

Week 2 (29 June-1 July 2015)

Training for the ministry

On Monday 29 June Synod reconvened for the second week of meetings. One of the first things on the agenda was the report of the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry. The deputies in their report, as well as the delegates around the table expressed their appreciation for the work done at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton. CRTS provides young men with a faithful theological training of a high academic level. For that reason Synod decided first of all to raise the financial contribution from Australia to AU\$82 per communicant member. Further, for the last nine years the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry had been investigating the possibilities of distance education with Hamilton, through the use of internet facilities. The conclusion of that investigation is that the Seminary in Hamilton does not see the way open for that possibility now or in the near future. Deputies also investigated the feasibility of offering the first year of theological studies in Australia, in close cooperation with Hamilton. Deputies have come to the conclusion that both investigations do not need to continue in light of Hamilton's response that they see no possibility to work with the FRCA in that regard. Synod agreed to that conclusion. In anticipation of that decision, one of the churches had submitted a comprehensive proposal to Synod with regards to the establishment of our own Seminary in Australia. This proposal was considered inadmissible. However, on the basis of other submissions from the churches, and notwithstanding the great appreciation for Hamilton Seminary, Synod decided to mandate new deputies to investigate the feasibility of establishing our own FRCA Theological Seminary in due time. A next Synod will have to decide if and how to proceed with any plans in that direction.

Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

In the evening the report about the Canadian Reformed churches was tabled. Again, great thankfulness was expressed for the blessings we receive from our relationship with the CanRC. Not only are we able to send our young men to Hamilton to receive Theological training, and not only are we able to enjoy the benefits of the Canadians' work on the Book of Praise, and not only do many of our ministers come from the churches in Canada, many of us in Australia also have close personal (family) ties with brothers and sisters in Canada. We thank God that we enjoy a very close and encouraging and supportive relationship with our sister on the other side of the Pacific. At the Synod table, special attention was given to the contacts of the CanRC with other churches. They are speaking with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) about a possible merger. Synod expressed the desire to stay informed about the sister church developments in North America with (besides the URCNA) the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), and the Eglise Reformée de Quebec (ERQ). Further, Synod decided to liaise

with the Canadian deputies regarding their and our relationship with the RCN. Both the FRCA and the CanRC have grave concerns about the developments in our Dutch sister churches. Perhaps we can be of mutual assistance as we consider how to proceed with our relationship with the RCN.

Letter to the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)

Last week Synod decided to suspend the sister church relationship with the RCN. The new Deputies for Sister Church Relations will make contact with the RCN to discuss this decision with them. However, Synod also thought it wise to contact the RCN via an official letter from Synod to Synod. Synod discussed what exactly this letter should say. It was decided to keep the letter short and to the point, considering that our last Synod had already sent the RCN an extensive letter of admonition. The same letter will also be sent to all the local consistories of the RCN, to make sure that all the churches of the RCN are made aware of the matters contained within the letter of admonition that has been sent to the Synod of the RCN of 2013, as well as the letter this Synod Baldivis 2015 has decided to send to the next RCN Synod.

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (DGK) & Reformed Churches Netherlands (GKN)

Synod's decision to suspend the sister church relation with the RCN has consequences for the decisions regarding the DGK and the GKN. The DGK is the new name for the churches formerly known as the RCN(restored). GKN is the name of the churches formerly known as "Voorlopig Kerkverband" (Temporary church bond). Both these churches were established when they withdrew from the RCN. The DGK have visited our Synods since 2006. Two submission were received from the churches to investigate the possibility of sister church relations with the DGK specifically. After a long and intense discussion Synod decided that that would be premature at this time. Instead Synod decided to "maintain contact with the DGK and the GKN and be receptive to contact with others who withdrew from the RCN and to report to next Synod on further developments in this regard." As one of the grounds Synod considered that "there are members, ministers and churches within the RCN that continue to express objections and grave concerns about the developments taking place among them who still need time in considering how to respond." Synod also mandated deputies to exhort all those who have left the RCN to reach out to others who love the Word and the Reformed faith.

Indonesia

Currently the FRCA have a sister church relationship with the Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI). This federation is the result of a union in February 2012 of three regional Synods, the GGRI Papua, the GGRI Kalimantan Barat and the GGRI NTT. Synod Armadale 2012 had already expressed great thankfulness that this union could take

place. Synod Baldivis decided that our deputies should provide more information about this union to the churches, confirming their Reformed character. Deputies will prepare that report and send it to the churches in due time. The GGRI have established a Theological Seminary in Waimarangu, Sumba. Our deputies were able to make recommendations to improve several aspects of the running of the Seminary. Furthermore, the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville is involved in mission work in Kupang in Timor, through a missionary, Rev. Edwar Dethan. Smithville also supports the Indonesian Reformed Theological Seminary in Kupang. There is another federation of Reformed churches in Indonesia, the Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis (GGRC) with whom we do not have a sister church relationship. That's why Synod also decided "to consult with the GGRI, the GGRC, and the CanRC to determine the obstacles on the way to unity, and to work together with all the parties involved to remove or overcome those obstacles" in order to make progress towards federal unity between the GGRI and the GGRC.

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

The last sister church on Synod's radar was the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. The FRCSA have eight congregations, five of which are needy churches. It is the privilege of our churches to continue to provide financial support to our sister. Deputies request that the amount contributed across the FRCA be around AU\$10 per communicant member. At present most of the SA students of theology go to the Mukhanyo Theological College (MTC) for their theological training. The college presents itself as a multi-denominational institution that is Reformed in theology. The curators of the FRCSA are satisfied that the MTC offers Biblically faithful theological training. The FRCSA do not live in an easy time or environment. There is a lot of crime and violence in SA. As a result, many people have migrated from SA, among them also members of the FRCSA. Some have also joined our churches in Australia. Br. Moes, the delegate from the FRCSA, addressed Synod on Monday night and flagged another problem in his churches, namely that some churches are vacant and more will be in the near future. He underlined this problem with a silent and meaningful and penetrating glance in the direction of the ministers around the Synod table. Synod expressed thankfulness for the growing relationship with the FRCSA and decided to continue sister relations with these churches according to the established rules.

Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB)

Synod Armadale 2012 had appointed deputies with the mandate to approach the Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB) in order to ascertain if a meaningful sister church relationship could be established. Deputies submitted a somewhat ambivalent report. Although they recommended that Synod mandate deputies to work towards the establishment of a sister church relationship with the IRB, they also indicated that such a relationship would not be that easy to maintain. Furthermore, an earlier Synod had

decided that we should, as a rule, only establish sister church relations with churches who are geographically close to us. It was noted that our church sister in Canada would possibly be in a better position to assist the IRB. For these reasons, among others, Synod decided not to appoint new deputies and not to pursue a sister church relationship with the IRB.

Conclusion

In the end it took Synod seven days to work through their agenda. In this Press Release only the most significant of the many decisions can be reported. They are sufficient, however, to show convincingly how busy our Lord Jesus Christ is with His church in Australia and world wide. During this Synod Baldivis 2015 the delegates often turned to the Head of the church in prayer to give thanks and to ask for His blessing and guidance. Synod did this in the awareness and acknowledgement that “unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labour in vain.” (Ps. 127:1).

For Synod,
Rev. E. Rupke
Vice Chairman