

Week 1 (22-27 June 2015)

Opening

On the evening of the 22nd June 2015 Synod was convened by the Free Reformed Church of Baldivis. On behalf of the convening church, Rev. S. 't Hart led in devotions. A considerable crowd had gathered in Baldivis' beautiful church hall. Rev. 't Hart invited all present to sing from Ps. 122 about the beauty of God's church and from Hy. 49 which is a prayer for the Holy Spirit of God to grant wisdom and insight. Following prayer, Rev. 't Hart offered a meditation on Eph. 4:3 where God's Word speaks about: "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." In his meditation Rev. 't Hart emphasised the importance of the unity in the church of Christ. Then, in prayer, he asked the Lord God for exactly that: wisdom and a large measure of the Holy Spirit for the delegates, so that the meetings could be conducted in peace, with a view of building up the church of Christ, to the glory of the name of God.

After that, Rev. 't Hart spoke a few words of welcome, outlining some of the matters that this Synod would have to discuss and decide upon. Then all the delegates were invited to sit around the Synod table.

Constitution of Synod

The consistory of Baldivis had examined the credentials received from the three Classes and found them to be in order. The following delegates were welcomed:

From Classis North:

Rev. J. Kroeze
Rev. D. Poppe
Rev. E. Rupke
Elder D. Veltkamp
Elder H. Hamelink
Elder G.J. Kleyn

From Classis Central:

Rev. C. Vermeulen
Rev. R.D. Anderson
Rev. A. VanDelden
Elder H. Gunnink
Elder D. Bonker
Elder G. Groenewold

From Classis South-West:

Rev. H. Alkema
Rev. S. 't Hart
Elder H. Olde
Elder G. van der Wal
Elder P. Witten
Elder R. Fokkema

Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Press Release of Synod Baldivis 2015 – Week 1

An election was held to appoint the officers for Synod:

Chairman: Rev. S. 't Hart

Vice Chairman: Rev. E. Rupke

First Clerk: Elder D. Bonker

Second Clerk: Rev. C. Vermeulen.

There was no objection against the appointment of sr. K. VanDuyn to be the administrative assistant for this Synod. On the contrary, she has ably served Synods in that position before.

With all the delegates and officers in place, the chairman declared Synod constituted. He asked the delegates to rise to express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity, which they did. Then this opening session of Synod was closed in a Christian manner by the vice chairman, and adjourned by the chairman, after which there was time for fellowship with all delegates and visitors.

Foreign Delegates

According to art. 30 CO a large part of the work of Synod is to deal with matters which belong to its churches in common. For that reason the relationships with foreign churches feature prominently on the agenda. Over the course of the first few days of Synod, the following delegates from foreign churches were welcomed:

Canadian Reformed Churches:

Br. O. Bouwman

Br. J. VanLaar

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands:

Rev. J. Plug

Br. J. de Jong

Reformed Churches of New Zealand:

Rev. P. Archbald

Rev. L. DeVos

First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore:

Pastor Chong Nam Tuck

Br. Leong Yew Hoong

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa:

Br. J. Moes

Gereja Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia:

Rev. F. Tipa kaya

Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis:

Br. S. Dethan

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (restored):

Br. A. VanDerNet

Kosin Presbyterian Churches in Korea:

Dr. Kwon Kyong Ho

Jayoo Reformed Churches in Korea:

Rev. DongSup Song.

Rev. DongSup Song visited our Synod on his church's own initiative. Synod agreed that he be allowed to address Synod to extend greetings and to introduce his church.

In the first week of Synod, the following items were discussed and decided upon:

Bible Translation

Two churches had submitted a request to Synod to allow the English Standard Version to be used in the church worship services. The deputyship for the evaluation of ESV and NIV had presented a favourable evaluation of the ESV, although only one of the deputies was able to complete the report. However, reports from the Canadian deputyship with a

similar mandate were included in the submissions from the churches. Synod determined that these were sufficient to acknowledge that the ESV is suitable for use in the church worship services. The churches will now have the freedom to use either the NKJV (which is used by all the churches in WA at the moment) or the ESV. The NIV 1984 (which is used in the churches in Tasmania) must be phased out by July 2018.

Investigation of 19 additional hymns

The Canadian Authorised Provisional Book of Praise which is used in some of our churches in WA includes 19 hymns which have been adopted by the Canadian churches, but not by the FRCA. Classis South-West have asked Synod to further investigate if these hymns should also be adopted by the Australian churches. These hymns were briefly considered by Synod Armadale 2012 but no decision could be made at the time because none of the churches had specifically requested Synod to do so. That's why Classis South-West decided to submit this request. Synod agreed that this investigation can now take place.

The First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC)

Synod Armadale 2012 had mandated a deputyship to “take up contact with the FERC on behalf of the FRCA, and to make a careful investigation of this church according to BC Art 29, exploring the feasibility of a sister church relationship, and to present a detailed report and accompanying recommendations to Synod 2015.” That report was submitted and discussed. The FERC is one congregation in the city-state of Singapore with about 320 members. They hold to the Three Forms of Unity and govern their church by the principles of the Church Order of Dort. Some discussion was held specifically on the question whether it is wise to entertain a sister church relationship with a church which consists of only one congregation. Would that one church not be too heavily burdened with the responsibilities that come with a sister church relationship? However, after discussion, Synod was convinced that this would not be the case. Therefore, with much joy and thanksgiving, Synod decided to extend an offer of sister church relationship to the FERC. A deputyship will be appointed to await the answer of the FERC to our offer and to conduct the relationship according to the rules adopted by Synod.

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

The contact with the RCNZ has been on the agenda of Synods for many years. Synods in the past have acknowledged that the RCNZ are a true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. But it never came to a sister church relationship because the RCNZ also maintained a relationship with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia (CRCA). This sister church relationship formed an impediment that stood in the way of a sister church relationship between FRCA and RCNZ. However, the last Synod of the RCNZ broke off the sister church relationship with the CRCA and replaced it with a relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship. Synod was satisfied that the nature of this new relationship takes away our concerns of negative influence coming from the CRCA to the RCNZ, and therefore considered that the impediment was removed. As a result Synod was very happy and thankful to be able to accept the offer of a sister church relationship with the RCNZ at this time.

United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

Late last year the consistories of the FRCA received a letter from the URCNA seeking contact with the FRCA. Two Classes submitted this letter to Synod. It was proposed that “Synod mandates deputies for relations with churches abroad to provide the URCNA with information about our churches in response to their letter to us, to take up contact with them, and to report to the next Synod.” The grounds that support this request mention that the CanRC are in a close relationship with these churches and are pursuing unity with them. For this reason, among others, Synod decided to adopt the proposal and to mandate deputies to get in touch with the URCNA. Our next Synod will then consider how to proceed with that contact.

Kosin Presbyterian churches in Korea (KPCCK)

The deputies for sister church relations also submitted a report about the sister church relationship with the KPCCK. In their report they acknowledge that the relationship remains somewhat limited by way of the language and cultural barrier. However, they also consider that the last three years have seen positive developments in practical expression of the relationship. Therefore they recommend to continue sister church relations with the KPCCK according to the established rules, on the grounds that as far as can be known they show faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed confessions. The deputies consider it of special interest that the KPCCK work with a model and mode of missionary work different from our own. They find that this needs to be investigated further. Synod decided to continue the sister church relationship.

Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

Judging from the many submissions from the churches in relation to a possible Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise, this matter is very much alive in the churches. A survey conducted by the deputies for the Book of Praise demonstrated that there is a clear desire in the churches to move towards such a Book of Praise. Around the table all the delegates are thankful for the work that the Canadian churches have done in this respect, and that the FRCA have been able to benefit from that work for many years. But now the churches have expressed the desire to stand on their own two liturgical legs. After a lot of work and discussion, the decision was made to develop an Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise and present it to the next Synod. This Book of Praise will contain the Psalms and Hymns of the 2014 Canadian Book of Praise that are approved for use in the FRCA (it will not include any unapproved hymns that are used in the CanRC), and it will incorporate changes to the creeds, confessions and liturgical forms as made by the FRCA, as well as the Australian Church Order. There was quite some discussion about which Bible translation to use. Some favoured the NKJV which capitalises personal pronouns referring to God, others the ESV which was earlier adopted for use in the church which does not capitalise personal pronouns referring to God. In the end it was decided that deputies should prepare two versions, one with the NKJV and the other with the ESV. The next Synod can then decide which one to adopt. For the time being, in the interim, the churches are encouraged to use the new 2014 Canadian Book of Praise.

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)

If the number of church submissions is anything to go by, then a decision regarding our relationship with the RCN was also highly anticipated. Many submissions expressed great concern about the direction that our sister churches in the Netherlands are going. In fact, Synod Armadale 2012 had sent a letter of admonition to the RCN outlining these concerns. Underlying many of these concerns is a manner of Bible explanation which does not do justice to the sufficiency, authority and clarity of God's Word, but instead allows circumstances of time and culture to determine the understanding of the Biblical text. This letter of admonition did not have the desired effect. The Dutch Synod of Ede 2014 did not accept that any of the warnings are accurate. In their report this leads our deputies to the conclusion: "We reluctantly must conclude that our Dutch sisters have, as a federation corporately, departed in important ways from the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy." The Synod delegates were unanimously agreed that the concerns raised in the deputies report are real and that our sister church relationship cannot continue as per normal. As a result Synod has now decided to suspend the relationship with the RCN. That means that attestations from brothers and sisters coming from the RCN will not be accepted without question. It also means that ministers from the RCN are no longer allowed to preach in the FRCA. To keep the lines of communication open, the FRCA will still welcome two delegates to our next Synod. This suspension of our relationship is a big step because Synod also declared "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." This suspension does not preclude yet another attempt to change the direction of the RCN, because Synod also decided "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." It is safe to say that this decision to suspend the relationship may very well be the last attempt to convince the RCN to turn around from the direction they are going, back to faithfulness to God's Word and the Reformed confessions which we share. It is the prayer of Synod that our sister churches might repent and our relationship restored. Please remember the RCN in your prayers and ask the Lord of the church to guard and preserve His church in the world.

For Synod,

Rev. E. Rupke
Vice Chairman