighter to carry.

Version III is that the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* will be used while each church presents its members with a separate copy of the Australian Church Order. The membership will also be informed of the changes as mentioned in 1.2.4 of this Report. There will be no royalties involved to either Dr W Helder, Rev G VanPopta or Hope Publishing. The churches of Melville, Busselton and Southern River have indicated that they are in favour of this version (see 2.2 sub 1 and 4).

The cost of printing the booklet with the Australian Church Order by Pro Ecclesia Printers will be minimal.

Version III is not included in point 7.2 of this Report because the matters of printing and copyright stay with Premier Printing and the SCBP.

Version III serves as an advice for Synod to consider as an alternative.

Deputies were not unanimous about the inclusion of 6.7

One of the deputies is of the opinion that it is inappropriate for Deputies to include this version in the list of versions for Synod to consider. This version was

not included in our mandate. Our mandate was to prepare two Australian versions of the Canadian *Book of Praise*, not to reconsider the desirability of such versions (Synod Baldivis 2015, article 76, ground 1: “*Submissions from the Churches indicate a clear desire to move towards an Australian Version of the Book of Praise*”). The problem with including this in our report is that it places an option on Synod’s table that was not within our mandate to place there. Options 6.1-6.6 are the options mandated by the last synod and it is now the task of Synod Bunbury to decide which of those should be produced.

6.8 Table

The information provided under 6.1 to 6.7 has been placed in a Table for easy reference.

✓ = required

x = not required

6.1 – Version I, 19 extra hymns included

6.2 – Version I, without 19 extra hymns

6.3 – Version II, 19 extra hymns included

6.4 – Version II, without 19 extra hymns

6.5 – Version I with only a number of extra hymns included

6.6 – Version II with only a number of extra hymns included

6.7 – Version III –2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* + separate booklet of Australian Church Order (Please note the lack of unanimity around the inclusion of this item as detailed in 6.7 above).

Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

	6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4	6.5	6.6	6.7
Textual changes required	✓	✓	minor	minor	✓	minor	x
Capitalisation of pronouns for God required	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	x
Locked pdf or editable file required from Premier	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	x
Premier can make changes	✓	✓	minor	minor	✓	minor	x
Updated files to be checked in Australia	✓	✓	minor	minor	✓	minor	x
Copyright costs (US\$) to be paid for <i>New Genevan Psalter</i>	\$7200	\$7200	\$7200	\$7200	\$7200	\$7200	x
Other copyright costs (US\$) per 1000 copies	<\$100	x	<\$100	x	Could be less	Could be less	x
Extra costs (CAN\$) involved by Premier	\$2650	\$2650	x	x	\$2650	x	x
Cost (CAN\$) per hardcover book to Premier for printing 1000 copies	\$31.49	\$31.49	\$31.49	\$31.49	\$31.49	\$31.49	AUS \$25

For more information see note 7.3 of this Report.

7.0 Legal and practical matters

7.1 Printing and distribution

Two matters are important to be considered:

7.1.1 The following comment made by the SCBP in their letter dated 4-4-2017:

We are willing to share the content of the 2014 Book of Praise with you to assist you in your preparation for Synod 2018. However, we would like you to be aware that Premier Printing as publisher has produced the electronic layout files as part of the process of publishing the book and digital versions of the Book of Praise, and has borne the cost of that work. They recoup their costs through sales of the book and digital versions of the Book of Praise. We feel that it would be appropriate for Premier to be properly compensated and recognized for that work. For this reason we encourage you to contact Premier Printing directly and negotiate with them to obtain these files.

7.1.2 The comment made by Br William Gortemaker from Premier Printing in his response of 8-9-2017:

Premier is by contract the sole publisher of the SCBP content in the English language. ... We need to consider how Premier's interests are affected by the relinquishing of these rights. Included in Premier's interest are intellectual property, costs that have not been recouped, and the loss of potential revenue from the Book of Praise once it is no longer used also by Australian churches.

Thus we are in the difficult situation of determining fair compensation against

current and future costs, while desiring to help the Australian churches. We are willing to discuss this and arrive at something mutually acceptable. Due to other constraints in the business we have no firm number to propose at this point.

Br William Gortemaker also wrote the following:

Finally, may I recommend you give some thought to the Australian bookstores (e.g. the Pro Ecclesia organizations) and what part they will play in the pricing and distribution of the books. They have previously received some revenue from the sale and distribution of Book of Praise in Australia. Perhaps it is worthwhile to discuss with them regardless of which direction you go.

7.2 Recommendations

Deputies considered the above comments and – whatever Synod’s decision will be regarding Version I or II – recommend

1. to ask Premier Printing to print the Australian version of the *Book of Praise* and to ask Pro Ecclesia Publishers to distribute these books in Australia (see 1.1 Mandate 3 b iii)
2. that an Australian Standing Committee (ASC) for the Australian version of the *Book of Praise* be appointed to implement the decision made by Synod Bunbury 2018 (see 1.1 Mandate 3 b iv).
3. that the Australian Standing Committee will further act as the legal entity within our churches to deal with copyright matters in liaison with the SCBP, if required (see 1.1 Mandate 3 b i).

Grounds

1. Premier Printing has the expertise and the experience in printing the *Book of Praise*.
2. Premier Printing owns the electronic layout files of the *Book of Praise* and certain costs are involved in purchasing these files.
3. To update those files in Australia before publishing the NKJV version of the song book will be a very demanding and time consuming task.
4. Premier Printing has spoken positively about Pro Ecclesia Publishers being the distributors of the song book. Pro Ecclesia could even receive some revenue from the sale and distribution.
5. Depending upon which **Version** is decided upon by Synod, the matter of copyright should be finalised before the Australian version of the *Book of Praise* is published.
6. An Australian Standing Committee should be in charge of all the preparations before the publication of the new Australian song book and should ensure that all legalities regarding copyright are dealt with appropriately.
7. Australia should maintain close contact with the SCBP which has done most of the work before publishing the *Book of Praise*.

7.3 Timeline and costings

The timeline varies, depending upon which option, mentioned under 6.0, is decided upon by Synod. The range could be from 1 (one) to 4 (four) years.

The costings involved, as have been provided by Premier Printing through Br William Gortemaker on 29-11-2017 by email, are as follows:

1. The NKJV versions will cost an extra CAN\$2,650 above the ESV versions because the setup costs

for the NKJV versions are higher than for the ESV ones.

2. The costs are estimates because the project is at an early stage. Factors that can influence the final costs are e.g.: paper availability, CAD-USD exchange rate, and final count/nature of changes required.
3. In their Mandate, 1.1.3.b.ii of this Report, Deputies were asked to consider possible sizes of the new songbook. Deputies first asked Premier for information on prices for printing the songbook. Then they also asked the following question:

The above questions are working with the sizes of the 2014 edition of the BoP. Would there be a possibility of having the size of the 1984 BoP? Would this make the costs any different?

The response Deputies received was as follows:

*In the table below you can see the smaller book actually costs more unless the quantities get quite a bit higher. In any case this size is **not recommended**.*

- *The most efficient option (which we have priced below) would be to scale the current content down to the 4 1/2 x 6 1/2 size. This however would make the type very small, too small for the average reader, and especially for beginning readers and seniors. The type would be smaller than the text in our 2008 Book of Praise of the same page size.*
- *The inefficient option would be to completely re-set the entire book in a larger font — which would require rebuilding all the stanzas with*

notation, re-flowing all the content over more pages, a thorough proofread. The result would be higher preparation costs, and also higher production costs due to the extra pages required.

The measurements mentioned above are the actual one for the 1984/2008 edition (4.5 inches = 11.4cm by 6.5 inches = 16.6cm). The measurements for the 2014 edition are 15cm by 22.5cm.

4. The prices of the books, either softcover or hardcover, are mentioned in CAN\$ in the following table.

	soft cover	hard cover	freight /book	Extra cost
NKJV				
1000	38.59	29.61	1.88	2650
5000	20.84	9.74	0.96	2650
10000	17.91	8.06	0.99	2650
ESV				
1000	38.59	29.61	1.88	x
5000	20.84	9.74	0.96	x
10000	17.91	8.06	0.99	x
1984 size				
1000	42.60	35.63	1.33	Depends
5000	21.89	11.74	0.48	upon
10000	17.91	9.10	0.48	NKJV/ESV option

5. Regarding the additional cost for producing an electronic version for iPads, etc, the information received was as follows:

The cost of an electronic version depends on the model (PDF or Mobile App?) and the level of functionality (links, etc.) built in. In Canada we decided to create an interactive PDF that has a good functionality across devices without the need to build and maintain an app across multiple platforms (Android, iOS, etc.).

A PDF with similar functionality would cost about \$ 1,000 to build plus costs of updates, management, and online distribution. This assumes a file can be provided with all the content changes already completed (e.g. after this is prepared for the printed books). Our version also requires royalties to be paid for four copyrighted hymns.

8.0 Appendices

8.1 Appendix I – Sample of Version I

8.2 Appendix II – Result of discussions on the 19 new hymns

Appendix II – Result of discussions on the 19 new hymns

Sample

of the proposed

**Australian version of the Canadian
*Book of Praise***

based on the

New King James Version

and

all pronouns referring to God

capitalised

Table of content:	Page
Introduction + Mandate	2
Psalm 22 – Version 1	3
Psalm 22 – Version 2	5
Psalm 142	7
Hymn 25	8
Hymn 28	10
Apostles' Creed	11
Nicene Creed	12
Article 26 of the Belgic Confession	13
Article 37 of the Belgic Confession	14
Lord's Day 26 of the Heidelberg Catechism	15
Lord's Day 45 of the Heidelberg Catechism	17
Canons of Dort Chapter I articles 1-5	18
Canons of Dort Chapter V Rejection of Errors #7-0	19
Abbreviated Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper	20
Prayers #13 and #14	23

Mandate received from Synod Baldivis 2015

Article 76 of the Synod Acts under V.3.a.iii reads:

To prepare two versions, one using the NKJV for all Scripture quotations and capitalising all pronouns referring to God, the other retaining the ESV without capitalisation.

As grounds for this decision were given under 5 and 6:

5. *Both ESV and NKJV are approved Bible translations in the FRCA.*
6. *Although the capitalisation of pronouns for God is not a principle issue, it is a good tradition and seen by many to serve as a constant reminder of the fact that God is worthy of great honour and respect.*

Synod Baldivis 2015 decided under Article 76.V.2 the following:

To encourage the churches to use the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise for the interim.

Work of Deputies

Using the 2014 edition of the Canadian *Book of Praise* (BoP), deputies have made lists of proposed changes to the Psalms, Hymns and the non-musical section of the BoP when compiling the version based on the New King James Version (NKJV). All pronouns referring to God have been capitalised and all text quotations are from the NKJV. These lists were discussed and some decisions were made e.g. not to capitalise the word 'name'.

Contacts with the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (SCBP) in Canada were tardy because the committee does not meet regularly. For that reason, the activities of deputies were slowed down as well. More information about these contacts – also with Premier Printing – can be found elsewhere in Deputies' Report.

What to present to Synod Bunbury 2018?

Deputies have decided to only present a **Sample** of the proposed *Book of Praise* – deputies will maintain this title although a new name needs to be decided upon – based on the NKJV where all pronouns referring to God have been capitalised. Deputies were not able to present a complete final version because that required too much work and would become too costly.

It should be noted that the **Sample** is an exact representation of what is to be in the *Book of Praise* based on the NKJV. Deputies apologise if there are still spelling or linguistic errors in this **Sample**.

This **Sample** contains the following:

1. Psalm 22 (version 1)
2. Psalm 22 (version 2)
3. Psalm 142
4. Hymn 25
5. Hymn 28
6. Apostles' and Nicene Creeds
7. Article 26 of the Belgic Confession
8. Article 37 of the Belgic Confession
9. Lord's Day 26
10. Lord's Day 45
11. Canons of Dort Chapter I articles 1-5
12. Canons of Dort Chapter V rejection of errors #7-9
13. Abbreviated Form Lord's Supper
14. Prayers #13 and #14

Some sections end with *Notes* by Deputies to inform Synod of the difficulties they often had to grapple with.

Note regarding Psalm 22

Regarding Psalm 22 Synod should decide which version is to be preferred.

- Version 1 is based on capitalising all pronouns referring to God **and** capitalising all pronouns referring to Jesus

Christ according to the written text of Psalm 22 in the NKJV.

- Version 2 is based on capitalising all pronouns referring to God only. According to the King James Version, Revised Standard Version, New International Version and the English Standard Version – Bible translations which have been used in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia – Psalm 22 does not use any capital letters for e.g. 'him' and 'me'.

Psalm 22 (version 1)

PSALM 22

*To the Chief Musician. Set to
"The Deer of the Dawn." A Psalm of David.*

Geneva, 1542/1543

1. My God, O why have **You** forsaken **Me**?
When I to **You**, O God, for refuge flee,
why do **You** grant no help and fail to see
My tribulation?
I groan by day, but **You** are far from heeding
the mournful cries that I have been repeating;
by night also **You** do not hear **My** pleading.
I find no rest.
2. Yet **You**, O Holy One, in glory dwell,
enthroned upon the praise of Israel.
In **You** our fathers put their trust as well
and were delivered.
For when they were by cares and woes afflicted,
they trusted **You** and so were well protected.
To **You** they cried and they were not neglected
or put to shame.
3. But I, I am a worm, and not a man.
I am despised and scorned by everyone;
those who **My** grief and misery have seen
say as they mock **Me**:
"He trusts in God, relying on **His** favour;
why does the LORD not help **Him** as **His** Saviour?"

If God delights in Him, let Him deliver
and rescue Him.”

4. You drew Me from the womb and gave Me rest,
for You, LORD, soothed Me on My mother's breast;
right from My birth I have on You been cast,
God My Defender.
You ever since the day My mother bore Me
have been My God. In My distress assure Me
that You are not far off but will restore Me;
none else can help.
5. Fierce bulls, those that on Bashan's heights abound,
with dreadful might besiege Me all around;
they open wide their mouths at Me and sound
like roaring lions.
Poured out like water, all My strength is going;
My bones are out of joint. My fear is showing;
My heart, like wax within My body flowing,
all melts away.
6. Dried like a potsherd, all My strength is gone;
My tongue sticks to My palate as I moan,
and in the dust of death You lay Me down.
Dogs here surround Me.
I'm skin and bones, and gloating foes are staring;
they've pierced My hands and feet, no cruelty sparing,
and they divide the garments I was wearing
by casting lots.
7. But You, O LORD, be not far off, I pray.
Come quickly to My aid this very day,
that from the deadly sword My life now may
soon be delivered!
Rescue My soul from dogs that fiercely glower,
from lions' mouths, in this My darkest hour.
Save Me from horns of oxen great in power,
O LORD My Strength!
8. I to My brothers of Your name will tell
and praise You in the midst of Israel.
All you who fear the LORD, praise Him as well

in your assembly.

O Jacob's offspring, honour and adore **Him**.

He did not scorn the lowly or abhor **Him**.

God did not keep **His** face concealed before **Him**
but heard **His** cries.

9. I'll sing **My** praises where God's people meet
and keep the vows that I will there repeat.
Praise God, who gives the poor enough to eat.
Rejoice forever!
All nations will remember to revere **Him**,
and all their families will bow down and fear **Him**.
He issues **His** commands and all will hear **Him**:
the LORD is king.
10. All who are rich will fear **His** majesty;
all who go down to dust will bow the knee –
yes, all whose own strength cannot keep them free
from death and ruin.
Posterity through every generation
will serve **Him** and proclaim **His** vindication;
those yet unborn will hear of the salvation
that **He** has won.

Psalm 22 (version 2)

PSALM 22

*To the Chief Musician. Set to
"The Deer of the Dawn." A Psalm of David.*

Geneva, 1542/1543

1. My God, O why have **You** forsaken me?
When I to **You**, O God, for refuge flee,
why do **You** grant no help and fail to see
my tribulation?
I groan by day, but **You** are far from heeding
the mournful cries that I have been repeating;
by night also **You** do not hear my pleading.
I find no rest.

2. Yet **You**, O Holy One, in glory dwell,
enthroned upon the praise of Israel.
In **You** our fathers put their trust as well
and were delivered.
For when they were by cares and woes afflicted,
they trusted **You** and so were well protected.
To **You** they cried and they were not neglected
or put to shame.
3. But I, I am a worm, and not a man.
I am despised and scorned by everyone;
those who my grief and misery have seen
say as they mock me:
“He trusts in God, relying on **His** favour;
why does the LORD not help him as his Saviour?
If God delights in him, let **Him** deliver
and rescue him.”
4. You drew me from the womb and gave me rest,
for **You**, LORD, soothed me on my mother’s breast;
right from my birth I have on **You** been cast,
God my Defender.
You ever since the day my mother bore me
have been my God. In my distress assure me
that **You** are not far off but will restore me;
none else can help.
5. Fierce bulls, those that on Bashan’s heights abound,
with dreadful might besiege me all around;
they open wide their mouths at me and sound
like roaring lions.
Poured out like water, all my strength is going;
my bones are out of joint. My fear is showing;
my heart, like wax within my body flowing,
all melts away.
6. Dried like a potsherd, all my strength is gone;
my tongue sticks to my palate as I moan,
and in the dust of death **You** lay me down.
Dogs here surround me.
I’m skin and bones, and gloating foes are staring;

they've pierced my hands and feet, no cruelty sparing,
and they divide the garments I was wearing
by casting lots.

7. But **You**, O LORD, be not far off, I pray.
Come quickly to my aid this very day,
that from the deadly sword my life now may
soon be delivered!
Rescue my soul from dogs that fiercely glower,
from lions' mouths, in this my darkest hour.
Save me from horns of oxen great in power,
O LORD my Strength!
8. I to my brothers of **Your** name will tell
and praise **You** in the midst of Israel.
All you who fear the LORD, praise **Him** as well
in your assembly.
O Jacob's offspring, honour and adore **Him**.
He did not scorn the lowly or abhor him.
God did not keep **His** face concealed before him
but heard his cries.
9. I'll sing my praises where God's people meet
and keep the vows that I will there repeat.
Praise God, who gives the poor enough to eat.
Rejoice forever!
All nations will remember to revere **Him**,
and all their families will bow down and fear **Him**.
He issues **His** commands and all will hear **Him**:
the LORD is king.
10. All who are rich will fear **His** majesty;
all who go down to dust will bow the knee –
yes, all whose own strength cannot keep them free
from death and ruin.
Posterity through every generation
will serve **Him** and proclaim **His** vindication;
those yet unborn will hear of the salvation
that **He** has won.

PSALM 142

*A Contemplation of David.
A Prayer when he was in the cave.*

Geneva, 1551

1. With all my voice to God I cry;
I call upon the LORD Most High.
Before **His** face my grief I show
and tell my trouble and my woe.
2. To **You** I pour out my complaint,
for I am weak, my spirit faint.
O LORD, I turn to **You** and pray,
for it is **You** who know my way.
3. Foes in my path have laid a snare.
I look, but none sees my despair;
I find no place of refuge near,
no friend to whom my life is dear.
4. LORD, hear my cry and comfort me;
in my distress to **You** I flee.
You are my shelter from the strife,
my portion in the land of life.
5. O God my Saviour, set me free
from those who are too strong for me.
Your servant out of prison bring,
that thankful praises I may sing.
6. The righteous then shall gather round
to share the blessings I have found,
their hearts made glad because they see
how richly **You** have dealt with me.

Note: The heading of Psalm 142 – also of Psalm 22 – is an exact copy of what is mentioned in the NKJV.

HYMN 25 Who Has Believed Our Message

Isaiah 53

Mon Dieu, mon Dieu

Geneva, 1542/1543

1. Who has believed our message from on high that God's own Son, who laid **His** glories by, came down from heaven to suffer and to die for our transgression?
Who saw revealed in **Him** God's power and favour – the mighty arm of **Him** who sent our Saviour, that we, **His** people, might be free forever from sin and shame?
2. See how **He** grew up like a tender plant and sprouted from a root in arid land. He had no form or beauty to command our adoration. He was despised and by mankind rejected – a man of sorrows, burdened and afflicted. His greatness was not noticed or respected: we shrank from **Him**.
3. Our sufferings and infirmities **He** bore; our sorrows **He** was willing to endure, while we thought **He** was being punished for **His** own wrongdoing. But **He** was pierced because of our transgression, bruised for our sin: **His** punishments and passion procured our peace; **His** scourgings and oppression healed us again.
4. All we like wilful sheep have gone astray; we've turned, each one to his own wicked way. Thus God has charged **Him** by **His** death to pay for our offences. Our shame **He** suffered in complete submission; **He** held **His** tongue when we showed our derision, bore us no rancour for our lack of vision and wilful wrong.

5. He opened not **His** mouth when foes had come
to lead **Him** to the slaughter like a lamb;
He, like a sheep before its shearers dumb,
heard **His** accusers.
He was oppressed, but then the LORD relieved **Him**.
Who of **His** generation then received **Him**
as sent from God because mankind had grieved **Him**
with all their sins?
6. With wicked men they **Him** a grave assigned,
but then a rich man **Him** a tomb did find,
since **He** had not been to deceit inclined,
for **He** was blameless.
It was God's will to grieve **Him** by oppression:
He made **His** Son an offering for transgression.
He, when at last **He** has fulfilled **His** mission,
shall see **His** seed.
7. The fruit of all **His** suffering and pain
shall **He** behold, contented with **His** gain:
that men through **His** instruction may obtain
His boundless mercy.
Hence I, the LORD, reward **Him** for **His** passion
and many shall I make **His** own possession:
the ones for whom **He** made **His** intercession,
for whom **He** died.

Dewey Westra, 1972; rev

Note: Deputies have not been able to add the 'joining brackets' in stanzas 3 and 6 of this hymn. The same is true for the ninth stanza of Psalm 22. They will be added in the final copy.

HYMN 28
Salvation Unto Us Has Come

Based on Romans 3-5

Es ist gewisslich

Wittenberg, 1535

1. Salvation unto us has come
by God's free grace and favour.
Our works cannot avert our doom;
the law can save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone,
who for **His** people did atone;
He is our one Redeemer.
2. What God did in **His** law demand
and none to **Him** could render
caused wrath and woe on every hand
for man, the vile offender.
Our flesh has not the pure desires
God's holy law of us requires,
and lost is our condition.
3. From sin our flesh could not abstain;
sin held its sway unceasing.
The task was hopeless and in vain;
our guilt was e'er increasing.
None can remove sin's poisoned dart
or purify our guileful heart,
so deep is our corruption.
4. Yet as the law must be fulfilled
or we must die despairing,
Christ Jesus came, God's wrath **He** stilled,
our human nature sharing.
The law **He** has for us obeyed
and thus the Father's vengeance stayed
which over us impended.
5. Christ Jesus full atonement made
and brought to us salvation.
Each Christian therefore may be glad
and build on this foundation.
Thy grace alone, O Lord, I plead.

Thy death is now my life indeed,
for **Thou** hast paid my ransom.

6. Faith clings to Jesus' work alone
and rests in **Him** unceasing;
and by its fruits true faith is known,
with love and hope increasing.
By faith alone we're justified;
works serve the neighbour and supply
the proof that faith is living.
7. All blessing, honour, thanks, and praise
to Father, Son, and Spirit,
the God who saved us by **His** grace;
all glory to **His** merit!
O Triune God in heaven above,
who hast revealed **Thy** saving love,
Thy blessed name be hallowed.

Paul Speratus, 1523; tr. Composite, 1910; alt.

Notes:

1. First line, second stanza and first line, fourth stanza: the word 'law' is not capitalised as was done in the 1984 edition.
2. In the 1984 edition the word 'law' was not capitalised in line 6 of the second stanza.
3. It became apparent that there is an inconsistency in capitalising the word 'law' in various hymnals deputies have checked.
4. The NKJV does not capitalise the word 'law' in Romans 3:19, 28.
5. Deputies have decided to maintain the non-capitalisation of the word 'law' as is used in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.
6. The 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise* uses the words 'thy' and 'thou' in stanzas 5 and 7 in line with most renditions of this hymn. Deputies have capitalised these words.

THE ECUMENICAL CREEDS

In Article 9 of the Belgic Confession three writings, dating from the first centuries of the Christian church, are named as creeds which “we willingly receive.” They are the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. These creeds are called ecumenical (general, universal) because they have been approved and accepted by nearly all the churches of Christendom.

THE APOSTLES’ CREED

This creed is called the Apostles’ Creed, not because it was written by the apostles themselves, but because it contains a brief summary of their teachings. It sets forth their doctrine, as has been said, “in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity.” The Apostles’ Creed is based on the creed used in Rome around A.D. 400, which in turn goes back another two hundred years. It is typical of the creeds used in the western part of the Roman empire.

- I. 1. I believe in God the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.
- II. 2. I believe in Jesus Christ,
His only-begotten Son, our Lord;
3. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary;
4. suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
5. On the third day He arose from the dead;
6. He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand
of God the Father almighty;
7. from there He will come to judge
the living and the dead.
- III. 8. I believe in the Holy Spirit;
9. I believe a holy catholic church,
the communion of saints;

10. the forgiveness of sins;
11. the resurrection of the body;
12. and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED

The Nicene Creed, also called the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, is a statement of the orthodox faith of the early Christian church, in opposition to certain heresies, especially Arianism. These heresies concerned the doctrine of the Trinity and of the person of Christ and were refuted at the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325). Yet it was not this Council but the Council of Constantinople (A.D. 381) which adopted the Nicene Creed. This Council incorporated into its creed various formulations from the decisions of Nicea and expanded the confession concerning the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed is typical of the creeds used in the eastern part of the Roman empire. Both the Eastern and the Western church held it in honour, although with one important difference. The Western church included the phrase "and the Son" (known as the *Filioque*) in the article on the procession of the Holy Spirit, a phrase which to this day is repudiated by the Eastern church.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of the Father before all ages;
God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God;
begotten, not made,
of one substance with the Father;
through whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and our salvation, came down from heaven
and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
and was made man.

He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate;

He suffered and was buried;

and the third day **He** arose, according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the
Father,

and **He** will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead;

whose kingdom shall have no end.

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son;

who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified;

who spoke through the prophets.

And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins;

and we look forward to the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Notes:

1. In III.9. of the Apostles' Creed the word *Christian* has been deleted.
2. The layout of both creeds is similar to the one in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.
3. The introductory remarks are similar to those in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.

ARTICLE 26

Christ's Intercession

We believe that we have no access to God except through the only Mediator¹ and Advocate Jesus Christ the righteous.² For this purpose **He** became man, uniting together the divine and human nature, that we might not be barred from but have access to the divine majesty.³ This Mediator, however, whom the Father has ordained between **Himself** and us, should not frighten us by **His** greatness, so that we look for another according to our fancy. There is no creature in heaven or on earth who loves us more than Jesus Christ.⁴ Though **He** was in the form of God, **He** emptied **Himself**, taking the form of man and of a servant for us (Phil 2:6, 7), and was *in all things made like His brethren* (Heb 2:17). If, therefore, we had to look for another intercessor, could we find one who loves us more than **He** who laid down **His** life for us, even while we were **His** enemies (Rom 5:8,

10)? If we had to look for one who has authority and power, who has more than **He** who is seated at the right hand of the Father⁵ and who has all authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18)? Moreover, who will be heard more readily than God's own well-beloved Son?⁶

Therefore it was pure lack of trust which introduced the custom of dishonouring the saints rather than honouring them, doing what they themselves never did nor required. On the contrary, they constantly rejected such honour according to their duty,⁷ as appears from their writings. Here one ought not to bring in our unworthiness, for it is not a question of offering our prayers on the basis of our own worthiness, but only on the basis of the excellence and worthiness of Jesus Christ,⁸ whose righteousness is ours by faith.⁹

Therefore, to take away from us this foolish fear or rather distrust, the author of Hebrews, with good reason, says to us that

Jesus Christ was *in all things made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted* (Heb 2:17, 18). Further, to encourage us more to go to Him, He says: *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need* (Heb 4:14-16).¹⁰ The same letter says: *Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus ... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from*

an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water, etc. (Heb 10:19, 22). Also, *He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them* (Heb 7:24, 25).¹¹ What more is needed? Christ Himself says: *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me* (Jn 14:6). Why should we look for another advocate? It has pleased God to give us His Son as our Advocate. Let us then not leave Him for another, or even look for another, without ever finding one. For when God gave Him to us, He knew very well that we were sinners.

In conclusion, according to the command of Christ, we call upon the heavenly Father through Christ our only Mediator,¹² as we are taught in the Lord's prayer.¹³ We rest assured that we shall obtain all we

ask of the Father in **His**
name (Jn 16:23).¹⁴

¹ 1 Tim 2:5; ² 1 Jn 2:1; ³
Eph 3:12; ⁴ Mt 11:28; Jn
15:13; Eph 3:19; ¹ Jn
4:10; ⁵ Heb 1:3; Heb 8:1; ⁶
Mt 3:17; Jn 1:42; Eph 1:6;
⁷ Acts 10:26; Acts 14:15; ⁸

Jer 17:5, 7; Acts 4:12; ⁹ 1
Cor 1:30; ¹⁰ Jn 10:9; Eph
2:18; Heb 9:24; ¹¹ Rom
8:34; ¹² Heb 13:15; ¹³ Mt
6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4; ¹⁴ Jn
14:13.

Notes:

1. A literal quotation from the Scriptures as is found in the ESV text has been changed completely into the NKJV text.
2. When there are other text references such as Romans 5:8, 10 and Matthew 28:18 which are mentioned between parentheses, no changes have been made to the written text.

ARTICLE 37

The Last Judgment

Finally, we believe, according to the Word of God, that when the time, ordained by the Lord but unknown to all creatures, has come¹ and the number of the elect is complete,² our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven, bodily and visibly,³ as He ascended (Acts 1:11), with great glory and majesty.⁴ He will declare **Himself Judge** of the living and the dead⁵ and set this old world afire in order to purge it.⁶ Then all people, men, women, and children, who ever lived, from the beginning of the world to the end, will appear in person before this great Judge.⁷ They will be summoned *with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God* (1 Thess 4:16).

Those who will have died before that time will arise out of the earth,⁸ as their spirits are once again united with their own bodies in which they lived. Those who will then be still alive will not die as the

others but will be changed in the twinkling of an eye from perishable to imperishable.⁹ Then the books will be opened and the dead will be judged (Rev 20:12) according to what they have done in this world, whether good or evil (2 Cor 5:10).¹⁰ Indeed, all people **will give account for every idle word they may speak** (Mt 12:36), which the world regards as mere jest and amusement. The secrets and hypocrisy of men will then be publicly uncovered in the sight of all. Thus for good reason the thought of this judgment is horrible and dreadful to the wicked and evildoers¹¹ but it is a great joy and comfort to the righteous and elect. For then their full redemption will be completed and they will receive the fruits of their labour and of the trouble they have suffered.¹² Their innocence will be known to all and they will see the terrible vengeance God will bring upon the wicked who persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world.¹³

The wicked will be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences and will become immortal, but only to be tormented *in the everlasting fire*¹⁴ *prepared for the devil and his angels* (Mt 25:41).¹⁵ On the other hand, the faithful and elect will be crowned with glory and honour. The Son of God will acknowledge their names before God **His** Father (Mt 10:32) and **His** elect angels.¹⁶ God *will wipe away every tear from their eyes* (Rev 21:4),¹⁷ and their cause – at present condemned as heretical and evil by many judges and civil authorities – will be recognized as the cause of the Son of God. As a gracious reward, the Lord will grant them to possess glory such as the heart of man could never conceive.¹⁸ Therefore we

look forward to that great day with a great longing to enjoy to the full the promises of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus* (Rev 22:20).

¹ Mt 24:36; Mt 25:13; 1 Thess 5:1,2; ² Heb 11:39, 40; Rev 6:11; ³ Rev 1:7; ⁴ Mt 24:30; Mt 25:31; ⁵ Mt 25:31-46; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5; ⁶ 2 Pet 3:10-13; ⁷ Deut 7:9-11; Rev 20:12, 13; ⁸ Dan 12:2; Jn 5:28, 29; ⁹ 1 Cor 15:51, 52; Phil 3:20, 21; ¹⁰ Heb 9:27; Rev 22:12; ¹¹ Mt 11:22; Mt 23:33; Rom 2:5, 6; Heb 10:27; 2 Pet 2:9; Jude 15; Rev 14:7a; ¹² Lk 14:14; ² Thess 1:3-10; 1 Jn 4:17; ¹³ Rev 15:4; Rev 18:20; ¹⁴ Mt 13:41, 42; Mk 9:48; Lk 16:22-28; Rev 21:8; ¹⁵ Rev 20:10; ¹⁶ Rev 3:5; ¹⁷ Is 25:8; Rev 7:17; ¹⁸ Dan 12:3; Mt 5:12; Mt 13:43; 1 Cor 2:9; Rev 21:9-22:5.

Some notes:

1. In this sample all sentences have been both right- and left-justified.
2. Note that the terms 'perishable' and 'imperishable' have been maintained instead of using the terms 'corruptible' and 'incorruptible' which are used in 1 Corinthians 15 (NKJV). The terms 'good' and 'evil' have been maintained instead of using the words 'good' and 'bad' (2 Corinthians 5:10 – NKJV).

3. Note that the text reference of Matthew 12:36 is not exactly similar to what is mentioned in the NKJV. The change has been made to make the text more readable. Italics have been removed.
4. In line 8 the word *Judge* has been capitalised to be similar to what is mentioned in line 14 but contrary to the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.

HOLY BAPTISM

LORD'S DAY 26

69. Q. How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?
- A. In this way:
Christ instituted this outward washing¹
and with it gave the promise that,
as surely as water washes away
the dirt from the body,
so certainly **His** blood and Spirit
wash away the impurity of my soul,
that is, all my sins.²
¹ Mt 28:19. ² Mt 3:11; Mk 16:16; Jn 1:33; Acts 2:38;
Rom 6:3, 4; 1 Pet 3:21.
70. Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?
- A. To be washed with Christ's blood means
to receive forgiveness of sins from God,
through grace,
because of Christ's blood,
poured out for us
in **His** sacrifice on the cross.¹
To be washed with **His** Spirit means
to be renewed by the Holy Spirit
and sanctified to be members of Christ,
so that more and more
we become dead to sin
and lead a holy and blameless life.²
¹ Ezek 36:25; Zech 13:1; Eph 1:7; Heb 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2;
Rev 1:5; 7:14. ² Jn 3:5-8; Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 6:11;
Col 2:11, 12.
71. Q. Where has Christ promised that **He** will wash us with **His** blood and Spirit

as surely as we are washed
with the water of baptism?

- A. In the institution of baptism, where **He** says:
*Go therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
baptising them in the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 28:19).
*He who believes and is baptised
will be saved;
but he whor does not believe
will be condemned* (Mk 16:16).

This promise is repeated where Scripture calls
baptism
the washing of regeneration and the washing away of
sins (Titus 3:5; Acts 22:16).

Notes:

1. The literal texts from the ESV have been changed into the NKJV.
2. No change has been made in the last two lines of the Answer to Question 71.
3. Use has been made of the Australian spelling of 'baptised'.

PRAYER

LORD'S DAY 45

116. Q. Why is prayer necessary for Christians?

- A. Because prayer is the most important part
of the thankfulness
which God requires of us. ¹

Moreover, God will give
His grace and the Holy Spirit
only to those who constantly
and with heartfelt longing
ask **Him** for these gifts
and thank **Him** for them. ²

¹ Ps 50:14, 15; 116:12-19; 1 Thess 5:16-18. ² Mt 7:7, 8; Lk 11:9-13.

117. Q. What belongs to a prayer
which pleases God
and is heard by Him?

A. First,
we must from the heart
call upon the one true God only,
who has revealed Himself in His Word,
for all that He has commanded us to pray. ¹

Second,
we must thoroughly know
our need and misery,
so that we may humble ourselves
before God. ²

Third,
we must rest on this firm foundation
that, although we do not deserve it,
God will certainly hear our prayer
for the sake of Christ our Lord,
as He has promised us in His Word. ³

¹ Ps 145:18-20; Jn 4:22-24; Rom 8:26, 27; Jas 1:5; 1
Jn 5:14, 15; Rev 19:10. ² 2 Chron 7:14; 20:12; Ps
2:11; 34:18; 62:8; Is 66:2; Rev 4. ³ Dan 9:17-19; Mt
7:8; Jn 14:13, 14; 16:23; Rom 10:13; Jas 1:6.

118. Q. What has God commanded us
to ask of Him?

A. All the things we need
for body and soul, ¹
as included in the prayer
which Christ our Lord Himself taught us.

¹ Mt 6:33; Jas 1:17.

119. Q. What is the Lord's prayer?

A. *Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name,
Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And do not lead us into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory forever. Amen.*¹

¹ Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4.

Note: The complete text of Matthew 6:9-13 has been used as is also done in the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.

FIRST HEAD OF DOCTRINE

DIVINE ELECTION AND REPROBATION

ARTICLE 1

All Mankind Condemnable Before God

Since all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and deserve eternal death,¹ God would have done no one an injustice if it had been **His** will to leave the whole human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn it on account of its sin, according to these words of the apostle: *that... all the world may become guilty before God. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:19, 23); and, *the wages of sin is death* (Rom 6:23).

¹ Rom 5:12.

ARTICLE 2

The Sending of the Son of God

But *in this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world* (1 Jn 4:9), *that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life* (Jn 3:16).

ARTICLE 3

The Preaching of the Gospel

So that men may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends heralds of this most joyful message to whom **He** will and when **He** will.¹ By their ministry men are called to repentance and to faith in Christ crucified.² For *how then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?* (Rom 10:14-15).

¹ Is 52:7; ² 1 Cor 1:23-24.

ARTICLE 4

A Twofold Outcome

The wrath of God remains upon those who do not believe this gospel.¹ But those who receive it and embrace Jesus the Saviour with a true and living faith are delivered by **Him** from the wrath of God

and from destruction, and are given eternal life.²

¹ Jn 3:36; ² Mk 16:16; Rom 10:9.

ARTICLE 5

The Cause of Unbelief,
The Source of Faith

The cause or guilt for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is by no means in God, but rather in man.¹ Faith in Jesus Christ and

salvation through Him, however, is the free gift of God, as it is written: *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God* (Eph 2:8). Similarly: *For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ... to believe in Him* (Phil 1:29).

¹ Heb 4:6

FIFTH HEAD OF DOCTRINE

THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

REJECTION OF ERRORS

Having explained the true doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, Synod rejects the following errors:

7

Error: The faith of those who believe for a time does not differ from justifying and saving faith except with respect to its duration.

Refutation: In Matthew 13:20-23 and Luke 8:13-15 Christ **Himself** clearly

indicates, besides this duration, a threefold difference between those who believe only for a time and true believers. He declares that the former receive the seed on rocky ground, but the latter in good soil, or in a good heart; that the former are without root, but the latter have a firm root; and that the former are without fruit, but the latter bring forth fruit in varying measure, constantly and steadfastly.

8

Error: It is not absurd that one, having lost his first regeneration, is again and even often born anew.

Refutation: This doctrine denies that the seed of God, by which we are born again, is imperishable, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: *having been born again, not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible* (1 Pet 1:23).

9

Error: Christ did not pray anywhere that believers should unfailingly continue in faith.

Refutation: This contradicts Christ **Himself**, who says: *I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail* (Lk 22:32). It also contradicts the apostle John, who declares that Christ did not pray only for the apostles, but also for all who would believe through their word: *Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me and, I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one* (Jn 17:11, 15), (cf. 17:20).

Notes:

1. Note that under refutation (8) the word 'imperishable' has been maintained, this in contrast to the NKJV text of 1 Peter 1:23.
2. The text of John 17:11 under (9) is somewhat longer than mentioned in the ESV text of the 2014 edition of the *Book of Praise*.

ABBREVIATED FORM FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

(For the Second Service)

Institution

Brothers and sisters:

The apostle Paul describes the institution of the holy supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29: *For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed 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." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and*

so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Self-examination

If we are to celebrate the holy supper for the strengthening of our faith, we must first examine ourselves.

Let everyone consider his sins and accursedness that he may humble himself before God.

Let everyone examine his heart whether he believes the sure promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is freely given him as his own.

Finally, let everyone determine whether he intends gratefully to serve the Lord with his entire life and to live in true love and

harmony with his
neighbour.

Invitation and Admonition

All who by the grace of God repent of their sins, desire to fight against their unbelief and live according to God's commandments, will certainly be received by God at the table of **His** Son Jesus Christ. They may be fully assured that no sin or weakness which still remains in them against their will shall keep God from accepting them in grace and granting them this heavenly food and drink.

But to all who do not truly grieve over their sins and do not repent from them, we declare that they have no part in the kingdom of Christ. We admonish them to abstain from the holy supper; otherwise their judgment will be the heavier.

Remembrance of Christ

Christ has commanded us to use this supper in remembrance of **Him**. At this table we remember that our Lord was sent by

the Father into the world, assumed our flesh and blood, and from the beginning to the end of **His** life bore for us the wrath of God. He was bound that we might be set free. Though innocent **He** was condemned to death that we might be acquitted at the judgment seat of God. He let **His** blessed body be nailed to the cross and so took our curse upon **Himself** to fill us with **His** blessing. He was forsaken by God that we might nevermore be forsaken by **Him**. By **His** death and the shedding of **His** blood **He** confirmed the new and everlasting covenant of grace when **He** said, *It is finished* (Jn 19:30).

Assurance

Therefore, as often as we eat this bread and drink of this cup, we are reminded and assured of Christ's hearty love towards us. He died on the cross and shed **His** blood for us that **He** might feed our hungry and thirsty souls unto eternal life with **His** crucified body and shed blood, as truly as we receive this bread and

drink in remembrance of
Him.

Fellowship

By **His** suffering and death Christ has obtained for us the Spirit of life. By this Spirit we are united with **Him** and receive all **His** gifts. The same Spirit unites us in brotherly love as members of one body.¹ Therefore we all, incorporated into Christ by true faith, are one body and shall show this to one another not just in words but also in deeds.

Expectation of Christ's Coming

Finally, Christ has commanded us to celebrate the holy supper until **He** comes. We receive at **His** table a foretaste of the abundant joy which **He** has promised and look forward to the marriage feast of the Lamb, when **He** will drink the wine new with us in the kingdom of **His** Father.

Let us rejoice and give **Him** the glory, for the marriage feast of the Lamb is coming!²

Let us pray.

¹ 1 Cor 10:17. ² Rev 19:7.

Prayer

Gracious God and Father, we thank **You** that **You** have given us **Your** only Son as a sacrifice for our sins and as our food and drink unto eternal life.

We pray, work in our hearts by **Your** Holy Spirit through this supper so that, entrusting ourselves more and more to **Your** Son Jesus Christ, we may not live in our sins, but **He** in us and we in **Him**. Strengthen our faith that **You** will forever be our gracious Father, who gives us all things necessary for body and soul. Grant us **Your** grace that we may joyfully take up our cross, deny ourselves, and confess our Saviour.

Teach us to expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, who will change our mortal body to be like **His** glorious body and take us to **Himself** in eternity. Amen.

Exhortation

In order to be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not

cling to the outward symbols of bread and wine, but lift up our hearts to Jesus Christ, our advocate at the Father's right hand.

Let us firmly believe that we will be nourished with **His** body and blood as certainly as we receive this bread and drink in remembrance of **Him**.

Communion

(When he breaks the bread, the minister shall say:)

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for the complete forgiveness of all our sins.

(And when he gives the cup:)

The cup of blessing, for which we give thanks, is the communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink from it, all of you, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was poured out for the

complete forgiveness of all our sins.

(During the communion some suitable portion of Scripture may be read and a Psalm or hymn be sung.)

Doxology

(After the communion, the minister shall say:)

Beloved in the Lord, now that the Lord has nourished us at **His** table, let us together praise **His** name with thanksgiving.

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 iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from destruction and crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies (Ps 103:1-4).

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our

Iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him (Ps 103:8-13).

Therefore my heart and my mouth shall proclaim the praise of the Lord, from now on and for evermore. Amen.

Thanksgiving

Merciful God and Father, we thank **You** for the opportunity to partake of the supper of **Your** Son Jesus Christ, by eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, and so proclaiming the death of our Lord as the only ground of our salvation.

We praise **You** that **You** give us the privilege to rejoice in the communion of **Your** Son, as well as in the fellowship with one another.

We also earnestly ask **You** that we, being strengthened in faith by the celebration of this sacrament, may bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

Cause us to show in our whole life our heartfelt love towards **You** and towards each other.

Grant that with ardent expectation we may await the return of our Saviour, who promised that **He** would drink with us of the fruit of the vine in the kingdom of **His** Father.

To **You**, Father, be all glory, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

PRAYERS

13. An Opening Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Heavenly Father, merciful God, it has pleased **You** according to **Your** infinite wisdom and lovingkindness to gather a church unto **Yourself** out of the peoples of the earth. Through **Your** Word and Spirit, **You** govern her through the service of men. You have graciously called us to be office-bearers and have charged us to keep watch over ourselves and all the flock which Christ has bought with **His** precious blood.

In **Your** name we are now together to deal with matters concerning the edification and welfare of **Your** churches and to do so in an ecclesiastical manner. We realize that we are unworthy and unable of ourselves to think, speak, or accomplish any good. We implore **You** that **Your** Holy Spirit may govern us in our deliberations and decisions and may lead us into **Your** truth.

Keep all misunderstanding away from us and guard us against the sinful inclinations of our hearts. May **Your** Word be our only rule and standard, so that our work may glorify **Your** name, serve the well-being of **Your** churches, and bring peace to our consciences.

We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep. Amen.

14. A Closing Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank **You** that in the gathering and preservation of **Your** church in our country **You** are pleased to use our services. You have graciously ordered all things so that **Your** gospel can be preached without hindrance and we may engage in public worship and have our ecclesiastical assemblies. At the close of this meeting we humbly ask forgiveness for the shortcomings and sins

which did not remain hidden from **Your** eyes. We bring thanks for the good we received from **Your** fatherly hand. Will **You**, O faithful God and Father, bless all decisions taken in agreement with **Your** holy Word. Preserve **Your** church by the purity of doctrine, by the proper administration and use of the sacraments, and by the faithful exercise of church discipline.

Destroy all wicked counsels conceived against **Your** Word and church, and strengthen the ministers to preach **Your** gospel boldly and steadfastly.

Give perseverance to the overseers and the deacons, that they may be a blessing to your people through the faithful administration of their offices.

Bless our Queen and her house, that she may reign by **Your** wisdom. So govern the civil authorities that they may rule in justice and with wise restraint. May their rule be directed to **Your**

supremacy as the King of both rulers and subjects. Let in this way the shameful and wicked dominion of Satan be increasingly broken down. Grant that we may lead a quiet and peaceful life, godly and respectful in every way.

Hear us, O God and Father, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Appendix II – A review of the 19 additional Hymns included in the (Canadian) Book of Praise

The Acts of Synod Baldivis 2015 record in Article 25 that Synod accepted the following proposal *“To further investigate the adoption of the 19 additional hymns from the 2010 Authorised Provisional Book of Praise (including changes made by Synod Carman in 2013) for use within the churches, taking into account the investigations that have already been done.”*

Deputies again reviewed the 19 additional hymns with a view to providing additional comments and observations regarding these hymns for the benefit of Synod and the Churches. In preparing these comments the Deputies considered the reports prepared by the SCBP, the ad-hoc committee that reported to Synod Burlington 201and the information contained in previous reports by the Australian Deputies.

In this report, Deputies aim to supplement this readily available information and not to duplicate it. The comments of the Deputies are not to be understood as recommendations regarding the hymns suitability.

In order to understand the comments of the Deputies particularly with regard to comments relating to musicality we offer the following explanations/definitions.

Chant: A chant is a short, simple melody, especially one characterised by single notes to which a certain number of syllables are intoned, used in singing psalms and canticles.

Melisma: is the singing of a single syllable of text while moving between several different notes in succession. An extreme example of melismatic music can be found in Handel’s Messiah – For unto us a child is born. The soprano and alto lines sing the word “born” across 57 successive notes.

Syllabic: is the signing of a single syllable of text matched to a single note.

Category 1. Deputies make no substantial additional comments about hymns in this category

Hymn	Textual	Musical
34		
45		
46		
58		<p>Both 4-line verses consist of two almost identical pairs. The last and second-to-last bars in line 4 are not quite the same as the last and second-to-last bars in line 2, which may cause the same sort of confusion as in the last bars of verse and refrain in Hymn 66, and lines 2 and 4 of Hymn 70.</p> <p>However, in congregations where this Hymn has been practised this confusion disappeared.</p>
60		
66	The use of old English is due to copyright restrictions	

Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

70		<p>Lines 2 and 4 almost but not quite identical – has the potential to create confusion.</p> <p>However, in congregations where this Hymn has been practised this confusion disappeared.</p>
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Category 2. Deputies share the following observations about the hymns in this category

Hymn	Textual	Musical
9	<p>The phrase “world without end” can be considered archaic and is otherwise translated as “forever and ever”. Deputies note that the King James translation uses “world without end”.</p>	<p>The tune of this Hymn is “chant-like” and foreign to the Reformed singing tradition.</p> <p>We note that it is not dissimilar to Hymn 8.</p>
10	<p>This Hymn is taken from the Scottish Psalter and is only the last 2 verses of a 19 verse psalm. This Hymn functions as a doxology. Deputies note that this Hymn appropriately highlights phrasing that ends each of the 5 divisions within the book of Psalms.</p>	

Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

32		Deputies note that the Genevan tunes are almost exclusively syllabic (i.e. one note per syllable). The existing hymns do contain some melismatic (i.e. multiple notes per syllable – Hymns 16 and 73) notation but this Hymn extends the practice significantly. The word alleluia is spread across 11 notes.
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Category 3. Deputies had divergent views about the hymns in this category

Hymn	Textual	Musical
30	<p>(A) Some deputies are of the view that the phrase “He died on the accursed tree” is imprecise. Deputies note that the Canadian deputies suggested that the phrase be interpreted metaphorically.</p> <p>If this is a metaphor as the Canadian deputies suggested, what is being compared to what? The man hanged on a tree is cursed in that he is rejected</p>	

Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

	<p>by heaven and earth, not because the tree is cursed, and one so hanged doesn't cause the tree to become accursed. Christ died suspended between earth and heaven.</p> <p>(B) Another view within the deputies regarding the phrase 'he died on the accursed tree' is : In Galatians 3:13 we read that Christ became a curse for us. Reference is made to Deuteronomy 21:23: <i>Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.</i> This should mean that the tree or the cross is accursed as well.</p>	
33		<p>This Hymn adds a new style of singing to the Book of Praise. The addition of a single line to be sung before the first stanza only is unique and inconsistent with the existing Reformed singing tradition</p> <p>All the "lu" syllables in "allelu<u>l</u>iah" are 3 beat notes, which our congregations have difficulty with (except those at the end of a line.) However, in</p>

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		<p>congregations where this Hymn has been practised this confusion disappeared.</p>
<p>38</p>	<p>(A) Some deputies are of the view that calling Jesus Christ “hope’s attraction” suggests that we have a capacity to hope, and this hope is <i>attracted</i> to Jesus Christ. This could be interpreted in an Arminian way, for it suggests that Jesus Christ attracts an innate capacity in us, our hope, to Himself. Jesus Christ is definitely to be seen as the object of our hope, for we are commanded to set our hope fully on the salvation that will come at the revelation of Jesus Christ. But then it is through His Spirit that God makes us obey this command so that we do set our hope on Jesus Christ. But that is something different from calling Him “Hope’s Attraction”.</p> <p>(B) Another opinion was worded as follows: When reading the complete hymn I notice in the first three verses that the</p>	<p>The Psalms have a maximum range of a 9th (octave + 1 note). Here we have an 11th (octave + 3 notes) which is a great a range for congregational singing. We do note that Hymn 37 also includes a range of 11 and was previously accepted.</p> <p>However, in congregations where this Hymn has been practised this range was not too difficult.</p>

	<p>focus is on the saving work of Jesus Christ who is now sitting at the right hand of God. In verse 4 Christ is called amongst other: example of love and the attraction of hope. What is Christian hope? It is definitely not a kind of wishful thinking such as: I hope something will happen. That is an Arminian approach.</p> <p>Based on the first three verses of this hymn we must focus on Christ and what he has done. Then I think of the wonderful part of Romans 8 which mentions that we are eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. In verses 24, 25 of that chapter we read: <i>For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.</i> This hope is also a firm assurance for us as God's children.</p>	
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50	<p>(A) One of the Deputies wrote: My interpretation of this hymn is as follows. “The Spirit came as promised, at God’s appointed hour.” This is a reference to the Spirit coming on Pentecost. “And now to each believer he comes in love and power, and by His Holy Spirit, God seals us as His own, and through the Son and Spirit makes access to His throne.” It appears that these three are all a reference to what the Holy Spirit does in believers according to God’s promise.</p> <p>The key question is – is it right to speak about the Spirit coming to believers? Should we not say that the Spirit has to come to them to make them believe in the first place?</p> <p>We need to consider Ephesians 1:13. This makes clear that having believed, we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Calvin has the following to</p>	
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	<p>say: "But is it not the faith itself which is here said to be sealed by the Holy Spirit? If so, <i>faith goes before the sealing</i>. I answer, there are two operations of the Spirit in faith, corresponding to the two parts of which faith consists, as it enlightens, and as it establishes the mind. The commencement of faith is knowledge: the completion of it is a firm and steady conviction, which admits of no opposing doubt. Both, I have said, are the work of the Spirit. No wonder then, if Paul should declare that the Ephesians, who received by faith the truth of the gospel, were confirmed in that faith by the seal of the Holy Spirit."</p> <p>So we have the Spirit coming on Pentecost, and then people today coming to faith, and those people who have believed experience the Holy Spirit in them as a seal of the coming inheritance.</p>	
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	<p>But really that shows that it is correct to speak about the sealing coming after faith. But is it correct to speak about the Spirit coming to people who already have faith? Does the fact that those who believe are then sealed with the Spirit, mean that we can build from that the idea that the Spirit also <i>comes</i> to those who are already believers?</p> <p>(B) Another deputy wrote: In reviewing verse 1 word for word I came to the following observations: Referring to Eph 1:13: ... <i>after you heard the word of truth, the gospel</i> ... = in God's appointed hour (line 1); ... <i>sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise</i> ... = The Spirit came as promised (line 1) and also: And by the Holy Spirit, God seals us as his own (line 4).</p> <p>Referring to Eph 1: 18,19: ... <i>that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory</i></p>	
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Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

	<p><i>of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe ... = and now to each believer he comes in love and power (line 2).</i></p> <p>Referring to Eph 2:18: ... <i>through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father ... = and through the Son and Spirit makes access to his throne (line 4).</i></p> <p>These three reference show that verse 1 of this hymn is based on Scripture as do the other three verses as well.</p>	
57	(A) Some deputies are of the view that this Hymn tends toward individualistic language particularly in verse 2 & 3. It focuses on the baby as an “individual”. This is unique. The phrase “cross as sign” is also ambiguous. Art 34 of the BC is clear that Baptism is a mark not the cross. We are required to take up our cross.	57

	<p>Verse 3 states that Jesus Christ loves this child we brought. In the covenantal context of baptism it is more correct to say this of the triune God (“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”) who is showing His love for the child by confirming His covenant with him/her.</p> <p>(B) Another view within the deputies is that the focus in this Hymn is all the time on Jesus Christ and what he has done for us. Jesus accepts the newly baptised child into his flock (grafted into his vine).</p> <p>Regarding the phrase ‘cross as sign’: We do not carry the sign of the beast but the sign of Christ, i.e. the cross. This is not contradictory to what article 34 B.C. says: <i>By baptism we are received into the church of God and set apart from all other peoples and false religions, to be entirely committed to him whose mark and emblem we bear.</i></p>	
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62	<p>(A) One view among the deputies is as follows. “The third stanza speaks about the Lord sending us into the world. This appears to be an allusion to John 20, where the LORD says to His disciples “Peace to you. As the Father has sent Me, so also I send you.” However, commentaries such as Hendriksen and Grosheide point out that this should be understood as an official commissioning of the apostles. They are sent by Jesus Christ to be apostles to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth. This hymn applies the words of John 20 to all believers, by speaking about us being sent into the world by Jesus Christ. We are not sent in the same way as the apostles were sent. You cannot appeal to John 20 as a Scriptural basis for this idea. Similar things can be said about John 17:18 – As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.</p>	
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	<p>Because Scripture nowhere else speaks about us being sent into the world, the idea of us being sent in that way is not scriptural. This hymn will end up undermining a more careful exegesis of these texts.”</p> <p>(B) Another view within the deputies drew the attention to what was written in the Report by the SCBP to Synod Burlington 2010 of the CanRC: <i>Several churches point out correctly that this hymn can especially be used as a thanksgiving song after the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. This is supported by the ad hoc committee’s observations, including one that suggests “...this hymn is a prayer that, strengthened by the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, we may live holy lives and witness to our neighbour so that the fullness of Christ’s kingdom may come.”</i></p>	
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Deputies for Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

	<p>Though there is no disagreement among the deputies regarding the commissioning of the apostles by Jesus as mentioned in John 20, it does not exclude the task we have to live a holy life '<i>and witness to our neighbour</i>'. The wording of this Hymn is, thus, Scripturally based.</p>	
75	<p>(A) One view within the deputies was that the line "For the world's salvation bled" (see verse 1 line 6) – tends to suggest an Arminian concept of Universal Atonement and not the Calvinistic view of Limited Atonement. The question is not only whether these words can be based on Scripture, but also whether their being popularly used in this hymn will tend to make people think in a universalistic way."</p> <p>(B) Another view within the deputies was based on the following text: 1 John 2:2: <i>And he himself is the propitiation for our</i></p>	<p>Deputies note the melismatic tendency of the music – which significantly extends the practice beyond existing hymns. The existing hymns do contain some melismatic (i.e. multiple notes per syllable – Hymns 16 and 73) notation but this Hymn extends the practice significantly.</p> <p>In congregations where this hymn has been practised the singing of these melismas did not cause any difficulty.</p>

	<p><i>sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.</i></p> <p>Also 1 John 4:14: <i>And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as Saviour of the world.</i></p> <p>These texts support the line “For the world’s salvation bled”.</p>	
79	<p>(A) One deputy commented as follows: Verse 2 – Line 4 is noted as an unusual way of speaking. Also unusual to sing specifically to Christ and not to God.</p> <p>“Verse 1, lines 3 and 4, “In you alone we live and move and have our being in your love” is partially a quote from Acts 17:28. In this text, Paul is addressing the Athenians on the Areopagus. He is speaking about God’s providence when he says: “In Him we live and move and have our being.” It is true that Jesus Christ is God and that providence is His work as well. The Hymn would have been fine if it had not had the last</p>	

	<p>phrase – “in your love.” Paul applies the other words both to himself and to his Athenian listeners (in Him we live ...). But it is incorrect that those Athenians unbelievers have their being in the love of Christ. So the hymn takes these words referring to God’s providence and applies them to Christ’s (saving) love. This is not what Paul was speaking about, and thus this is a misquote and will only serve to confuse the understanding of this text. “</p> <p>(B) Another deputy noted: regarding the first difficulty mentioned: Do we pray to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit individually? Sermons have been given about this topic and the answer is: Yes. So we can also sing to Christ specifically as we also pray to the Father specifically when we say: Our Father in heaven and also to the Holy Spirit specifically (see Hymn 47)</p>	
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	<p>The second difficulty mentioned is that 'we come' to Christ. It should be considered as a response to what we read in Matthew 11:28: <i>Come to me, all you who labour ...</i> Christ calls and we will respond.</p> <p>The third difficulty mentioned is concerning the reference to Acts 17:28. It is true that Paul speaks to the Athenians in this chapter. However, it happens more often in other songs that a partial quote is used. This does not mean that we are dealing with a 'misquote' here. We 'live and move' in Christ and in his 'love' we have our existence.</p>	
81	(A) One view within the deputies was as following: Guideline 7 mentions that the song is to be free from artificiality and sentimentality. To ask for a thousand tongues to sing my Redeemer's praise is artificial. The poet is not asking for a thousand others to sing along with him,	

	<p>but that he himself might have a 1000 tongues.</p> <p>The second concern is that there is reason to question the doctrinal accuracy or at least clarity of the fifth stanza.</p> <p>This Hymn says that the dead are able to listen to His voice, and through listening to His voice, the dead receive new life. It is not clear whether Wesley means the spiritually dead or the physically dead. However, the other two lines speak about salvation issues (mournful rejoice; poor believe) and thus it is likely that Wesley's reference to the dead includes the spiritually dead. Moreover the words used – the dead listening to His voice – appears to be an allusion to what Jesus said in John 5:24,25, where it surely includes the spiritual dead.</p> <p>Do the naturally dead listen to Christ's voice? Is it not rather that His word</p>	
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	<p>which calls them is a mighty word, which gives to them new life? This is also the case for the spiritually dead. They indeed hear His voice with their physical ears. But they receive new life only because His voice is powerful and makes their hearts heed His words.</p> <p>Reformed commentaries make clear that it is the voice itself that creates new life, not that the dead hear the voice, choose to listen and then as dead people, receive new life. (Bouma in <i>Korte Verklaring</i>: “If His voice comes to them, they are still dead and cannot hear. But His calling is creative.” Grosheide in <i>Kommentaar op Het Nieuwe Testament</i>: “Such a listening, which is the beginning of the understanding, the obeying, is only possible through being made alive.”).</p> <p>Wesleyan theology had the idea of prevenient grace. They thought that God must have given some ability to all</p>	
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	<p>men to repent, for otherwise it would not make sense for the gospel to call people to repent. In this way, a dead sinner has the ability to listen to the word of God. This is an unscriptural picture of how God grants salvation, and an error rejected by the Synod of Dort.</p> <p>The conclusion is that this hymn includes a line which is fully in keeping with Wesleyan theology, but rejected by reformed theology. We do not want our theology changed in the popular mind through the kinds of hymns we sing.</p> <p>(B) Another deputy commented as follows:</p> <p>When I sing verse 5 of this hymn then I consider the following question: What did Christ do according to the description in this line? He healed the lepers, he made the lame walk again, he let the blind see again and he drove out evil spirits. And finally the dead received new life again: think of the son</p>	
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	<p>of the widow of Nain, of the daughter of Jairus and of Lazarus. The explanation given by Bouma and Grosheide, mentioned under (A), also emphasise this creative work of our life-giving Saviour. The verses 3, 4, 5 and 6 of this hymn speak and sing of these miraculous signs of our Saviour.</p> <p>When I sing this hymn I do not think of any Arminian heresy of prevenient grace and I do not think anyone who stands in awe of Christ's wonderful work should think in that direction. Let us as church on earth and in heaven sing of the glories of our God and King. Its culmination point is found in verse 7.</p>	
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Report of Deputies for Indexing Synod Decision to FRCA Synod 2018

C/- Consistory of the Free Reformed Church of Bunbury

22 November, 2017

Dear brothers,

Synod Baldivis 2015, in its Article 139, mandated *Deputies for Indexing Synod Decisions* to:

1. Continue the work of the late Rev G Van Rongen in collating the decisions of Synod as they relate to articles of the Church Order and check for accuracy. *This has been done.*
2. Publish these decisions on the official web page of the FRCA. *This has been done.*
3. Notify the churches of any changes when these decisions are updated. *This was done.*
4. Make all the published Acts of the general Synods since the start of the FRCA available in electronic form to FRCA members, but not to publish them on the FRCA website at this time. *The Acts of FRCA synods 1954-2015 have been scanned into the computer and PDF versions have been placed onto CDs and made available in Pro Ecclesia Bookshop at a small cost to the public.*
5. To review the publication of the Acts on the FRCA website in regards to the publication of sensitive information and develop an appropriate policy for online access. *We placed a notice in the Una Sancta requesting submissions, but none were received. Verbal feedback was given by one person who requested that copies of the Acts not be placed in a public space online. His view was that public access poses a risk that the information is used with malicious intent. There are examples where,*

particularly the media, portray churches, church members and affiliated organisations in an unfavourable light in their pursuit of liberal political agendas. If the Synod agrees that this risk must be managed, then we recommended that access be provided to individuals by request to the administrator of the FRCA's website, and that the electronic documents are password protected. The latter will also protect documents that leave the FRCA website as these effectively go into the public domain. It will not be practical for judgements to be made as to what is and what is not sensitive.

6. To place one bound paper copy in the archives after the decisions of Synod 2015 have been indexed; and
 - a. to collate the changes made to the Church Order by past Synods. *This has been completed;*
 - b. to place an updated or "clean" electronic copy of the Church Order on the FRCA website. *This has been done;* and
 - c. to publish (with the cooperation of Pro Ecclesia if possible) the updated church order which can be inserted into our liturgical book. *This has been done and copies of the updated Church Order are available from Pro Ecclesia Bookshop, and the churches have been notified.*

The scanning into an electronic form (PDF) of all the published acts from 1954 to 2015 was a labour-intensive task but is now complete. Apart from the 1954 Acts of Synod (which has been translated) the first few synod's Acts are available only in the Dutch language.

As pointed out to Synod 2012, for the sake of conciseness we included in the index only the synods' decisions and not the grounds on which the decisions were based. Only in a few instances, where the recorded decisions were unintelligible without the grounds, did we make an exception to this rule. The full texts of the decisions, including the grounds, are of course available in the official Acts.

Deputies for Indexing Synod Decisions

With Christian greetings,
Robert Eikelboom & Jelte Numan

Report of Deputies Art. 48 C.O.

Mandate

Esteemed brothers,

Synod Baldivis 2015 made the following appointments to serve as Deputies according to Article 48 of the Church Order, i.e. “to assist the classes in all matters provided for in the Church Order”:

For Classis South-West: Rev RE Pot (alternate: Rev S ‘t Hart)

For Classis Central: Rev C Vermeulen (alternate: Rev A Hagg)

For Classis North: Rev J Kroeze (alternate: Rev E Rupke)

Assistance Given

As deputies we were requested to give assistance to the classes in the following instances:

1. Release of Rev. T. Sikkema

Classis Central of 22 October 2015

- a) Rev. R.E. Pot and Rev. J. Kroeze were invited to attend Classis Central of 22 October 2015 in connection with the release from office of Rev. T. Sikkema, missionary of the FRC of Armadale.
- b) Since Rev. Kroeze was unavailable on this particular date, Rev. E. Rupke attended as alternate.
- c) Classis was supplied with the proper documents related to Rev. T. Sikkema’s request to be released from office, to enter upon another vocation, according to Art. 15 C.O., including substantiation for granting this release, and details of the financial arrangements and care for Rev. T. Sikkema.

Deputies Art 48 C.O.

- d) Classis was satisfied that the reasons for this release were exceptional and substantial, as required by the church order.
- e) Classis decided to approve the decision of the consistory of FRC Armadale to relieve Rev Sikkema of his office.
- f) Deputies were able to give concurring advice.

R.E. Pot & E. Rupke

2. Deposition of Rev. E. Rupke

Classis North of 27 May 2016

- a) Rev. R.E. Pot and Rev. C. Vermeulen were invited to attend Classis Central of 27 May 2016 in connection with the deposition from office of Rev. E. Rupke, minister of the FRC of Melville. Both deputies were able to attend.
- b) Classis was informed that on 30 April 2016 the consistory of FRC Melville suspended Rev. E. Rupke from office, for the serious and gross sin of adultery, having received concurring judgment from the consistory of their neighbouring congregation FRC Kelmscott, and in accordance with Art. 76 & 77 C.O.
- c) Classis was supplied with information from the FRC Melville in support of their proposal that classis judge that Rev. E. Rupke be deposed from his office as minister, according to the requirements of Art. 76 & 77 C.O.
- d) Classis was convinced that the sin was of such a nature that Rev. Rupke could not continue in the office of minister, and that deposition was warranted.
- e) Classis so judged that Rev. E. Rupke be deposed by consistory of FRC Melville.
- f) Deputies were able to give concurring advice.

R.E. Pot & C. Vermeulen

3. Retirement of Rev. A. Van Delden

Classis Central of 26 May 2017

- a) Rev. J. Kroeze and Rev. R.E. Pot were invited to attend Classis Central of 26 May 2017 in connection with the retirement of Rev. A. Van Delden, minister of the FRC of Mundijong. Both deputies were able to attend.
- b) Classis was supplied with the proper documents related to the request for emeritus declaration, including written letters from the consistory of FRC of Mundijong and Rev Van Delden indicating approval of the consistory with the deacons and agreement of the minister; letters from qualified physicians, and an outline of provisions for supporting Rev and Mrs Van Delden during retirement.
- c) Classis was satisfied that retirement of Rev Van Delden was warranted on health grounds according to the provisions of Art. 13 C.O., on the basis of the evidence presented.
- d) Classis declared that Rev. Van Delden be granted an honourable release from the responsibilities of his office as of 30 June 2017.
- e) Classis decided that since the financial package presented at Classis for the support of Rev. Van Delden needed more information to confirm that it satisfies the requirement of Art. 13 C.O., a more detailed package regarding financial support be presented to the next classis for approval of classis and deputies.
- f) Deputies were able to give concurring advice.

J. Kroeze & R.E. Pot

Classis Central of 21 July 2017

- a) Rev. J. Kroeze and Rev. R.E. Pot were provided with the FRC of Mundijong's more detailed and amended retirement provisions for Rev Van Delden, which they submitted to Classis Central of 21 July 2017.

Deputies Art 48 C.O.

- b) Having considered this, as well as the letter from Rev. A. Van Delden presented at Classis Central of 26 May 2017 in which he affirmed his agreement to the financial arrangements made by the FRC Mundijong, both classis and deputies were able to give concurring advice.

J. Kroeze & R.E. Pot

4. Examination of Candidate D. Winkel

Classis South West of 10 February 2017

- a) Rev. J. Kroeze and Rev. A. Hagg were invited to attend the peremptory examination of Candidate David Winkel, according to Article 6.1.b C.O., at Classis South West of 10 February 2017, convened by the FRC Baldivis at the FRC Bunbury.
- b) As Rev. C Vermeulen was unavailable and the alternate (E. Rupke) was no longer a minister in the federation, Rev. A Hagg, was invited in his place.
- c) The requisite documentation was presented and found to be in order and the examination could proceed.
- d) After due deliberation, Classis, with the cooperation and concurring advice of the Synodical Deputies Art 48, sustained the examination, with the result that the candidate could be admitted to the ministry and be ordained. We are thankful to God for this outcome.

A. Hagg & J. Kroeze

5. Closed Session Matter

In closed session, Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art. 104) gave deputies an additional mandate in relation to an unfinished matter that required their involvement according to the church order. This will be reported separately by way of a supplementary report.

R.E. Pot & C. Vermeulen

Recommendations

Deputies respectfully recommend that synod:

1. Receive this report, and release deputies from their task.
2. Appoint new deputies to assist the classes according to Art. 48 C.O., with one deputy and one alternate from each classical region, i.e. according to the manner decided by Synod Armadale 2012, Decision 3 (Art. 110, p.80-81).

With brotherly greetings,

Deputies Art. 48 C.O.

Deputies for Art. 66 Church Order: Days of Prayer

In accordance with Art. 66 Church Order, Synod Baldivis appointed the FRC Baldivis to call a Day of Prayer in times of war, general calamities and other great afflictions the presence of which is felt throughout the churches.”

After due deliberation a Day of Prayer was called for Sunday February 5, 2017 regarding “Same Sex Marriage and the threat that changing sexual norms have on our churches.” (See appendix 1.)

The calling of a Day of Prayer is a rare event in our churches, and so prior to calling this Day, there was considerable discussion as to what constitutes a legitimate reason to call a Day of Prayer and how it is to be done. Following the Day of Prayer that was called, the ministers who led the church services on that day were asked for their feedback on how the Day was remembered and how it was received by their congregations. Apart from the Church of Baldivis, feedback was received from 8 ministers and one consistory. Different congregations placed more or less emphasis on the Day of Prayer, with those giving it more attention tending to recognise greater value in it than those who did not. All those who responded brought the matters highlighted to the LORD in prayer in the church worship services, and most also had a relevant sermon and appropriate psalms of penitence. Some ministers also explained the reason for a Day of Prayer to their congregations and gave suggestions as to how the day was to be remembered, with one minister explaining that the Day was to be observed with a) repentance & confession, b) teaching & discussion, c) prayer & supplication. The consistory of Rockingham suggested that since a Day of Prayer is traditionally accompanied with repentance and fasting, and since the Sunday is by nature a day of rejoicing and celebration, it would be good to consider a Day of Prayer for another day of the week, such as a Wednesday.

Other ministers did encourage their congregations to observe a sober day on the Sunday that the Day of Prayer was called for. A few ministers noted that due to the rare observance of the

Day of Prayer, more education regarding such a day is warranted.

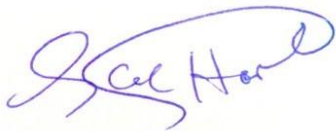
With respect to the specific reasons for the calling of this day of Prayer, at least two congregations felt that although the day was “generally supported” in their congregation, they were unconvinced of the need to call it since “the threat was not specific enough” and “this is something that should be prayed for all the time and not just on a prescribed day.” Most churches, however, did support the decision to call this day (although a few found the timing of the Day to be a little unfortunate).

By way of observation, following the Day of Prayer, the matter of same sex marriage and threat this and the changing sexual norms of our society have on our churches received ongoing and increasing coverage in the churches in the lead-up to and aftermath of the government’s Same Sex Marriage Postal Survey and the subsequent legislation that was passed by Parliament.

Since Church Order art. 66 is rarely invoked, and since there is neither precedence nor guidance from General Synod to determine how and when the church assigned is to call such a day, it is really up to the Church appointed by General Synod to determine how and when this ought to be done. If Synod Bunbury feels that the Day called was not warranted or deficient in any way, it would be helpful if Synod gives more guidance regarding the use of C.O. art. 66 in our churches. Since much of the deputyship work for Synod is done within the Perth Metropolitan region, Synod Bunbury might like to consider appointing another Church for art. 66 Church Order for the future.

Deputies Art 66 Days of Prayer

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Hart". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

S. Hart
Chairman

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "W. Plug". The signature is very stylized and cursive, with many loops and flourishes.

W. Plug
Secretary

Appendix: Letter calling a Day of Prayer, sent to the churches

**To: The Consistories,
Free Reformed Churches of Australia**

December 10, 2016.

Dear brothers.

**Re: Calling a Day of Prayer on Sunday February 5, 2017
(article 66 C.O) regarding Same Sex Marriage and the threat
that changing sexual norms have on our churches.**

Synod Baldivis 2015 appointed the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis to call a Day of Prayer for “times of war, general calamities and other great afflictions the presence of which is felt throughout the churches.”

In August 2015 we received an email from the Consistory of the Free Reformed Church of Launceston as well as two private letters from members of our churches encouraging us to set a Day of Prayer regarding the Same Sex Marriage bills that were going before Parliament at that time. At the time when we received these requests we did not act immediately because a) the urgency to call such a Day of Prayer was removed when the government of the day decided to put the matter of Same Sex Marriage to a plebiscite; b) we wrestled with the question of what constitutes an appropriate reason to call a day of prayer. At the same time we recognize the gravity of the situation in our day where not only is Same Sex Marriage being constantly pushed, but that there is a more general overturning of the biblical ordinance concerning marriage and sexuality. We also observe a growing attempt to silence the Christian voice in the public sphere.

In our discussions concerning what constitutes a right cause to call a day of prayer, advice was sought from the ministers in our churches in August 2015 and 2016.

One minister recalled that a Day of Prayer was called by the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands about 12 years ago because there had been a remarkable and sad increase in the

number of divorces in those churches and the matter of divorce was to be discussed at their next Synod.

We were also advised that a Day of Prayer was proposed by the Canadian Reformed Church of Cloverdale in September 2008 because of its concerns about the abuses of Canada's Human Rights Commissions, particularly against Christians who have spoken out about matters such as homosexuality. Although the church at Cloverdale was informed that "we strongly believe that the consistent moral decline of our nation should constantly be brought forward to our God and Father in both regular congregational and individual prayer", Cloverdale's request was denied because "it does not fit the current requirements for a national day of prayer". Synod Chatham 2004 stated that "these afflictions must be of an acute nature, of extreme severity and posing an immediate crisis for the life of the church and the nation. (Acts of Synod Chatham 2004, Article 40, 4.4).

Regarding the calling of days of prayer we were also directed to a letter to the November 10, 1989 issue of *Clarion*, the magazine of the Canadian Reformed Churches, where the late Rev. J.D. Wielenga wrote after the calling of a day of prayer about abortion:

The circumstances which might require a Day of Prayer are, according to art. 54, "war, general calamities, and other great afflictions, the presence of which is felt throughout the churches." Originally, the list was somewhat longer, like in art. 49 of the C.O. of 1586, namely: "times of war, pestilence, times of scarcity, severe persecutions of the church, and other public afflictions."

The concrete examples mentioned in the C.O. make clear how the C.O. wants the "general afflictions" to be understood: they must be of an acute nature, of extreme severity, and posing an immediate crisis for the life of the church and/or the nation. When the C.O. states that the presence of the afflictions must be felt throughout the churches, it expected that those afflictions occupy the

minds and the thoughts of the people and dominate their conversations at home and in public.

Furthermore, historically the Day of Prayer was at the same time a day of fasting. The C.O. of 1578 states in art. 74 that in prayer and fasting the churches are to confess before God penitence and contrition of heart. The afflictions for which a day of prayer was proclaimed, apparently were viewed and experienced as judgments of God on the sins of the church and/or the nation.

One must not too quickly proclaim a Day of Prayer. The Synod of Rotterdam in 1887 deemed it necessary to warn the churches, when proclaiming, a Day of Prayer, to remain within the limits intended by the C.O. The nature of such a day ought not to be “to bring a prayer which attracts extra attention, next to the weekly prayers of the congregation,” neither “to put before the Lord the chronic ills and needs in which land and church and nation abound.” A Day of Prayer requires that the people “feel stricken in conscience by the majesty of God’s judgments,” and “together humble themselves before God in penitence.” One must not too quickly proclaim a day of prayer, for this would “lead to undervaluation of the weekly prayers and to a weakening of the institution of the Day of Prayer by over-use.”⁸

Considering what Rev. Wielenga wrote in *Clarion*, one might conclude that we should not call a Day of Prayer regarding Same Sex Marriage. In many ways the issue of Same Sex Marriage is one of “the chronic ills and needs in which land and church and nation abound”, as noted by Synod Rotterdam 1887. However when we recognize the effect the changing sexual norms and practices in our nation are having on the church, there is a much stronger case for us to have a day of prayer about these matters. Although people falling into homosexual sin does happen in our churches, marital unfaithfulness and the breakdown of marriage, sexual activity

⁸ http://www.clarionmagazine.ca/archives/1989/485-508_v38n23.pdf

before or outside of marriage, sexual abuse, the use of pornography as well as a failure to see the gift of sex as God intended it from the beginning are more prevalent sins within our churches and equally in need of confession and forgiveness in Christ. Recently some of those sins have been very public and have caused distress in our churches. If our days of prayer were traditionally expected to be accompanied by fasting and the confession of sin, a clear case can be made for the need for us to humble ourselves before God and to plead for purity and holiness in the church. We also see the need for a raised awareness and increased teaching in our churches concerning personal purity and a biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality.

Having considered these things we have therefore decided to call a Day of Prayer in our churches for Sunday February 5, 2017. We leave it to the judgment of each consistory as to how this day is to be observed but we encourage the churches to raise the matters of Same Sex Marriage and other matters relating to gender and sexuality as well as the need for purity both in and outside of holy marriage in preaching, teaching and publications and to bring these and other matters affecting our churches and nation before the Lord not just on February 5 but regularly in the weekly congregational prayer.

May the Lord have mercy on us and our nation.

On Behalf of the Council of the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis,



S. 't Hart
Chairman



B. Plug
Secretary

Report on Archives and Library of Synod

The Consistory
Free Reformed Church at Mt Nasura

Esteemed brothers

In accordance with ‘Rules for the Archivist’, Synod Acts 1998, Appendix 11, point 3. *“The Archivist reports to the church council on the contents and condition of the Archives; stating who has received or seen items, and the items involved”*, I hereby submit my report as follows:

Contents of Synod Archives

Additions to archives since the January 2015 report

Synod 2015 material: Items 15.01 - 15.108

Additions to library

Deputies Report 2015
Acts of Synod 2015

Loans from Archives

Br H Dekker:

- 80.10 Report Deputies correspondence with Churches abroad
- 83.2.2b Report from deputies for correspondence abroad – General report
- 85.1.7 Deputies – correspondence foreign sister churches

Br L t’Hart

- 70.21 Report Mission Albany
- 72.1.17 Mission report from Albany
- 75.19 Mission report from Albany
- 78.13 Mission report from Albany

A detailed chronological listing of all documents added to the synod archive since July 2015 is attached.

A detailed chronological listing of all synod archived documents since 1954 is stored in the archive cabinet.

Archive Inspection

The archives of 2015 were inspected by two representatives of the Free Reformed Church of Byford on 4th of December 2017.

With Christian greetings,



Mr Len Vermeulen
(Synod Archivist for the Church of Mt Nasura)

CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX TO SYNOD ARCHIVES

(items added after last reported date December 2014)

SYNOD 2015- AGENDA CREDENTIALS

- Agenda
- Signing of the attendance list and examination of credentials for Classis North, Central and South.
- Signing of the attendance list and examination of credentials for RCNZ, RCNr, GGRC, GGRI, FRCSA, RCN, CanRC, FERCS.

SYNOD 2015 – CORRESPONDENCE INWARD

- FRC Albany – Sister church relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Korea.
- FRC Armadale – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in Netherlands restored(DGK)
- FRC Baldivis – Overture regarding training for the ministry.
- FRC Baldivis – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in Netherland.
- FRC Baldivis – Overture regarding Book of Praise.
- FRC Busselton – Appeal, Article 11 Classis South West (October 2013)
- FRC Byford – Pulpit exchange proposal for Classis Central

- FRC Byford – Overture regarding Reformed Churches of Netherlands
- FRC Byford – Overture regarding Reformed churches of Netherlands – DGK and GKN
- FRC Byford – Overture regarding Book of Praise.
- FRC Darling Downs – Overture regarding Book of Praise
- FRC Darling Downs – Overture regarding Sister Church relations with RCNZ
- FRC Kelmscott – Overture regarding Book of Praise
- FRC Kelmscott – Overture regarding Sister church relations with RCNZ
- FRC Kelmscott – Overture regarding Training for the Ministry
- FRC Kelmscott – Overture regarding Article 48
- FRC Kelmscott – Overture regarding ERCS
- FRC Kelmscott – Overture regarding Deputies Sister Churches
- FRC Kelmscott – Proposal to Synod regarding Appeals
- FRC Kelmscott – Audit Synod Treasurer
- FRC Kelmscott – Audit Needy Churches South Africa
- FRC Launceston – Evaluation of Bible Translation
- FRC Melville – Proposal for adoption of ESV Bible for use in worship services
- FRC Mount Nasura – Overture regarding Book of Praise
- FRC Mount Nasura – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in New Zealand
- FRC Mount Nasura – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in Netherlands
- FRC Mount Nasura – Additional information Reformed Churches in Netherlands
- FRC Mount Nasura – Overture regarding Bible Translations
- FRC Mount Nasura – Overture regarding Training for the Ministry
- FRC Mount Nasura – Overture regarding Article 48 of Church Order
- FRC Mount Nasura – Outline of CTRS discussion paper
- FRC Mount Nasura – Letter of notification for items to be placed on agenda pending receipt of Deputies Report

- FRC Mundijong – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in Netherlands
- FRC Rockingham – Proposed revision and supplement to recommendations to Deputies – Training for the Ministry
- FRC Southern River – Proposal CRTS levy (training for the ministry) North America
- FRC Southern River – Overture Training for the Ministry Mandate
- FRC West Albany – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in Netherlands
- FRC West Albany – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in Indonesia
- FRC West Albany – Overture regarding Reformed Churches in Brazil
- FRC West Albany – Overture regarding Article 48 of Church Order
- Letter from West Albany – Minister not available for synod
- Letter from Deputies for Contact with First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore – request to address Synod
- Letter regarding Appeal or Objection to a retired Minister delegated to Synod
- Letter regarding Classis Central Alternative Br G Groenewold
- Letter from OPC – Greetings and Regrets including CIER Report
- Classis North – Credentials of Delegates to Synod
- Classis North – Overture regarding Establishing Theological Training in Australia
- Classis North – Overture regarding Fraternal contact with United Reformed Churches of North America
- Classis Central – Credentials of Delegates to Synod
- Classis Central – Overture regarding Book of Praise
- Classis Central – Proposal regarding Pulpit Exchange
- Classis South West – Credentials of Delegates to Synod
- Classis South West – Overture regarding Changing Article 45 Church Order
- Classis South West – Overture regarding Book of Praise

- Classis South West – Overture regarding contact with URNCA
- Deputies Relations with Sister Churches – Supplementary report RCN

LETTER OF APPOINTMENT

- Deputies Article 48 – Rev. C Vermeulen, Rev. E Rupke, Rev. J Kroeze. Alternates: Rev. R Pot, Rev. S 'tHart, Rev. A Hagg
- Deputies Days of Prayer – FRC Baldivis
- Deputies Book of Praise – Rev. C Vermeulen, Br DJ Swarts, Br G Groenewold, Br G Spyker, Br Rob Eikelboom
- Deputies for Sister Church Relations with the Free Evangelical Reformed Church (FERC) of Singapore – Rev. T van Spronsen, Rev. E Rupke, Br. S Fokkema, Br. K vanderVeen
- Deputies for Sister Church Relations with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia – Rev. A van Delden, Rev. W vanderJagt, Br. B Bosveld, Br. E deHaan, Br. E Heerema, Br. T deVos
- Deputies for Sister Churches – Rev RD Anderson, Rev A Hagg, Rev S 'tHart (convener), Br W Pleiter, Br W Spyker, Br M ten Haaf, Br P Witten (Alternates), Rev H Alkema (Alternates)
- Deputy for contact with RCNZ – Br. M. Bax, Rev. H Alkema, Rev. R. Pot, Br. A. Vermeulen (Alternate)
- Deputies for Training for Ministry – Br J vanderPlas, Rev PKA deBoer, Br B Huizinga, Rev D Poppe (convener), Br T Reitsema (Alternate)
- Auditor for Training for Ministry – FRC Southern River
- Deputies Marriage Act – Br. H Faas, Br. T Houweling
- Deputies General Secretary – Br. J den Boer, Br. M Pot, Br. W Amoraal
- Deputies for Indexing Synod Decisions – Br. J Numan, Br. Rob Eikelboom
- Inspection of Archives – FRC Byford
- Synod 2018 Convening Church – FRC Bunbury
- Synod Archive Appointment – FRC Mt Nasura

- Synod Treasurer Appointment – Br A Braam, Br B de Vos
- Audit Synod Treasury Appointment – FRC West Albany
- Deputies for Synod Venue Infrastructure – Br A van der Wal, Br E t'Hart

LETTER OF DISCHARGE AND THANKS

- Deputy Article 48 Church Order – Rev PKA deBoer, Rev A VanDelden, Rev W VanDerJagt
- Deputy Book of Praise – Br E Swarts
- Deputy for contact with Churches in Brazil – Br. J. Hidding, Rev. J. Kroeze, Br. J. Wielstra
- Deputy contact Churches in Singapore – Rev. W. Huizinga
- Deputy for contact with RCNZ – Br. J. Bruning, Br R Eikelboom
- Deputies Training for the Ministry – Br. R. Heerema, Rev. E. Rupke
- Synod Treasurer – Br E Eikelboom, Br. D Bonker
- Deputy Bible Translation – Rev. J. Kroeze
- Deputy Relations Churches Abroad – Rev. PKA de Boer, Br. W. Vandervan, Rev. T. Van Spronsen
- Deputies General Secretary – Br. J.L. Van Burgel

OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE:

- Letter to the Synod of the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands with Appendix
- Letter to the RCN with Appendix and footnotes
- Letter to Reformed churches in Brazil
- Response to Appeal or Objection to a Retired Minister Delegated to Synod – Br T Visser
- FRC Busselton – Response to Appeals
- FRC Albany – KPC Korea
- FRC Armadale – DGK
- FRC Baldvis – Book of Praise, RCN, Training for Ministry
- FRC Byford – Book of Praise, DGK GKN, Pulpit Exchange Classis Central, RCN
- FRC Darling Downs – Book of Praise, RCNZ

- FRC Kelmscott – Article 13 CO, Article 48 CO, Book of Praise, Deputies Sister Churches, FERCS, Proposal re Appeals, RCNZ, Training for Ministry
- FRC Launceston – Bible Translation
- FRC Melville – Bible Translations
- FRC Mt Nasura – Article 13 CO, Article 48 CO, Bible Translations, Book of Praise, RCN, RCNZ, Training for Ministry
- FRC Mundijong – RCN
- FRC Rockingham – Training for Ministry
- FRC Southern River – Training for Ministry
- FRC West Albany – Article 48 CO, Brazil, Indonesia, RCN
- FRC Australia – Errors in Acts of Synod 2015
- FRC Australia – Distribution of Acts 2015 / Acts of closed session

CLOSED SESSION

- Article 48 of Church Order

GLOSSARY OF ECCLESIASTICAL ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS INDEX

CanRC Canadian Reformed Churches
FERCS First Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore
FRCSA Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
FRCA Free Reformed Churches of Australia
GGRC Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvin
GGRI Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia
RCN Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
RCNr Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored)

LIBRARY

Deputies Reports 2015
Acts of Synod 2015

Report of Deputies for Archive Inspection



The Free Reformed Church of Byford (WA)

POSTAL ADDRESS: PO BOX 24, BYFORD, WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6122

Byford, 4th December 2017

Synod FRC WA 2018 (Synod Bunbury)
c/o secretary FRC Bunbury
PO Box 2425
Bunbury WA 6231


Dear brothers,

Consistory hereby reports that on Monday 4th December 2017, two proctors inspected the 2018 Synod archives. These archives were found to be complete and in good order.

Brotherly greetings, on behalf of the consistory



Rev. A. Bikelboom
chairman



G.J.G. van der Linde
correspondence secretary

Report of Deputies re Marriage Act

NOMINATING AUTHORITIES - MARRIAGE ACT 1961

16 January 2018

Synod 2018
C/- Free Reformed Church of Bunbury
Post Office Box 2425
BUNBURY WA 6231

Esteemed brothers

Mandate

Synod Baldivis 2015 made the following decision with respect to Nominating Authorities (Article 134 – Deputies Marriage Act):

To accept the deputies' report.

In their report to Synod Baldivis 2015, Deputies recommended that Synod Baldivis 2015 resolve:

To appoint new deputies officially designated as the *Nominating Authorities* to discharge duties under the Marriage Act 1961.

Background

On 22 September 1999, the Governor-General first declared the Free Reformed Churches of Australia as a “recognised denomination”, such declaration having been made under section 26 of the *Marriage Act 1961 (Cth)*. This declaration has since been repeated, most recently under the *Marriage (Recognised Denominations) Proclamation 2007* as most recently amended with effect from 4 November 2015.

The declaration of the FRCA as a “recognised denomination” entitles all ministers of religion within the bond of the FRCA, by

virtue of that fact, to become registered as marriage celebrants (see section 29 of the *Marriage Act 1961*).

The Act requires that the “recognised denomination” nominate ministers of religion within that denomination for registration. To that end, deputies are required to be appointed by each Synod with the authority to nominate new ministers within the bond for registration.

The *Marriage Act* is administered by the Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department – Marriage Law and Celebrants Section. From time to time this Department issues information updates which deputies then circulate to the various ministers within the bond.

Helpful information as to the administration of the Act and related links can be found at <http://www.ag.gov.au/FamiliesAndMarriage/Marriage/Pages/default.aspx>.

It should finally be noted that, whilst the declaration of a “recognised denomination” is made by the relevant Commonwealth department (Attorney-General’s Department), the registration of the individual minister is performed by the relevant State Department (Department of Justice in Western Australia and Department of Justice in Tasmania).

Execution of Mandate

Deputies have been able to execute their mandate over the past 3 years.

In summary, the following has been carried out:

- Incoming ministers have been nominated by deputies to the relevant State Registrar, and these ministers have become registered as marriage celebrants (Rev R Bredenhof, Rev W Bredenhof, Rev Souman, Rev Winkel)
- The relevant State Registrars have been advised of departing ministers from the bond of the FRCA (Rupke, Retief)

- The records of the ministers within the FRCA kept at the relevant State Registrars have been kept up to date
- Information disseminated by the Commonwealth Attorney-General has been forwarded to all ministers within the FRCA.

On 9 December 2017, amendments to the *Marriage Act 1961* commenced to redefine marriage as the “union of 2 people to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life”. The right to marry in Australia is no longer determined by sex or gender. There are protections for ministers of religion to act in accordance with their religious beliefs when solemnising a marriage, or determining whether to solemnise a marriage. Ministers have been informed of these changes via e-mail and the Guidelines for marriage celebrants are currently under review. New forms approved by the Commonwealth Attorney-General must be used from 9 December 2017.

Deputies remain of the view that it is administratively convenient that, for the purposes of marriage celebrancy within the FRCA, the FRCA remain a “recognised denomination”. We recommend that 2 deputies be appointed for the task of nominating ministers and circulating information.

Recommendation

Deputies recommend that Synod Bunbury 2018 resolve:

To appoint new deputies officially designated as the *Nominating Authorities* to discharge duties under the *Marriage Act 1961*.

Respectfully submitted

Humphry Faas

Tim Houweling