

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Synod West Albany 2000 recognized that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) are true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, a positive recognition confirmed by Synod Armadale 2012, which also expressed a continued resolve to work towards the goal of a sister church relationship, and thereby bring our unity in faith to practical and visible expression. The RCNZ's relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) has previously been identified as an impediment to realizing this goal of a sister church relationship, but Synod acknowledged that Synod 2011 of the RCNZ has decided to discontinue the sister church relationship with the CRCA and establish instead a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCA. However the rules for this new relationship have not yet been finalized, and so deputies were mandated amongst other things "to determine how the nature and practical implications of the RCNZ's new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCA differs from their previous sister church relationship and evaluate how this impacts on the impediment identified by previous Synods." The recommendation of the deputies to offer the RCNZ a "fraternal relationship" was not accepted, but it was decided to continue to encourage our local churches to exercise practical support and interaction wherever possible in areas that are not reserved for relationships between sister churches.

Reformed Churches in Indonesia

Regarding our sister churches in Indonesia, the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia (GGRI), deputies reported that this is now a larger federation as a result of the union in February 2012 of what were previously three federations, namely the federation of GGRI-NTT (our original sister church), the federation of churches in Papua, and the federation of churches in Kalimantan Barat. Synod acknowledged this development with gratitude to the Lord. Deputies were mandated to report to the churches with a clearer picture of this larger federation with its three regional synods, along with the implications of this union. Deputies were also given the task to continue focusing on providing support to the GGRI with the intention of building up their Reformed character, and to support plans to establish a Theological Seminary in Sumba. In this connection they were mandated to encourage the GGRI to seek the expertise and help of those involved in the establishing of the Indonesian Reformed Theological Seminary of the GGRC (supported by Mission Smithville of the CanRC) in Kupang. Financial support will also be provided to facilitate two students/ministers of the GGRI to come to Australia during the inter-synodical period in order to study English and familiarize themselves with the Australian churches. An additional part of deputies' mandate concerns reporting developments on the GGRI's efforts to seek federal unity with the GGRC.

With respect to the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvin (GGRC), Synod decided to continue contact, helping wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches also, and to encourage the GGRC strongly to work towards federal unity with the GGRI, and thus a sister-church relationship with the FRCA. The FRCA churches and their members will be encouraged to provide the means of support as it pertains to carrying out the various aspects of the above-mentioned work in connection with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia.

Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford

Synod decided not to agree to the request of several churches to investigate the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA), which has seceded from the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), and concerning which the deputies for relations with churches abroad had also submitted a report. Grounds for this decision included the fact that the LRCA requested deputies to make a judgment as to whether the CanRC are faithful or not, particularly in connection with the CanRC's decisions to enter sister-church relations with the OPC and other churches, while the FRCA continues to recognise the CanRC as true and faithful churches and has not objected to these sister-church relationships.

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands

With sadness it was noted that over time the FRCA synods and deputies have had the need to express various weighty concerns concerning the faithfulness of our sister churches in the Netherlands, and that deputies have presented evidence that the RCN does not reject all errors contrary to the Word of God. In line with the rules for sister church relations, which require mutual assistance, encouragement, exhortation and care, Synod decided that the seriousness of these concerns requires an official admonition to the RCN in the form of a statement of weighty objections with respect to the doctrine and practice of the RCN, also taking into account that the RCN have requested us to direct our concerns directly to their synod. This admonition is to pay special attention to items that have had the attention of our deputies over recent years, relating especially to hermeneutics, ethics, sacraments, ecclesiology, church government, and liturgy. It is to take into account the responses already received from the RCN, and to be done in consultation with deputies from our sister churches in Canada and South Africa. An advisory committee was appointed to formulate this admonition, to be completed by March 2013 so that synod can reconvene on 22 April 2013 DV in order to adopt it and decide how to proceed with our relationship with the RCN.

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Restored)

Deputies reported that the offer of sister church relations from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands Restored (RCNr) has been retracted, and that the RCNr has made it clear that further meaningful contact will only be possible once the FRCA break their sister church relationship with the RCN. Synod also acknowledged that the RCNr's relationship with the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA), which seceded from our sister churches the Canadian Reformed Churches, may be an impediment to a future sister church relationship with the RCNr. Noting that there have been other groups, ministers and churches that have left the RCN but have not joined the RCNr, Synod decided to pray for true ecclesiastical unity based on God's Word and as maintained in the confessions, and to appoint deputies with a mandate to keep contact with the RCNr and be receptive to contact from other churches (like the Voorlopig Kerkverband) who have split off from the RCN and the RCNr, and to report on further developments in this regard.

Book of Praise

In recent years our sister churches in Canada have been making revisions to the Book of Praise, and deputies had the task to report on the revised wording of the psalms, revisions to the hymns (including 19 additions), taking into account comments from the churches. Synod decided not to adopt the 19 additional hymns that had been presented to the churches for evaluation, since it was considered that a desire to have more hymns was not alive in the churches. However Synod did make an important decision that will have significant implications for our church services, namely to adopt provisionally the 150 psalms and 65 hymns as revised and published in the provisional Book of Praise (2010 edition) of the Canadian Reformed Churches, on the grounds that these revisions are an improvement on the present version of the Book of Praise (2008 edition). We are thankful for the excellent work done in this regard, and may it serve as a blessing to the church in bringing her praises in song to God!

Several churches had also presented submissions expressing a desire to see an Australian version of the Canadian Book of Praise. Synod considered that it is prudent to invite input from the churches regarding this, and deputies were given the mandate to recommence investigations regarding producing such an Australian version of the Book of Praise in the event that a future synod decides to produce such an edition. This would include the revised version of the 150 psalms and 65 hymns, along with a prose section that incorporates the small changes authorized by FRCA synods over the years, and the FRCA church order. Amongst other things, deputies also received the mandate to submit the relevant material already received from the churches concerning the 2010 edition of the Book of Praise to the Canadian SCBP for consideration, and to study the use of capitalization for personal pronouns referring to God.

Bible Translation

The church of Legana drew the attention to the fact that the 2011 edition of the NIV contains substantial revisions from the 1984 edition of the NIV that was previously approved for use in our churches, and that it demonstrates concessions to feminism in its translational choices. Deputies were appointed to evaluate the NIV 2011 edition so that Synod 2015 can come to a definitive decision concerning this, and in the interim Synod decided to disallow the NIV 2011 for use in the church services. Since the ESV has received a positive evaluation from many in Reformed churches, Synod considered that it would be worthwhile to properly evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and thus decided to give deputies a further mandate to evaluate the ESV with a view to allowing it to be used in the church services.

Miscellaneous decisions

Other decisions of synod included:

- adopting regulations for cases when classes extend permission to speak an edifying word.
- not acceding to a request from one of the churches to grant permission for a brother to be examined by Classis under the provisions of Art. 8 of the church order with a view to admission to the ministry of the Word.
- continuing 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 publishing this on the FRCA website.

Free Reformed Churches of Australia
Press Release of Synod Armadale 2012 – Week 2

Synod adjourned on Thursday evening, 19 July 2012, and will reconvene the Lord willing on 22 April 2013.

On behalf of Synod Armadale 2012
R.E. Pot

(Approved 19 July 2012)