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**FREE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF AUSTRALIA**

**DEPUTIES FOR RELATIONS
WITH CHURCHES ABROAD**

REPORT TO SYNOD ALBANY 1987

Esteemed Brethern,

The Synod of The Free Reformed Churches, Launceston 1985 appointed the above mentioned deputies and instructed them to report to the Synod 1987.

The deputies hereby submit the report of their activities. As the work of deputies will continue after the completion of this report and since we expect to receive some preliminary information from the Synod of The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands which commenced April 22, 1987, a short supplementary report will be issued DV just before Synod Albany commences.

A. MANDATE

Synod Launceston, 1985 appointed Rev. K. Bruning (convenor), Rev. Dr. S.G. Hur, Rev. G. van Rongen, Rev. A. Veldman and br. J.L. van Burgel as deputies and instructed them as follows:

a. to continue the sister church relationship with:

- i. The Canadian Reformed Churches
- ii. De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland
- iii. Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika
- iv. The Presbyterian Church in Korea
- v. The Gereja-gereja Reformasi Indonesia di Sumba Timor-Sabu

(See Acts, Article 74)

b. to visit the first Synod meeting of the Churches mentioned in a(v) above in November 1985, by Rev. Dr. S.G. Hur; Alternate: Br. J.L. van Burgel.

c. i) to thoroughly investigate the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and the Free Church of Scotland and submit comprehensive reports to the Churches and to the next Synod, paying particular attention to the marks of the true Church and the question of Church government.

ii) to maintain contact with these Churches at the present level (Acts 1985, Art. 43).

- d. i) to write to the next Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand to point out to these Churches that their sister church relationship with, for instance, the Reformed Churches of Australia, as well as their second level correspondence with the GKN (Synodical) are impediments to continue the existing contact.
- ii) to inform the Deputies of our sister Churches in The Netherlands about this decision.
(Acts 1985, Article 75)
- e. i) to investigate whether or not the Reformed Church of Japan, the Presbyterian Church in Uganda and the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka can be recognized as true and faithful Churches according to Art. 29 of the Belgic Confession with a view to the possible establishment of sister church relations.
(See Acts 1983, Art. 112.5e; Acts 1985, Art. 76)
- ii) to urge the Reformed Church of Japan to break the ties with the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES).
(Acts 1985, Art. 76)
- f. to investigate the possibilities to seek new contacts with other Churches, in close contact with Deputies from our sister churches, especially with those of The Netherlands.
(Acts 1983, Art. 112.5f)
- g. to inform the Interim Committee of the ICRC of Synod's decision as recorded in Acts 1985, Art. 88 point 3.2.
Synod deputizes Rev. G. van Rongen and Rev. A. Veldman (Alternate: Rev. Dr. S.G. Hur) to attend the Conference 1985 at Edinburgh with the instructions as recorded in Acts 1983, Art. 112.5j and Acts 1985, Art. 88 point 3.2.
- h. to bring to the Attention of the Churches those items from the correspondence with sister churches abroad which are of importance to the Churches.
- i. to forward copies of the Acts of Synod 1985 to the sister churches abroad.
- j. to inform the sister churches abroad of the place and time of the next Synod, and to send the preliminary agenda to them at least six weeks prior to the commencement of that Synod.
- k. to inform the Churches as soon as an invitation or announcement of a coming Synod of one of the sister churches comes in, so that the Churches may determine if one of the office-bearers is able to represent our Churches there.
- l. to supply the Churches with acts of Synods of sister churches abroad.
- m. to report to the Churches three months before the next Synod and also the Synod itself.

B. MEETINGS OF DEPUTIES

Deputies have met on six occasions since Synod Launceston. All deputies were present at each meeting except for Rev. K. Bruning who was absent on two occasions overseas. Rev. S.G. Hur was appointed acting chairman during Rev. Bruning's absence.

Br. J. Eikelboom, who was appointed as alternate delegate, attended the first two deputies' meetings.

C. GENERAL ACTIVITIES

1. RULES FOR CORRESPONDENCE

1.1 Synod Kelmscott 1983 requested deputies to draft rules for correspondence with sister churches. These were printed in the Acts of Synod Launceston 1970, Art. 26 as follows:

- a. to take care for each other that the doctrine, church services, church government and discipline do not deviate from the Reformed confession;
- b. to send each other the Agendum and Decisions (Acts) of the General Synods and the receiving of subsequent delegates from these other churches as advisors;
- c. to consult each other previous to making any amendments or additions to confessional standards, church orders or liturgical forms;
- d. to accept each other's attestations and admit each other's ministers of the Word to preach the Word and administer the sacraments, applying what was determined at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1893, in Article 165, which was further detailed at the Synod of Groningen in 1927 in Article 161 (which includes the closer definition made in Amsterdam in 1936, Article 122, decision I, 4);
- e. to be responsible to each other concerning correspondence with third parties.

1.2 Deputies of the sister churches in The Netherlands recommended to Synod Heemse 1984 that it appoint deputies to study the rules for correspondence and the rules for temporary contact. The deputies had indicated in their report to Synod that the rules in their present form presented practical difficulties when applied to various Presbyterian Churches with which the GKN (lib) had sought contact.

In response to this Synod Heemse decided:

- i. to instruct new deputies to study the whole field of inter-church relations and
 - a) to base themselves on the considerations on this matter of the 1978 Synod of Groningen-Zuid (see below);
 - b) to take into account those difficulties which made former deputies decide to suggest changes, as proposed in their report, especially as to the question of so-called 'double correspondence';
 - c) to reformulate, if necessary and possible, the names for the different forms of relations and the rules that hold for them;

d) to discuss these issues with (deputies of) churches with which relations exist, especially (of) those that have approached this Synod about these issues;

e) to serve the next General Synod with proposals.

ii) To allow deputies to apply the present rules in a flexible way, in accordance with the considerations mentioned under 1(a), until the next General Synod.

As to the 'temporary relation of ecclesiastical contact', synod decided not to drop the word 'temporary' but to add the rule that 'letters of testimony will be accepted'. Another decision asked for the translation (into English) of the most important articles in the synod's Acts.

1.3

The Dutch deputies formed a separate section (VI) to study these issues, taking as their starting-point that the new formulation should lead to rules which were both completely responsible in the eyes of the Lord and profitable to all parties concerned. They report to Synod Spakenburg 1987 as follows:

"After having taken a survey of inter-church relations as practised until now in the Reformed Churches, and also of the practice in other churches at home and abroad, the section moved on to a discussion of the character and the aims of new rules.

Matters discussed included:

the extent to which these relations should be practised, and the measure of readiness to enter into them;
the need for a period of getting acquainted with a church with regards to preaching, sacraments and discipline;
the influence of history and background and how these should be taken into account;
the background to and grounds for 'double correspondence';
the need to keep in mind that we should serve our sister churches and where necessary be prepared to learn from them;
and finally the fact that rules can only function satisfactorily if there is a mutual trust and love, so that it may well be a good thing, in certain cases, to make certain arrangements with a certain church which do not hold for another church in order for both churches to benefit most from the relationship."

Next came a draft for new rules for inter-church relations, copies of which were taken to the I.C.R.C. meeting in Edinburgh as a contribution from the Dutch churches to the discussion to be held on inter-church relations.

A translation of this draft was provided to the Australian deputies and can be found in Appendix 1 (pages 81-85) of this report.

1.4 The proposals by the Dutch deputies to Synod Spakenburg were studied by us and following their request a preliminary response was sent.

In our letter we pointed out a.o.:

- i) that the lack of uniformity in rules for ecclesiastical relations may lead to practical difficulties;
- ii) the proposal to withdraw the 'temporary relation of ecclesiastical contact' and the suggested consequences of a decision by Synod to declare a church true and faithful appears to be in line with the decision of Synod Launceston 1985 (Art. 67);
- iii) that several parts of the proposed rules need clarification;
- iv) that we are concerned that in the proposals the so-called 'double correspondence' cannot be ruled out;
- v) it is not clear whether the same rules will be shared by both corresponding churches.

1.5 Canadian deputies to Synod Cloverdale 1983 also requested a mandate to "initiate a discussion with the sister churches regarding the application of the rules for correspondence to various churches".

Synod Cloverdale responded to this by instructing the Committee on Correspondence:

- i. "that whenever a discussion with the sister churches on rules to cover ecclesiastical relationships is initiated, to urge the sister churches to maintain correspondence according to the adopted rules as the only form of permanent ecclesiastical relationship."
- ii. "to inform the sister churches that the Canadian Reformed Churches have not made it a common practice to formalize ecclesiastical contacts with churches with which correspondence cannot yet be established."
(Acts 1983, Art 110)

The Canadian deputies in their report to Synod Burlington, 1986 did not come with any proposals but requested (and were granted) a new mandate to consult with sister churches on this matter.

1.6 Synod Launceston 1985 decided:

"as there should be only one form of permanent ecclesiastical fellowship between sister churches and this under the mutually accepted rules for correspondence, any rules for temporary ecclesiastical contact should make clear that the contact has as its ultimate aim the establishment of sister church relationship"
(Article 74 ii)

1.7 Deputies request Synod to renew its mandate to consult with the sister churches regarding the rules for ecclesiastical contact.

2. DECLARATIONS

Deputies received declaration from deputies of our Dutch sister churches that Rev. C. Kleyn and Rev. D. van Houdt were ministers in good standing.

Declarations for Rev. K. Bruning, Rev. K. Jonker, Rev. G. van Rongen and Rev. A. Veldman were issued by deputies prior to their visits overseas.

Contrary to the adopted rules no such declarations were received by deputies regarding other ministers from foreign sister churches who visited our country, and who by some of our consistories were invited to conduct church services.

3. INTRODUCTORY BOOKLET

Deputies reported to Synod Launceston that they proposed to authorize a booklet which introduces the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to recent and future contacts abroad.

The local churches also showed interest in such a booklet which could be used by church members to introduce our churches to outside contacts.

Rev. van Rongen willingly prepared the booklet which has now been duly printed. Most of the cost of producing the booklet has been recouped by sales to the local churches. Several hundred copies remain for future use.

The updating of some data, e.g. by means of a supplementary sheet, may become necessary in the near future.

CONTACT WITH SISTER CHURCHES

D. CANADA

1. CORRESPONDENCE

- 1.1 The Canadian Reformed Churches informed deputies of their impending Synod to be held at Burlington, Ontario on April 15th, 1986. Local churches were informed and there being no office bearer travelling to Canada, deputies sent fraternal greetings by letter.
- 1.2 Canadian deputies have responded to our request for a copy of their translated material on the Presbyterian Church in Korea's form of government.

2. ACTS OF SYNOD BURLINGTON 1986

This General Synod was held from April 15 to May 7, 1986.
From the Acts we pass on the following pieces of information:

2.1 Theological College

2.1.1

Professor L. Selles reached retirement age. As professor of New Testament he is succeeded by the Rev. J. Geertsema of Surrey, B.C.

Synod expressed its gratitude for the work done by Professor Selles, as well as for that of the Rev. W.W.J. VanOene as Lecturer Ecclesiology and the Rev. G. VanDooren as temporary instructor in Diaconiology.

2.1.2

Since the previous General Synod, seven students have completed their studies, the enrolment now standing at ten - among them being one student from our churches.

2.1.3

Synod dealt with some correspondence between the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Word appointed by our churches and the Board of Governors regarding the possibilities that our Free Reformed Churches of Australia would become formally involved in the maintenance of the Theological College at Hamilton.

Since the above mentioned Deputies undoubtedly will report to Synod we will not give any quotations from the Acts on this matter.

2.1.4

Further decisions taken by Synod are:

1. to express gratitude that the work at the Theological College continues without interruption and that all instruction is given in harmony with the Word of God and in agreement with the confessions of the churches;

2. to express gratitude that a more suitable building for the college could be acquired and that this was possible due to the generous donation of the Women's Saving Action and the building-fund drive held among the churches and the Australian sister churches;

5. to approve the establishing of a two-year program leading to a diploma in theological studies;

6. to thank the faculty for making available to the churches a special missionary training at the college.

2.2 The Book of Praise

2.2.1 The Apostles' Creed

2.2.1.1

Synod, accepting a majority report of one of its committees, decided not to accede to requests to restore the text in accordance with the 'received text' by deleting the word "Christian" in section III of this creed.

2.2.1.2

The Standing Committee for the Book of Praise has been instructed to insert the word "Christian" in the hymn version of the Apostles' Creed, if this is possible.

2.2.1.3

A melody, proposed as an alternative for Hymn 1, was passed on to the Standing Committee for possible adaptation to the 'new text' of the creed. If adaptation is not possible, the Committee is instructed to see whether a new melody can be found for this 'new text'.

2.2.2 The Nicene and Athanasian Creeds

The text of these creeds has not been linguistically revised. Therefore the Standing committee for the Book of Praise has been instructed "to see to the linguistic revision of the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed and to present a draft of this revision to the churches no later than one (1) year before the next general synod and to include this revision in the report to the next general synod for the final edition of the Book of Praise".

2.2.3 The Belgic Confession of Faith and The Canons of Dort

2.2.3.1

Synod decided to return to the old reading of Article 8 Belgic Confession of Faith, "for they are all three co-eternal and co-essential" instead of the 'present revised reading "For these three, in one and the same essence, are equal in eternity".

2.2.3.2

The headings of Articles 3 and 4 in Chapter II of the Canons of Dort in the Book of Praise are almost identical. Therefore Synod decided to change the heading of Article 4 into "Why His death had infinite value".

2.2.4 The Church Order

2.2.4.1

The text of Article 13 has been amended and now reads:

If a minister of the Word is rendered incapable of performing the duties of his office because of age, illness, physical or mental disability, he shall retain the honour and title of minister of the Word. He shall also retain his official bond with the church which he served last, and this church shall provide honourably for his support. The same obligation exists towards a minister's widow and/or dependants.

Retirement of a minister shall take place with the approval of the consistory with the deacons and with the concurring advice of classis and of deputies of regional synod.

2.2.4.2

Article 44 has also been amended, and now reads:
The president shall ask whether the ministry of the office-bearers is continued, the decisions of the major assemblies are honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their church.

2.2.4.3

In Article 72 the adjective "habitual" in "habitual drunkenness" has been deleted.

2.3 Contact with other Churches

2.3.1 The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

A report of a committee for contact with the OPC, appointed by the previous General Synod, was received. It contains a "detailed evaluation of the divergencies which the General Synod of 1977 neglected to give for its decision to recognize the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ." It was decided to continue the committee and charge it "to continue the discussion on divergencies, which are an issue of mutual concern"; and "to express the hope that this continued discussion will remove obstacles to full correspondence". The doctrinal divergencies under discussion regard the matter of "Visible and Invisible Church", the Covenant, Assurance of Faith, the Observance of the Law, and the matter of fencing the Lord's Supper.

There are also church-political divergencies. Other impediments are: the OPC's contact with the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church of America, and its membership of the RES.

Delegates of The Canadian Reformed Churches attended respectively the 51st and 52nd General Assemblies of the OPC, while the Burlington Synod was attended by a delegate of the OPC.

2.3.2 The Covenant Orthodox Reformed Church, Sackville

This church asked for a sister-church relationship. Synod, however decided:

1. To express gratitude for the contacts which the Classis Ontario North, and especially the Church at Ottawa has with the CORC of Lower Sackville, and to express the hope that these contacts may continue fruitfully towards full unity of faith.
2. Not to accede to the request of the CORC to establish with them a sister-church relationship but to urge the CORC and the Church at Ottawa along with Classis Ontario North to work at removing any obstacles preventing admission of the CORC into the Federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

2.4 Correspondence with churches abroad

2.4.1

From now on we can expect to be addressed from Canada by a committee that is working under a new name. Synod decided to call their deputies for contact with i.e. our churches "THE COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD"

2.4.2

As for the ICRC, Synod decided:

1. To instruct the Committee on Correspondence with Churches Abroad to prepare the next meeting of the ICRC as they have outlined in their report by:
 - a. requesting the Canadian Reformed Church at Cloverdale to organize a prayer service before the commencement of the 1989 meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches;
 - b. consulting the sister churches on suitable topics for the 1989 meeting of the ICRC;
 - c. by assuming all reasonable cost related to their role as host on behalf of The Canadian Reformed Churches;
 - d. depending on the nature of the matters to be discussed to invite either one or both of the professors of the Theological College recommended by the committee as advisors to the conference.
 - e. designating two members of the committee as delegates.

2. To advise the executive of the ICRC that the amendments as proposed by the General Synod of Burlington West of 1986 be placed on the agenda instead of those proposed by Synod Cloverdale 1983, to wit:

- a. that a stipulation be included in the "Basis" of the ICRC that the delegates subscribe only to the standards of the churches of which they are a member;
- b. that membership of the RES is an impediment to membership of the ICRC;
- c. that "CONSTITUTION Art. V. - Authority" be amended to read: "The conclusions of the conference shall be advisory in character. Member churches are to be informed of these conclusions and are recommended to work towards their implementation."

It may be clear that these decisions were taken before the name of the committee was changed into "The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad".

The committee recommended that the professors J. Faber and C. Van Dam be appointed as advisors.

2.4.3

Up till today the Canadian Reformed Churches have been unable to establish a correspondence-relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea, due to language and communication difficulties. The committee was therefore charged with the mandate:

- a. to explain to the PCK this decision of the General Synod of Burlington West of 1986;
- b. to respond to any reaction, inquiries, and information the PCK may direct to our churches;
- c. to be diligent in the endeavour to improve communications with the PCK so that the "entering into and the maintaining of a correspondence-relationship" become possible.

2.4.4

Regarding the Free Church of Scotland, it was decided:

2. (a) to charge the Committee on Correspondence with Churches Abroad to open contacts with the FCS to investigate and evaluate their history, background, doctrinal standards and their maintenance, church government, and their practices in order to ascertain whether we should recognize them as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ and should enter into a sister-church relationship with them;
(b) to instruct the Committee on Correspondence with Churches Abroad to continue to inform the churches about the history, background, doctrinal standards and their maintenance, church government, and practices of the other churches which participate in the ICRC and with whom we have no sister-church relationship;
3. to keep the current sister-churches informed of all progress made in this regard and to work in co-operation with them.

2.4.5

As far as the current sister churches of The Canadian Reformed Churches are concerned, Synod decided:

1. To continue the Ecclesiastical Fellowship with The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, and Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika in accordance with the adopted rules.
2. To charge the committee to send an invitation to sister churches abroad at least one year prior to the date the next general synod is to convene and to have our churches represented by a delegate to general synods of such churches abroad if invited and when feasible.

2.4.6

A special point in this respect is the matter of the rules for correspondence with sister churches abroad and other relations.

The committee has been charged with the following mandate:

- a. to continue to address the sister-churches on the matter of church-relations, setting forth the decisions and concerns of the Canadian Reformed Churches, as outlined by the General Synods of Smithville (Acts, Art. 154, D,1,2) and Cloverdale (Acts, Art. 110, D,1).
- b. to evaluate the reactions of the sister-churches in these matters with respect to a possible common approach.

A special section of this report deals with this matter, so that at this stage we will not go into any details.

2.4.7

Article 191 of the Acts of Synod reads as follows:

Rev. J. Mulder, in his capacity as convenor of the Committee on contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, expresses the gratitude and appreciation for the work done by the Rev. W. Huizinga in his capacity as member of this committee. The chairman adds some well-chosen words as a farewell to Rev. W. Huizinga, who accepted a call to the Free Reformed Church of Armadale, Western Australia.

2.5 Miscellaneous

Various appeals were dealt with, e.g. on the matter of Women's voting rights.

2.6 Next General Synod

The next General Synod will be convened by the Church at Winnipeg, to be held, the Lord willing, in the (Canadian) fall of 1989.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

We can declare that in the Acts concerned we have not found anything contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and consequently to the Three Forms of Unity and Reformed Church Policy.

Deputies thankfully concluding that the Canadian Reformed Churches have remained faithful to God's Word, recommend to Synod Albany to continue the sister relationship with these Churches in accordance with the adopted rules.

E. KOREA

1. The Presbyterian Church in Korea has advised deputies on General Assemblies held at Pusan on 19th September, 1985 and Seoul on 25th September, 1986. The Australian sister churches were invited to send delegates. Deputies have responded with written fraternal greetings.
2. Minutes of the General Assembly held at Pusan were received. Whereas in the past English summaries of the main decisions were provided, those for the 1985 and 1986 Assemblies have not been received. Deputies have written to the PCK requesting these be made available.
3. Rev. S.G. Hur was able to study the minutes of the 1985 Assembly and could report to deputies that they contained nothing contrary to God's Word and the Reformed Confessions.

RECOMMENDATION

Deputies propose that Synod Albany decide to continue the sister church relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea under the established rules.

F. THE NETHERLANDS

1. CORRESPONDENCE

1.1

Since Synod Launceston, deputies received copies of the Acts of Synod of De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland held at Heemse (1984/1985).

1.2

The deputies of our sister churches in The Netherlands expressed some surprise at the decision taken by the Synod of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia regarding the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. We have been able to provide some background information.

The Dutch deputies at the same time requested some information about the Reformed Churches of Australia to enable them to better understand the relationship between the RCNZ and the RCA. This information has been supplied.

1.3

Deputies were advised that the Synod of De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland would convene DV, on 22nd April, 1987 at Spakenburg. Local churches have been advised and there being no office bearer travelling to The Netherlands who could represent our churches, deputies have sent fraternal greetings by mail.

1.4

The report by the Dutch deputies to Synod Spakenburg was received by us in January, accompanied by a letter which explained some of the proposals made regarding the RCNZ.

2. ACTS OF GENERAL SYNOD HEEMSE 1984/85

This Synod was opened on April 25, 1984 and closed on June 5, 1985.

The Acts were published in two volumes, including sixteen appendices. This novum was caused by the large number of items on the Synod's agenda, in particular by the Synod's mandate to formulate and adopt the definite text of the churches' service book with its various sections.

Summarizing the Synod's decisions we follow the order of the Acts.

2.1 Church Political Matters

Synod appointed deputies for the advising of local churches with regard to the work of deacons.

She adopted some rules for the conducting of catechism-classes by theological students.

She confirmed a decision taken by previous general synods that children adopted from foreign countries can only be baptized when the Dutch government has acknowledged their adoption.

2.2 Liturgical Matters

The permission, granted on certain conditions, to theological students, to speak an 'edifying word' in the churches, has been maintained.

No decision was taken on the question whether elders who conduct 'reading services' are entitled to use the unchanged salutation and benediction.

2.3 Evangelism and Mission-Work

Candidates to the ministry of the Word who have accepted a call as missionaries will from now on be ordained before they begin their study for the special missionary exam, and not - as before - when they have passed this examination.

2.4 Training for the Ministry of the Word

The special preparatory study to be undertaken before students are admitted to the Theological Seminary at Kampen, will be extended. The organizing of such a study became urgent since the study of the classical languages at grammar school and similar institutes is no longer as intensive as it used to be.

2.5 Foreign Churches

2.5.1 General

2.5.1.1

'Lux Mundi', the magazine published by the Committee for the Relations with Churches Abroad, will be issued more frequently.

2.5.1.2

The Rules for 'ecclesiastical fellowshp' and 'provisional ecclesiastical contact' will be studied by the committee, in consultation with the foreign sister Churches, and if necessary be amended by the next General Synod.

2.5.1.3

The non-English sister Churches will be requested to translate the essential parts of their Acts into English and publish them. The Dutch churches have decided to do the same and to have their revised Church Order translated into English.

2.5.2 Sister Churches

2.5.2.1

Regarding The Free Reformed Churches of Australia Synod decided:

- a) to continue the ecclesiastical fellowship with The Free Reformed Churches of Australia according to the accepted rules for ecclesiastical correspondence.
- b) to mandate the deputies to be appointed to inform the Australian sister churches on the contacts with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

GROUNDS:

- a) The Free Reformed Churches of Australia have, in doctrine, liturgy, church government and discipline, remained faithful to the Reformed confession.
- b) Regarding the contacts with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands have their own responsibilities. However, there is a necessity to inform the Australian sister churches about these contacts.

2.5.2.2

The sister church relationship with The Canadian Reformed Churches will also be continued.

These churches were granted permission to translate the Dutch Form for the Ordination or Installation of Missionary ministers of God's Word into English and to include it in the 'Book of Praise'.

2.5.2.3

The same relationship will be continued with Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika.

2.5.2.4

The same was decided concerning The Reformed Churches of East Sumba/Savu. A second lecturer for the training of ministers has been appointed (the Rev.J. Klamer, a former missionary). His special mandate is: on behalf of the Dutch Churches to assist the Churches of East-Sumba/Savu by conducting refresher courses for ministers, evangelists, elders and deacons.

2.5.2.5

The same relationship will be continued with The Presbyterian Church in Korea.

Deputies have been mandated to assist the two missionaries-professors Batteau and Gootjes and their families.

They must study the changes in the confession and Church Order of the Korean sister churches.

The Korean Presbyterian Church (Reformed), a group within the so-called Hapdong-Church, requested the establishing of 'fraternal relations'. Deputies have been commissioned to seek further information.

2.5.2.6

The relationship of sister churches will be continued with The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Northern-Ireland. Ground for this decision is that it has been confirmed that this church shows the marks of the true church. This Church has some difficulties with the current rules for ecclesiastical fellowship.

2.5.3 Contact Churches

2.5.3.1

Provisional ecclesiastical contact will be continued with The Free Church of Scotland, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (Second Presbytery).

2.5.3.2

The offer of provisional ecclesiastical contact made to the Reformed Church of Japan, the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, and - on certain conditions - to Die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, is maintained.

2.5.3.3

A less formal form of contact will be sought or continued with Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika, with churches in Sudan, Spain, Germany and France, the Presbyterian Church of America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and The Orthodox Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

2.5.4 I.C.R.C.

General Synod decided to join the International Conference of Reformed Churches, and appointed delegates to the conference held in the month of September 1985 at Edinburgh in Scotland.

She also decided to propose a number of amendments to the Constitution and Rules, and the appointing of a study committee that shall inform the member churches on missionary literature, and courses for training of missionaries, and serve them with a draft of a Scriptural missiology. She further would like the I.C.R.C. to establish a consultative council that would make an inventory of the missionary activities of the member churches, advise them in their selection of territories for mission-work and similar things.

2.6 Civil Government

The Government of The Netherlands is in the process of re-imbursing all the Churches that originate from the former 'national church' as it existed in the days of the occupation of the country by the French under Napoleon Bonaparte, when the church was robbed of certain material possessions and prerogatives. The General Synod Arnhem 1971 appointed deputies who must participate in the negotiations. General Synod Heemse confirmed this decision. The proceeds are intended to support the retirement funds of the churches concerned.

2.7 Synodalia

Synod re-appointed deputies for Bible translation. Their mandate is to represent the Churches in the contact with organisations that occupy themselves with Bible translation activities; they shall act as observers and try to follow the developments in this field.

2.8 Particularia

The teachings of the Rev. Joh. Hoorn of Grootegast regarding Article 28 of the Belgic Confession of Faith - in particular concerning the believers' duty to join the true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ - were investigated and rejected.

2.9 Varia

A letter was sent to the General Synod of De Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, complaining about the fact that contact with these churches is becoming more and more difficult seeing the developments in these churches.

2.10 Doctrine

This and the next section regard the - mainly linguistic - renewal of the official service book of the Dutch churches.

- a) The definite revised text of the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed was adopted.
- b) The same happened to the text of the non-official "Kort Begrip der Christelijke Religie" - a summary of the Heidelberg Catechism -, which will be included in the church service book.
- c) In Article 9 of the Belgic Confession of Faith the so-called Comma Johanneum (I John 5:7b-8a) has been deleted as a proof-text.
- d) Prooftexts for the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism have been adopted.
- e) The revised text of the Canons of Dort has been adopted.

2.11 Liturgy

- a) The text of some more liturgical forms and prayers has been adopted.
- b) In the provisional church service book (Proefbundel) the liturgy of 'Middelburg 1933' was incorrectly printed. This will be rectified in the new service book.
- c) The revised text of the metrical version of the 150 Psalms was adopted.
- d) The same happened to a hymnal consisting of 35 hymns.

With all this the work of renewing the church service book, undertaken some 30 years ago, was completed.

3. REPORT DEPUTIES

Deputies received the report of the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad to be dealt with by General Synod Spakenburg Noord 1987.

From this report we pass on the following information:

3.1 SUMBA/SAVU

There has been an intensive contact with the sister churches of East Sumba/Savu, in particular through both missionaries-lecturers, the Rev. J. Boersema and Rev. J. Klamer. There are nine congregations meeting in two classes and annually in a synod, with a total membership of more than 3500. From 12 to 15 November 1985 their first synod was held, which decided to try to intensify contact with The Free Reformed Churches of Australia. If possible they would like to send a brother to Australia for one year with the main purpose of studying the English language, this in view of the international contacts.

3.2 The Far East

3.2.1

The danger that the Korean government would stimulate the Shinto-worship by building temples for Tandun, seems, for the time being, to be over. The prayers and actions, also from the side of our sister churches, have been answered and blessed.

Two missionaries-professors from the Dutch sister churches, J.M. Batteau and N.H. Gootjes, are still teaching at the Korea Theological Seminary in Pusan, the enrolment of this seminary stands at 200.

3.2.2

In September 1986 two deputies visited Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Japan and Korea. A special report on this journey will follow.

Earlier, in August/September 1985, Professor Gootjes, on behalf of the Dutch churches, visited the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan. Professor Batteau visited the Reformed Church of Japan in the year 1984. Early 1986 the Rev. J. Klamer visited the Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore - as for this church, deputies propose that contact with this church will be continued. Further information on the above mentioned churches will be supplied in an additional report to Synod Spakenburg Noord 1987.

3.3 English Speaking Countries

3.3.1

Deputies propose to continue sister church relations with The Canadian Reformed Churches, The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

3.3.2

Deputies are of the opinion that they could continue to recognize the Free Church of Scotland as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. They propose to offer to this church the sister churches relationship.

3.3.3

The contact with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) was disappointing. It seems as if this church is not interested in the GKN. Deputies therefore propose to discontinue this contact.

3.3.4

The contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. is also disappointing. However, there are contacts between the OPC and The Canadian Reformed Churches; therefore deputies would not like to completely discontinue their contact with the OPC and will wait for the decisions to be taken by the OPC and the PCA regarding a possible amalgamation.

3.3.5

Contacts with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) have been intensive. From the topics under discussion between the GKN and the RCNZ we mention: the relationship of the latter with other churches, e.g. with the synodal churches in The Netherlands - which in the opinion of the Dutch deputies will automatically be terminated as soon as the RCNZ will decide to leave the RES. The report further refers to the correspondence between the deputies of the GKN and our own churches on the RCNZ and that the fact that the Reformed Churches of Australia and the RCNZ are living in a sister church relationship has led The Free Reformed Churches of Australia to discontinue their official contact with the RCNZ. The deputies of the Dutch churches would like to continue the discussion with the RCNZ on these matters, although they cannot yet see any perspective of a closer relationship.

3.3.6

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church of New Zealand - a minister of which attended the Edinburgh ICRC meeting in 1985 as an observer - informed the Dutch deputies of being unable to establish an official relationship because these four small congregations have, on purpose, not organised themselves in a confederation of churches. Deputies therefore propose to discontinue their contact with this church.

3.3.7

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI) is a member of the ICRC. In the month of April 1986 a delegation visited our Dutch sister churches. Some particulars on this church are supplied in the deputies' report, e.g. that the RPCI does not struggle with the problem of the "adherents". She is known as "The Covenanter Church", maintaining "The National Covenant of Scotland" of 1638 and "The Solemn League and Covenant" of 1643 for the promotion of Presbyterianism. They have a sister church relationship with i.e. the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia. They adhere to the principle of "purity of worship".

Deputies would like to continue contacts with this church.

3.3.8

Seeing the contact which our churches have the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA), and this church's membership of the ICRC, the Dutch deputies have sent a letter to the PCEA in which they introduced their churches. They propose to Synod to open contact with the PCEA, in co-operation with the deputies of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

3.4 Africa and Europe

3.4.1

As for Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika, deputies propose to continue the sister church relationship.

3.4.2

Since Die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (GKSA, the 'Dopperkerken') have entered into a sister church relationship with De Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (formerly the "buitenverbanders"), the GKN have withdrawn their offer to enter into a provisional relation of ecclesiastical contact. Further contacts with delegates of the GKSA led to the proposed writing by the Dutch deputies of a memorandum, which would be discussed prior to the GKSA Synod to be held January 1988, this in co-operation with deputies of the VGKSA. Deputies request Synod's approval of this plan.

3.4.3

There have been some good contacts with representatives of Die Nederduits Gereformeerde kerk in Suid-Afrika. Deputies would like to continue these contacts.

3.4.4

Certain developments in Nigeria, Zaire, France, Spain, Greece and Germany are having the deputies' attention.

3.5 I.C.R.C.

The deputies' report includes a section on the ICRC. We would like to pass on the following points:

3.5.1

The minutes of the next conferences should be more detailed, in deputies' opinion.

3.5.2

The papers to be delivered at the conference should be in the hands of the delegates, in time.

3.5.3

The next conference should strictly honour the Constitution in admitting delegates of churches only.

3.5.4

The published Communique was too short. It must be possible, on the ground of the papers delivered and discussed, to issue a Reformed testimony on a large number of issues. It will also be necessary to give more publication to the conference itself and to its Communique.

3.5.5

Deputies are of the opinion that if all members of the conference consider certain matters, which could not be put on the agenda, to be urgent, it shall be authorized to issue statements on them.

3.6 Lux Mundi

From the beginning of 1986 this magazine is published four times a year.

3.7 Rules for Ecclesiastical Relationships

At this stage we will not deal with the report's section on "Rules for Ecclesiastical Relationships", since this is done separately elsewhere in our report.

3.8 Proposals

In a final section the proposals made by deputies to the forthcoming General Synod are repeated. One of them has not been mentioned yet, the proposal to charge deputies with the mandate to issue a revised version of the English information booklet on the GKN, and to authorize them to issue a similar publication in German and French.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

We can declare that in the Acts concerned we have not found anything contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and consequently to the Three Forms of Unity and Reformed Church Polity.

We therefore, with thankfulness conclude that De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland have remained faithful to God's Word and recommend to Synod to continue the relationship of sister churches with De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland in accordance with the adopted rules.

G. INDONESIA

1.

1.1 Synod Launceston instructed deputies to visit the first Synod of the Gereja-gereja Reformasi Indonesia Di Sumba Timor-Savu to be held in November 1985.

Rev. S.G. Hur was appointed by Synod to attend with Br.J.L. van Burgel as alternate.

Regrettably Rev. Hur was unable to undertake the visit because the Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott consistory could not accede to his release. The alternate delegate appointed by Synod, Br. J.L. van Burgel was also unable to attend for personal reasons.

Consequently deputies were forced to decline the invitation from the Sumba/Savu Churches.

1.2 A provisional synod agenda was received which included the following items:

- a) Legalization of the (revised) church-order of the Reformed Churches of Indonesia, East Sumba/Savu.
- b) Correspondence/relation with the (local) government on the occasion of the opening of classes (and synods).
- c) Appointment of deputies.
- d) Degree of the 'self-supporting' of the churches of East Sumba/Savu in connection with the policy of the Dutch sister churches concerning reducing the annual support.
- e) Correspondence/cooperation with the Australian sister churches.
- f) The membership of the ICRC for the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (East Sumba/Savu).
- g) Whether office-bearers in the church are allowed to receive other offices too (for instance in the regional parliament) or not.
- h) We are expecting other issues from the classes and local churches.

1.3 Deputies have requested information from the Indonesian sister churches about their decisions of Synod but to date we have not received a reply.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.4 Deputies propose that Synod authorise deputies to visit the Sumba/Savu Churches at the next Synod to be held late 1987. Because of the language difficulties and unfamiliarity with the Indonesian country and its customs, deputies recommend two delegates be sent. The cost per delegate is approximately \$800.00

1.5 Deputies propose that correspondence with the Gereja-gereja Reformasi Indonesia Di Sumba Timor-Savu be continued under the established rules.

H. SOUTH AFRICA

1. CORRESPONDENCE

- 1.1 Deputies received copies of the Acts of the Synod of Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerken in Suid-Afrika held at Cape Town in 1984 and Pretoria in 1986.

An invitation to attend Synod, Pretoria commencing 31st March, 1986 was received and forwarded to the local churches. Subsequently deputies sent written greetings on behalf of the FRCA.

- 1.2 The South African deputies passed on to us a request to supply information to their deputies for the revision of the Church Book regarding the FRCA policy on the solemnization of marriages. Deputies were able to assist with a detailed response.

2. REPORT SYNOD PRETORIA 1986

The Synod was opened on March 31, 1986 and closed on April 4. From the Acts we summarize the following decisions:

2.1 Church Service Book

The South-African sister churches are in the process of renewing their Church Service Book by adapting its language to present day usage, a process similar to that in our Dutch and Canadian/American sister churches and in our own churches as well.

2.1.1

This first of all regards the Bible version to be used.

A previous synod appointed deputies with the mandate to examine a new bible translation in the African language, the Nuwe Afrikaanse Bybelvertaling 1983 (NAB 1983). Synod decided to continue the use of the 1933/53 translation for all church work. The NAB 1983 was considered to be too 'free' and to cause a break in the relation between the Scriptures and the doctrinal standards of the churches. New deputies have been appointed with the mandate to investigate the possibility of suggesting improvements in the NAB 1983, and to contact other churches with the aim of joining forces in making objections against the NAB and considering the undertaking of efforts to come to a reliable Bible translation.

2.1.2

As for the liturgical forms, Synod decided to ask the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika - the so-called Doppekerken - for permission to make use of the recently linguistically renewed Form for Infant Baptism. Provisional texts - to be tested by the churches - have been adopted for other liturgical forms, an exception being the Form for Confirmation of Marriages, as for this matter the South-African sister churches decided to contact the Canadian Reformed Churches and our own churches and consult them on the question whether solemnization of marriages - in South-Africa called Confirmation - taken place either in an official church service or in a private ceremony (a request for information was received and has been answered by deputies in the meantime).

2.1.3

Synod decided to adopt a proposal of deputies concerning the adoption of a number of 'Skrifberymings' (metrical versions of Scripture texts), written by the Reformed theologian and poet Totius.

2.1.4

Deputies have been mandated to look for an appropriate tune for the singing of the Apostles' Creed.

2.1.5

At the next Synod a report will be discussed on the question whether the Kampen 1975 order of service can be recommended to the churches.

2.2 Other Internal Matters

2.2.1

Church life in the South-African sister churches has much in common with that of our own churches. Since their number is small - there are three congregations, at Cape Town, Johannesburg, and Pretoria - and there are no Classes, church visitation reports are dealt with at their synods, which are held every other year. This was also done at the 1986 synod.

2.2.2

Some problems are similar to ours, e.g. the question in how far the local church is able to maintain supervision over people who are living far from the local church. One of the churches decided to restrict this to a certain area. Synod was of the opinion that the consistory concerned should be very careful in adopting fixed church borders: some members could easily be excluded from pastoral care and church communion.

2.2.3

The church of Cape Town is undertaking mission work at Belhar. Synod gratefully took notice of the good progress made in this respect. As for the ordination of missionary elders Synod advised the church of Cape Town to use the normal Form for the Ordination of Elders.

2.2.4

As for the mission work undertaken at Mamelodi, the South-African sister churches are in the process of taking this over from the church of Drachten-Zuid-Oost in The Netherlands. Deputies have been instructed in this respect.

2.2.5

The VGKSA cannot maintain their own institute for the training for the ministry of the Word. One student from their midst is studying in Kampen in The Netherlands. Contact with the Kampen Seminary will be sought regarding the possibilities for theological students from the VGKSA to partly follow a training at a South-African university.

2.3 Contact with other Churches in South-Africa

2.3.1

Synod had some difficulty in formulating a decision regarding the context with the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (the 'Dopperkerken'). Ultimately Synod was of the conviction that there is a biblically-founded calling to seek church unity. However, at the moment there are a number of impediments, e.g. the GKSA's membership of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), their correspondence with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (formerly the 'buitenverbanders') and problems regarding the execution of church discipline in the GKSA.

Deputies have been given the mandate to write a draft-appeal to the GKSA, which will be sent for comment to the consistories and also to the Dutch committee for relations with foreign churches, after which it will be finalized at the next Synod, which for this particular purpose will be convened at an earlier date, in October 1987, so as to be able to send this appeal in time to the GKSA Synod, which will be held in January 1988.

2.3.2

The same deputies have been mandated to seek contact with the Free Church in Southern Africa, and show the churches' interest and sympathy with this church.

2.4 Foreign Churches

The last mentioned item leads us to the matter of the VGKSA's relationship with other churches.

2.4.1

The above mentioned contact with the Free Church in Southern Africa originates from the latter's membership of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Delegates from this church and the VGKSA met at the Edinburgh 1985 conference.

As for this organisation, Synod discussed the report of the observers who attended this conference. Synod was unanimous in deciding to apply for membership of the ICRC. Funds are available for a delegation of one or two persons to the next conference to be held in Canada. Synod accepted the basis of the ICRC in this sense that the VGKSA within the ICRC wants to co-operate with churches that adhere to the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards as their confessions and take them seriously in their church life.

2.4.2

Prior to this decision Synod unanimously expressed itself on the contents of the Westminster Confession and Catechism. It considered the Westminster Standards to have beneficially contributed to the maintaining of the Reformed character of the Presbyterian churches. Certain formulations create a number of questions, e.g. concerning the confession regarding the church, the covenant of grace, the relation to the civil government and the system of church government. Synod decided to acknowledge - in the line of the history of the church - the Westminster Standards as a Reformed confession, and to mandate the deputies for contact with foreign churches, in their eventual contact with churches that have adopted this confession, with due deference to raise these matters so that in the light of God's Word we can jointly make progress in confessing the truth.

2.4.3

Unlike the action undertaken by a previous synod, no special deputies-delegates to the ICRC will be appointed, but deputies for contact with foreign churches will be mandated in this respect.

2.4.4

The correspondence will be continued with The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, The Canadian Reformed Churches, and De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, and the contact with the Reformed Churches of East Sumba/Savu and the Korean Presbyterian Church will be continued.

2.4.5

The Dutch sister churches had sent two delegates, in particular with the aim that the proposed new rules for correspondence would be discussed; these churches would like all the sister churches to adopt rules of the same tenor. During the Synod a discussion on this matter was held. Deputies will continue it in their contact with their Dutch colleagues.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

We can declare that in the Acts concerned we have not found anything contrary to the Holy Scriptures, and consequently to the Three Forms of Unity and Reformed Church Policy.

We therefore, thankfully concluding that Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika have remained faithful to God's Word, recommend to Synod to continue the relationship of sister churches with these churches in accordance with the adopted rules.

OTHER FOREIGN CHURCHES

I. THE EVANGELICAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND

1. INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.1 Synod Launceston 1985 instructed our Committee (Acts Art. 95, 7 III):
- a) to thoroughly investigate the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and the Free Church of Scotland and submit comprehensive reports to the Churches and to the next Synod, paying particular attention to the marks of the true Church and the question of Church government.
 - b) to maintain contact with these Churches at the present level (Acts 1985, Art. 43).
- 1.2 These instructions find their origin in the decision taken by Synod 1985 regarding a number of objections raised against the decision taken by Synod Kelmscott 1983, whereby it was confirmed that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Free Church of Scotland "are faithful Churches of the Lord", and the "deputies for correspondence with foreign sister Churches" - now the "Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad" - were instructed:
- a) to inform these Churches of this decision;
 - b) to intensify the correspondence with those Churches with the aim to establish full sister church relationships with them".
(Acts 1983, Art. 75)

One of the considerations of Synod may reveal in which way our Churches came to deal with this matter when it says that "the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland has already established full sister church relationships with our sister churches in The Netherlands". Another consideration states that this church has "given full support to and co-operation with our sister churches in the Constituant Assembly, Groningen 1982" of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) Synod 1985 (Acts Art. 43) decided:

1. that the decisions recorded in Articles 72 and 75 of the Acts of Synod 1983 were taken with undue haste and without due consideration...
 3. that the Deputies for Correspondence with Foreign Sister-Churches appointed by Synod 1985 be instructed ... (as above)
- 1.3 Since both our own churches and the EPCI have joined the ICRC, one of the purposes of this organization being "to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches" (Constitution, Article III2), the execution of our Committee's mandate is the more urgent.

2. HISTORY

2.1 All though the ages there has been a close church-historical relation between Scotland and Ireland.

Although there existed a Celtic Church in Ireland before the time of Patrick, this Scots-born man is commonly known as 'the apostle of the Irish' (5th century).

In the next century the monastic church of Ireland saw its missionaries return to Scotland, e.g. in the person of Columba.

Danish invaders from the end of the 8th century brought the Irish church under the jurisdiction of Rome.

However, King Henry VIII, who for personal reasons rejected the pope's authority, compelled the Irish to do the same (1537) - although in doctrinal and liturgical respect this church did not change. King Edward VI tried to introduce a Reformed liturgy.

Queen Mary, however, brought the Irish church back into the Roman fold. Her successor, Elizabeth I, officially re-introduced the Anglican rites, but they were not readily accepted by the people. In the year 1560 - the same year in which the Church of Scotland was organized and the Scots Confession written - the Irish parliament again repudiated the pope's authority. Anglicanism became the national religion.

During the 18th century the Anglican Church became the Established Church. This situation lasted until 1869. For a while the membership of this church mainly consisted of landlords, the majority of the population remained Roman Catholic. This led to a struggle for emancipation because Roman Catholics were excluded from land tenure and public offices. This struggle ended with the Emancipation Bill of 1829, when equality was obtained.

2.2 In the meantime another sea-crossing between Scotland and Ireland had taken place. During the reign of King James I many Scots had fled their country and settled in the Northern part of Ireland. These hard-working Presbyterians were granted land tenure by William of Orange as soon as he had conquered Ireland. They established their own congregations, which were supported and influenced by the Church of Scotland.

In the 18th century Ulster - Northern Ireland - had a mainly Protestant population.

However, soon afterwards the Presbyterian Church of Ireland fell into decay, in spite of the efforts undertaken by the 'Covenanters' to keep their church pure and undefiled. There was a revival during the 19th century, but at its end liberalism had again gained the upper hand.

2.3 A very important event took place late in the 'twenties of the 20th century. In the year 1926 the Rev. James Hunter, minister of Knox Presbyterian Church and a leader in the Bible Standards League, supported by a group of other ministers and church members, brought charges against the teachings of Professor J.E. Davey of the Presbyterian College in Belfast. An information brochure published by the EPCI mentions the following charges:

- 1) a denial of the doctrine of imputation of our guilt to Christ and His righteousness to us.
- 2) a denial of the impeccable character of Christ.
- 3) a denial of the infallibility of the Bible.
- 4) the view that, in some way, God was responsible for man's sin.
- 5) that the doctrine of the Trinity was not taught in the Word of God.

The Belfast Presbytery, dealing with this matter in closed session, acquitted that Professor. Appealing to the Assembly, the Rev. Hunter was again put in the wrong. Besides, the Presbytery had banned all discussion of the subject, but the Rev. Hunter did not keep the matter secret; therefore the Assembly appointed a committee, armed with assembly powers, so that the Rev. Hunter could expect that disciplinary action against would be taken. Therefore, and also because the church could not be expected to return to the Scriptures as long as the training for the Ministry was in the hands of liberal theologians, the Rev. Hunter in July 1927 seceded from the Irish Presbyterian Church.

On October 15, 1927 it was decided to re-institute the Church, which initially called itself 'The Irish Evangelical Church', but in the year 1964 adopted the name "The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland".

The above mentioned brochure ends its own brief summary of the history of the church as follows:

Events since 1927 have fully vindicated the decision of such men as James Hunter and W.J. Grier. The last fifty years have seen further development within Irish Presbyterianism that give cause for deep concern. We have seen involvement in unbiblical ecumenism, the increase of critical theology in the theological college and the ordination of women. It is little wonder that voices within Irish Presbyterian circles have begun to sound a timely alarm. Whilst we welcome such concern, we are more than ever convinced that our present separate existence is required by our commitment to what the Bible teaches.

3. SITUATION

3.1 At this time there are 10 congregations with 9 ministers and a total membership of approximately 1000.

Most of the ministers were trained at the College of the Free Church of Scotland in Edinburgh.

With this church the EPCI co-operates in the missionwork undertaken in India, Peru and South Africa.

Up till today there are no formal rules for the relationship with the Free Church of Scotland.

The rules under which our own churches and the Dutch sister churches maintain their relationship, have been accepted by the EPCI for its relation with The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands - although they are somewhat 'strange' to them. The Dutch churches, therefore, are in the process of amending them.

A sister church relationship with the Dutch churches was established in the year 1981.

The EPCI was "a founder member of the British Evangelical Council, a body that seeks to promote Biblical Church unity amongst those of a conservative evangelical outlook". (Brochure)

At the end of the year 1979 the EPCI terminated its membership of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES), because of this organization's tolerant attitude towards liberal ideas and practices in e.g. the 'synodical' churches in The Netherlands, and seeing the 'dual membership' - of the RES and the World Council of Churches - of some of its member churches.

Close relations are maintained with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (the old 'Covenanters'). As a result of the new and intensive contact with e.g. The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the EPCI has recently contacted the RPCI about the two churches' separate existence in the same country.

Unlike the RPCI - and the Free Church of Scotland - the EPCI does not adhere to the so-called 'Purity of Worship' (e.g. unaccompanied Psalm singing only).

This church publishes a monthly, called "The Evangelical Presbyterian". It has also established the Evangelical Bookshop in the centre of Belfast.

3.2 The EPCI's position in the political situation of Northern-Ireland is a very difficult one.

It may be known that the IRA is seeking amalgamation with the Roman Catholic Republic of Ireland in the South. The Protestants, being the majority of the population of Northern-Ireland, offer strong resistance against this. Most of them are supporters of the well known Rev. Ian Paisley and his movement. This movement also attracts some of the younger members of the EPCI. However, the church itself does not support the movement of these "defenders of the true faith", not only because in the other Presbyterian churches the true faith is not preserved at all, but also because of the worldly, rebellious and violent means used by this movement.

Consequently the EPCI is in an isolated position, and its members are sometimes considered and treated as betraying "the national cause"!

4. DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

4.1 The EPCI has adopted - and is in the process of revising - a document called 'The Code'. this can be considered as a kind of elaborate Church Order.

The first paragraph of Section 2, "The Standards of the Church", has under the heading "Our Creed" the following sentence:

The Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and the supreme standard of the Church.

4.2 The second paragraph begins with the following lines:

The subordinate standards of our Church are the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms; we believe these subordinate standards, as amended in this sub-section, accurately summarise, interpret and apply the teaching of the Scriptures on important points of doctrine and worship.

4.3 The same sub-section sums up the amendments to the Westminster Confession, when it says:

We do not receive the passages in the Confession relating to the Civil Magistrate (chapter 23) in any such sense as to mean that the Civil Magistrate has a controlling power over Synods or Councils with respect to the exercise of their ministerial authority, or power to persecute any for their religion. We accept all the statements of chapter 24 except the last sentence of paragraph 4, which we omit entirely. The omitted words are: "The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own: nor the woman of her husband's kindred, nearer in blood than of her own".

We omit from Paragraph 6 in chapter 25 the following words: "But is that Anti-christ, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God" and the revised paragraph now reads, "There is no other head of the Church, but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the Pope of Rome, in any sense, be the head thereof. The claim of any man to be the Vicar of Christ, the Head of the Church, is unscriptural, without warrant in fact, and is a usurpation, dishonouring to the Lord Jesus Christ".

5. CHURCH POLITY

5.1 OFFICE BEARERS

5.1.1

The above mentioned brochure states:

Being Presbyterian we adhere to the traditional Presbyterian Church polity, having deacons and elders. While within the office of elder we distinguish between ruling and teaching, our ruling elders are equal with our teaching elders (or ministers). Each local congregation elects its own office bearers and calls it own minister. The local kirk session nominates representatives to the denomination's central body or 'Presbytery'.

5.1.2

As for these office bearers the brochure says:

In seeking to maintain a position of confessional integrity we believe in the necessity of Church discipline and therefore require all holding office to subscribe without reservation to the Confession and Catechisms. Members of our Presbytery are called upon to renew their subscription annually.

Standard questions are put at all Ordinations, Installations, Licensures, Missionary Commissions and annually to members of Presbytery. According to "The Code" they are:

- (1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- (2) Do you make the following affirmation:
"I believe the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism as accepted by this Church, to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God and as such I subscribe them as the confession of my faith, and this I do without any reservations"?
- (3) Do you believe the Form of Government of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and do you promise to adhere to and support it, and to yield submission in the Lord to the Courts of this Church?

Additional questions are put respectively to Ministers-Elect, Elders-Elect, Deacons-Elect, Licentiates (in our ecclesiastical vernaculair: Candidates to the Ministry), and Missionaries.

5.1.3

As quoted earlier, every congregation has the right to call its own minister. The 'Code' adds to this rules: "subject to the approval of Presbytery".

Ruling Elders are elected for life, though only in the congregation appointing them.

Elections for Deacons are held any time after 3 years, but in no case beyond 5 years following the previous election.

5.1.4

The responsibilities of the minister are the same as in our churches, with the addition of some administrative duties, as may be seen from the following:

The minister has particular responsibility to:

- 1) faithfully minister the Word both publicly and privately.
- 2) conduct public worship and make arrangements for the pulpit supply and essential ministerial services of the congregation or congregations of which he has the oversight during his absence therefrom.
- 3) administer the sacraments.
- 4) care, as a Pastor, for his people.
- 5) visit the people, especially the sick.
- 6) instruct the young.
- 7) conduct marriages and funerals.
- 8) aid in the government of the Church.
- 9) provide a Christian example at all times.

The minister shall present annually a report to the congregation and to the January meeting of Presbytery; this report shall include:

the number of baptised members; that of communicant members 1st January/31st December, of deaths and disjunctions; the average number of members at Communion Services; the average attendance of morning, evening and mid-week services; the number of Sabbath School and Bible Class Rolls at the end of the year; the number of baptisms and of marriages.

5.1.5

The responsibilities of the Ruling Elders are described as follows:

The Ruling Elders shall join with the Minister in the government, nurture and discipline of the congregation. Upon them, equally with the minister, devolve the responsibility of caring for the spiritual welfare of the people and the superintendance of all meetings and organisations within the congregation. It is the responsibility of Ruling Elders to pray with, and or, the congregation and to seek fruit among them. They are to visit the people, paying special attention to the sick, and to irregular attenders, and also to instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourner, warn the careless and nourish and guard the children of the Church.

5.1.6

As for the Deacons, together they form a Deacons Board, the duties of which are:

to assist the Session by administering the affairs of the congregation, e.g. ministrations to the poor, the needy, the sick, the lonely and any who may be in distress; the management of the graces of liberality and concern for the needy among the people;

but also:

the collection and disbursement of the finances; the preparation of audited accounts; the maintenance, improvement, insurances and use of the property; giving assistance in organising projects in, or by, the congregation and any other task which the Session may assign them.

5.1.7

The EPCI has adopted some common rules for the election of office bearers, so that this is not left to the discretion of each congregation.

We mention some of them:

5.1.7.1

On the eligibility as qualified voters the 'Code' says:

All members of the congregation in full communion, and only such, shall be eligible as qualified voters for the purpose of electing ministers, ruling elders and deacons.

5.1.7.2

As for the election and call of ministers it includes the following rules:

- 1) Any member in full communion may propose a candidate; if the proposal be seconded the nomination goes to the meeting.
- 2) Should more than one candidate be proposed and seconded a vote shall be taken of the qualified voters and repeated until only one candidate remains.
- 3) A vote shall be taken on this candidate, for and against, and if he be approved by no less than a 2/3 majority, the call shall be drawn up and signed by the communicant members of the congregation concurring.

5.1.7.3

Election of Ruling Elders and Deacons takes place with the help of the issuing

of voting papers identifying male members to qualified voters who shall place a mark opposite the names of those - up to the number required - whom they wish to choose.

No person can be admitted as a ruling elder or deacon if:

- 1) he does not receive 60% of the votes cast;
- 2) the Session are dissatisfied with his qualifications notwithstanding the votes received.

5.2 THE CONGREGATION

5.2.1

The 'Code' states:

Membership of this Church is open - through the Session - to all such persons as have made a credible profession of faith in Christ as God the Son, their Saviour and Lord, have been baptised and exhibit a teachable spirit.

5.2.2

As for the children of the congregation it says:

Children of such members - though not yet admitted to full communion - are, because of God's Covenantal promise, received as infant members of the congregation in the sacrament of baptism.

5.2.3

The responsibilities of the members of the congregation have been set out as follows:

Members have a responsibility to faithfully attend the means of grace, submit to the authority of the Session, respect and encourage their minister, promote the peace and prosperity of the congregation, give of their substance as the Lord may prosper them, pray for the work of the Gospel at home and abroad and exhibit a Christian spirit at all times.

5.2.4

Regarding converted Roman Catholics there is a special rule, which reads thus:

It is recommended that, in general, converted Roman Catholics be baptised and their previous baptism be considered invalid. However, recognising the historical complexity of and division upon this matter, the Session of each congregation shall have discretion to act in each case as it so determines.

5.3 ASSEMBLIES

5.3.1

What we are used to calling a Consistory or Church Council is in the Presbyterian world called the Session. Somewhere the 'Code' states:

The Session consists of the Teaching and Ruling Elders of the congregation.

In the EPCI, then, there is no problem regarding the question whether or not the deacons belong to the Consistory!

5.3.2

The duties of the Session are set out in following lines:

The elders - including the Minister or Interim-Moderator (in our Church Order: the counsellor appointed to assist a vacant church) comprise the Session, which has to do with the whole spiritual oversight of the congregation, including the admission to, or exclusion from, the sacraments of the Church, and Church discipline (in necessary cases in conjunction with the Presbytery).

5.3.3

The Session meets at least bi-monthly

for the transaction of ordinary business, public intimation having been given on a previous Sabbath.

5.3.4

Business meetings of the congregation shall be called from the pulpit.

An annual business meeting must be held at which there shall be presented reports (including inter alia, Session, Pastoral and Financial reports) assessing the preceding year and indicating improvements, plans and objectives for the ensuing year; such information and explanation of the reports as may be asked for shall be given.

As for the agenda the following rule has been adopted:

Announcement shall be made of the meeting on the two preceding Sabbaths. Such announcements shall specify the business to be transacted and no business other than that specified may be brought before the meeting.

5.3.5

The Deacons meet at least six times annually

for transacting of ordinary business, with not more than three calendar months between meetings.

These meetings are also called from the pulpit or by notice given to every member.

5.3.6

The "central body" - as the above quoted brochure calls it - of the EPCI is the Presbytery. This church is too small and the number of congregations inadequate for a General Assembly, consisting of delegates sent by the respective presbyteries as is the case in larger groups of Presbyterian churches.

It consists of:

- (1) all ministers, including retired ministers.
- (2) representative ruling (including assessor) elders commissioned from each Session.

Each congregation may have one commissioner for the first twenty members and another commissioner for every additional twenty or part of twenty, provided that no congregation send more than three commissioners to Presbytery.

5.3.7

At the February meeting the Presbytery elects a Moderator who will remain in office until in the next year his successor is appointed and installed. He presides the meetings (a minimum of nine meetings each moderatorial year as has been agreed to), and is invited to each congregation during his year of office.

5.3.8

The Presbytery appoints a number of Standing Committees, respectively for Training of Ministry and Admissions; Inter-Church Relations; Church Extension and Home Missions; Public Morals; and a Presbytery Arrangements Committee.

5.3.9

The responsibilities of the Presbytery are o.a.:

1) Superintend generally the spiritual and temporal affairs of its congregations, give advice in cases of difficulty and receive and determine petitions, complaints and appeals.

4) See that ordinances are duly administered and discipline upheld in any congregation that may become vacant; appoint a Minister as Interim-Moderator of its Session, and carry out the laws of the Church as to filling the vacancy.

5) Approve students for the ministry, receive them under its care, direct their theological training and after due trial, license them to preach the Gospel.

6) Examine, approve, ordain and/or install ruling elders.

9) Ordain to the Gospel ministry and watch over all that pertains to the call, ordination and/or installation of ministers and to the dissolution of the pastoral relationship.

10) Try charges against ministers, ruling elders, deacons, licentiates and missionaries and, if necessary, administer censure.

5.3.10

The position and authority of the Presbytery is described as follows:

The Presbytery is the supreme Court of the Church in legislative, administrative and judicial matters.

5.4 TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY

5.4.1

The EPCI is not in the position of maintaining their own theological college. Therefore the Standing Committee's business at their meetings includes a.o. "an evaluation of Theological Colleges".

5.4.2

Students who have been admitted to one of the Theological Colleges approved by the Presbytery at the last evaluation of the Committee, must sit three Presbytery examinations, one in each year of their theological training.

5.4.3

Each student shall:

gain a minimum of 6 months practical experience under the supervision of a serving minister of the E.P.C. before becoming eligible for ordination.

6. EVALUATION

6.1 Since the acknowledging of the Presbyterian Church in Korea as a sister church by Synod Albany 1975, and since the decision taken by Synod Kelmscott 1983 whereby it was confirmed that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland and the Free Church of Scotland "are faithful Churches of the Lord" - which churches adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechism as their subordinates standards - it is not necessary to make an evaluation of the confessional standards of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

6.2 As for the question of Church government, the many quotations from and references to the above mentioned 'Code' may have made clear that, in spite of a number of details which are unfamiliar to us, the government of this church is in the hands of those who, as gifts from the glorified Head of the Church (Ephesians 4:11ff), have been appointed by Him.

The above quoted 'Code' proves that the EPCI, elaborating on the Presbyterian Church Polity, has tried to safeguard itself against the danger of hierarchy, which threatens any church, whatever 'system' the Church government it may have adopted. Many of the detailed rules, though formulated in words different from ours, are similar to those in our own Church Order and practical church life.

6.3 Our Committee was not in the position to extend their investigations to the 'local scene'. Therefore we cannot report on e.g. the church services and in particular on the preaching of God's Word. However, more than once deputies of the Dutch sister churches visited the EPCI and reported favourably.

6.4 As for literature published by or from within the EPCI we hereby testify that we have not found anything that is not in harmony with God's Word; on the contrary, their official magazine, "Evangelical Presbyterian", includes many an edifying contribution.

7. CONCLUSIONS

7.1 On the ground of the above evaluation we come to the conclusion that the statement made by Synod Kelmescott 1983 that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland is a faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ, is confirmed by our Committee's investigations. This church indeed shows the marks of the true Church as set out in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, while in their church government there is nothing that could be an impediment to the establishing of a sister church relationship with them.

7.2 The only difficulty arises when we would propose this relationship to be maintained in accordance with the existing rules. As said before, these rules are strange to the EPCI. On the other hand, this church has decided to accept them as far as they are practicable for their relationship with the Dutch sister Churches. We could make the same suggestion, in the meantime waiting for the result of the special study of the existing rules undertaken by our Dutch sister churches, and, if possible, adopting the result of this study.

8. RECOMMENDATION

Our Committee herewith recommends to Synod Albany 1987 to re-confirm that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland is a faithful church of the Lord, showing the marks of the true church as set out in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith and to propose to them to enter into a relationship of sister churches, on the basis of mutually accepted rules.

9. CONTACT

There has been no other contact with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland than that - on a personal, informal basis - between our Churches' delegates to the ICRC at Edinburgh 1985 - at the same time members of our Committee - and the Rev. Derek Thomas, delegate of the EPCI to that conference. Besides, there was some correspondence with the Standing Committee for Inter-Church Relations when we requested them to provide us with the latest data.

J. THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

1 INTRODUCTION

The contact with the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) came into being especially via the Constituent Assembly for the International Conference of Reformed Churches, held in Groningen, the Netherlands, from October 26 to November 4, 1982. As a result of this contact Synod Kelmscott 1983 took the decision "to confirm that the FCS is a faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts of Synod, Art. 75). The same Synod instructed deputies "to intensify the correspondence with this Church with the aim to establish full sister church relationship with her."

Synod Launceston 1985 had to face several appeals against the above mentioned decision. It decided that the decision of Synod Kelmscott 1983 was taken "with undue haste and without due consideration." It instructed Deputies for Correspondence with Foreign Sister-Churches - now the "Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad" - "to thoroughly investigate the FRC, paying particular attention to the marks of the true Church and the question of the Church government" (Acts of Synod, art. 43).

At the International Conference of Reformed Churches, held in Edinburgh, Scotland, from September 2-10, 1985, two delegates of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have used the opportunity to speak extensively with delegates of the FCS. During their stay in Edinburgh they also attended two worship services of the FCS.

2 HISTORY

The roots of the FCS are to be found in the Reformation of the 16th and 17th century by John Knox and Andrew Melville. Its constant foe has been episcopacy and the unrelenting attempts of the state to gain dominance over the Church. Its authentic voice had been heard in the National Covenant of 1638. This document clearly states that the Church is not a department of the State and its spiritual jurisdiction must never be usurped by the State.

The battle regarding this issue, however, was not only to be fought during the 16th and 17th century, but the relationship between the Church and the State was also the main issue of the secessions during the 18th century, namely in 1733 and 1761. In both cases the Church had to defend her right to appoint ministers. In 1733 a heritor refused to appoint a certain Erskine as minister. This resulted in the institution of a separate Presbytery, called the 'Secession Church'. In 1761 the same issue was concerned, but now especially with respect to the authority of the General Assembly. One Gillespie was dismissed as minister and instituted a 'Presbytery for Relief for Christians oppressed in their Church privileges'. The Church originating from this secession was called 'Relief Church'.

Together with other seceded groups the 'Secession Church' and 'Relief Church' united in the 'United Presbyterian Church' which in 1900 united

with the majority of the Free Church into the 'United Free Church'. In 1929 this 'United Free Church' merged with the Church of Scotland.

In the meantime the Church of Scotland was confronted with a polarization between 'moderates' who were influenced by Rationalism and 'evangelicals' who were influenced by the Reveil. This polarization resulted in the Disruption of 1843 under the leadership of Thomas Chalmers. Those who signed the 'Act of Separation and Deed of Demission' called themselves 'Church of Scotland, Free'. This addition 'Free' later on became the proper name of this Church: Free Church. The issue at stake was once again the relationship between Church and State. Keeping the establishment-principle the Free Church also defended a principle of 'non-intrusion' of the State in matters of the Church.

This Disruption of 1843 is seen as the third Reformation in Scotland.

1. The great Reformation of the 16th century.
2. The adoption of Presbyterianism in 1638 (The National Covenant).
3. The Disruption of 1843 (free from intrusion by government).

In 1846 the FCS built a theological college in Edinburgh. At present this is still the college for the training for the ministry of the Word within the Free Church. 474 out of 1226 ministers joined the Disruption, as well as 93 theological students. With the Disruption the FCS lost all Church property.

In 1863 the FCS started her first discussion with the 'United Presbyterian Church' which ultimately resulted in a union of both Churches, called the 'United Free Church'. With this ecclesiastical reunion some were so fervent that they compromised on vital principles. Furthermore, within the United Free Church Liberalism in the form of the Higher Critical school made its impact felt, whilst also Revivalism under the leadership of Moody and Sanky with its Arminian stance gained a large following. Anti-confessionalism surfaced in its various forms.

All of these developments and others came to a head in the controversy surrounding the Declaratory Act. Properly understood a Declaratory Act, as its name suggests, was an act whereby a General Assembly would declare what it understood to be the true meaning, or meanings, of passages in the Westminster Standards whose importance might be uncertain. These Acts then functioned as explanatory Acts. However, in the movement for union between the FCS and the United Presbyterian Church which took place in the 1890s the Declaratory Act began to be used as a means of introducing doctrinal changes. Modifications were made in the doctrine of the corruption of man's whole nature by the fall, and in the matter of the Civil Magistrate. Allowances were made for "diversity of opinion" when it came to the Confession. The result was that the changes proposed and made were unacceptable to a minority of the members of the FCS. They voted against the union decided on in May 1900. Once again a minority found itself claiming to be the true continuation of the Church of Scotland. This Church claimed name and property with the authorities. In 1904 the House of Lords granted this claim, which in 1905 resulted in a fair division of Church property. The Free Church continued was once again called the Free Church of Scotland and it is this Church with which we have contact.

(The abovementioned information is mostly derived from the report of deputies on Correspondence with foreign Churches of the GKN to Synod Groningen Zuid, 1978 and from the report of the Committee on Correspondence with Churches Abroad of the CRC to Synod Burlington-West, 1986. Furthermore, the book "The Heritage of our Fathers", written by Prof. G.N.H. Collins, is also used as reference.)

3. SITUATION

The Free Church of Scotland consists of about 140 congregations. These congregations are divided over 9 Presbyteries (classes) which are under the jurisdiction of 3 regional synods. There is also a Synod of North America divided in two Presbyteries, namely Ontario/Western Canada and Prince Edward Island. The FCS had Mission Fields in South-Africa, Peru and India with respectively 5, 2 and 1 missionaries. Furthermore, the FCS also supports the work of the Christian Witness to Israel. Close relations are maintained with the EPCI and the RPCI in Ireland and also with the PCEA in Australia.

The FCS maintains a theological college which has its seat in Edinburgh. It is acknowledged by university statute to train students for the degree of Bachelor of Divinity. It is supervised by the General Assembly via the training for the Ministry Committee. This Committee also deals with the admission of students. Amongst others the requirements for admission are a Bachelor of Arts degree as well as an attestation of the consistory (session) which has to testify that one is a communicant member. The training for the ministry consists of a four year theological course. Five professors teach the following subjects:

Apologetics and Practical Theology
Greek and New Testament Literature
Systematic Theology
Church History and Church Principles
Hebrew and Old Testament Literature

4. CONFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The subordinate standards of the FCS are the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as well as the Scottish Confession of Faith, 1560.

5 MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

5.1 The pure preaching of the Gospel

In the abovementioned report of Deputies on Correspondence with Foreign Churches of the GKN to Synod Groningen-Zuid, 1978, it reads: "There is surely a subjectivistic tendency within the FCS, nevertheless this subjectivistic element does not dilute the pure preaching of the Gospel." This subjectivistic tendency differs locally. The set up of the sermons is different from the ones we are used to in Australia. Some are topical in approach, some have an experimental aspect, nevertheless it is still Scriptural and Reformed. This conclusion can

be drawn from the reports of several people who attended worship services of the FCS. Homiletical approaches aside, the preaching is very sound.

5.2 The pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them

Holy Supper is celebrated only once or twice a year. Usually the actual preparations begin already at mid-week and it is customary for two or three preparatory services to be held during that week. In those services the nature of the Supper is extensively dealt with, as well as the matter of admission to the Supper and the consequences of partaking with an unregenerate heart. Finally, on the Lord's Day itself the actual Supper is administered. There are voices demanding that Holy Supper should be celebrated more often. In this context a paper of Rev. J.D. Keenan may be mentioned in which is pleaded for a celebration even once every Sunday. He bases this on the term 'breaking of bread' in the Acts of the Apostles.

As far as the administration of Holy Baptism is concerned the practice of infant baptism is an integral part of the Confession of the FCS. Adherents who faithfully attend the worship service are allowed to let their children be baptized. However, voices are heard from within the Free Church which express unhappiness with this situation, and refer to their Catechism which excludes this practice. There are no regular catechism instructions. During the worship service in the morning the children go to Sunday School. They leave just before the sermon starts. A year before they make profession of their faith they follow a special course. It is recognized by many a minister that the children ought to be present during the whole worship service. In this context the contact with the Reformed tradition will hopefully be very beneficial.

C) The exercise of Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins

On the matter of discipline the FCS is known for its strictness to Biblical norms. She defends and promotes very strongly the holiness of the Lord in the lives of its Churches and members. In this context it is worthwhile to quote some passages of "The practice of the Free Church of Scotland in her several courts". Chapter V of this book deals with discipline. The first paragraph of this chapter reads: "Church Discipline is held to be of great use and necessity in our ecclesiastical system. It is regarded as belonging to that government which Christ has instituted in the visible order of His kingdom, and which, by His institution, is essentially distinct from the government of civil magistrates." Paragraph 2 answers the question with whom Church Discipline deals. "It deals chiefly with Church members. But the adult children of adherents, are also amenable to it, when they fall into gross sin." Furthermore it is stated that "Church discipline admits of nothing as ground for its action but what has been declared censurable by the Word of God, or by some act of universal custom of the Church agreeable thereto." Distinction is also made between secret and public sins, whilst reference is made to the rule of Matthew 18 as well.

6 CHURCH POLITY

The information given in this paragraph is mainly derived from the above-mentioned book "The practice of the Free Church of Scotland in her several courts", which deals with:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| 1) The Kirk-Session | | |
| 2) The Deacons' Court | | |
| 3) The Presbytery | | its constitution, powers, and |
| 4) The provincial Synod | | functions |
| 5) The General Assembly | | |

6.1 THE KIRK-SESSION

Constitution

- The pastor or pastors of each congregation, along with a suitable number of elders, who are not pastors, constitute the Kirk-Session.
- Those elders who do not exercise the pastoral office are called ruling elders. These elders are elected for life, or until they cease to be members of the congregation, or their resignation be accepted of, or they be held and declared to have resigned through long absence from sessional meetings, or they be deposed.
- The election of ruling elders belongs, in the Free Church of Scotland, to the members of the congregation in full communion.
- The qualifications required of ruling elders are the following:
 - a) they must be in full communion with the congregation;
 - b) each of them must have attained the age of twenty-one years;
 - c) they must possess more or less of all the qualifications described in the New Testament, as needful for persons exercising spiritual oversight in the Church, whether such persons be designated in our translation by the term 'bishop' or by the term 'elder'.
- An ordained minister who, from any cause not involving Church censure, is without a pastoral charge, is eligible as a ruling elder in the congregation to which he belongs.

Powers and functions

- No one can be admitted to the privilege of Baptism or the Lord's Supper, without satisfying the Kirk-Session that he or she possesses these qualifications, viz.:
 - a) a confession of faith in accordance with the Word of God and the standards of the Church;
 - b) a life and conversation becoming the gospel, in so far as can be outwardly seen;
 - c) a competent knowledge of religious truth, and of the nature and meaning of Christian ordinances.
- A specially important function of the Kirk-Session is the exercise of discipline. This function belongs to the Kirk-Session exclusively in the first instance, with respect to all members and adherents of their congregation, except the pastor, who is specially subject to the immediate jurisdiction of the Presbytery.
- Every Kirk-Session has a right and is bound to elect one of the ruling elders belonging to their number, as a representative to the Presbytery and Provincial Synod of the bounds.

6.2 THE DEACONS' COURT

Constitution

-The pastor or pastors of each congregation, along with the ruling elders and the deacons, constitute the Deacons' Court.

-The deacons's function is the administering of the temporal affairs of a congregation. The higher office scripturally includes the lower. The pastor and ruling elders are, therefore, not excluded from the exercise of the deacon's function. The number of deacons in each congregation ought to be in proportion to the size and position of the congregation. Deacons are also elected for life in the same way as the ruling elders (see above).

-The election of deacons belongs to the members of the congregation in full communion.

Powers and functions

-The Deacons' Court have charge of the whole property belonging to the congregation, or held for the congregation's use by Trustees appointed in terms of deeds which the General Assembly has sanctioned; also of all the congregation's secular affairs. They arrange for the Assembly's collections being taken and disposed of as instructed by the Assembly. The distribution of all the congregational funds is subject to the regulation of the Deacons' Court, in the exercise of their allowed discretion, or in obedience to the Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly. They also attend to the temporal wants of the poor connected with the congregation.

6.3. THE PRESBYTERY

Constitution

-A Presbytery consists:

- a) of all the pastors of the congregation within the bounds;
- b) of the Professors of Theology, whose appointed sphere of labour is within the bounds;
- c) of representative elders.

Powers and functions

-It is an important function of the Presbytery to consider carefully appeals and complaints affecting discipline, and to dispose of them in accordance with the Word of God and the laws of the Church.

-The Presbytery possesses inherently the function of deciding whether young men are qualified or not to be received into the number of enrolled students of theology, with a view to the pastoral office. It also has the function of examining them as to their qualification at any stage of their progress; of determining, in due time after examination, whether they may be licensed to preach to gospel or not, and of licensing them if they be found qualified. In the Free Church of Scotland, the exercise of these functions by the Presbytery is regulated by Acts of the General Assembly.

-It is the duty of the Presbytery to see that the ordinances are duly administered and discipline upheld in any congregation that may be vacant; to appoint one of their number as interim Moderator of its

Kirk-Session; and to carry out the laws of the Church as to filling up the vacancy.

6.4 THE PROVINCIAL SYNOD

Constitution

-A Provincial Synod consists:

- a) of all the pastors of the congregations within the province;
- b) of the Professors of Theology, whose appointed sphere of labour is within the province;
- c) of the same representative elder from each Kirk-Session in the province, who represents it in the Presbytery to which it belongs;
- d) of corresponding members, both ministers and elders, commissioned as such by neighbouring Synods.

Powers and functions

-A Provincial Synod is mainly a Court of review especially regarding matters of discipline.

6.5 THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Constitution

-The General Assembly differs from the Inferior Church Courts in the circumstance that, as a body, it has no permanent existence. Whatever powers of function belong to the General Assembly, belong to it entirely as a representative and temporary body.

-The General Assembly consists of an equal number of ministers and elders, commissioned annually by each recognised Presbytery of the Church. The exact number to be elected and commissioned by each Presbytery is fixed from time to time, by Act of Assembly, with consent of a majority of Presbyteries.

Powers and functions

-The General Assembly is also a Court of Review regarding complaints, appeals and petitions forwarded by Presbyteries and Synods.

-It has the authority to establish new Synods and Presbyteries.

-It may also dispose collections to be held in the Churches.

-Although the General Assembly is invested with the power of regulating the whole action of the Church in its Synods, Presbyteries, and Kirk-Sessions, it is still not regarded as having any lordly or absolutely binding authority. It is expected to act ministerially under Christ, and to carry out such rules as appear to harmonize with His own instructions in His Word. Consistent with the principles of Presbyterian Government, all reasonable means ought to be taken for keeping the action of the Assembly in accordance with the general mind of the church, inasmuch as all the ministers and ruling elders are entitled and called upon to judge for themselves as to the mind of the Great Head of the church. Still it is held that, as Christ requires good order to be maintained in His Church, it is needful for the Assembly to act legislatively as well as judicially. But a particular course for procedure has been devised for preventing any innovation, and for securing due deliberation and harmony in the enactment of new

laws, and in the alteration of old ones. An act (commonly called the Barrier Act) was passed in 1697 through which the course of procedure referred to has arisen. As to this Barrier Act this is more or less in line with approbating the Acts as it happens in our Churches, except that in the Free Church of Scotland this is not done by the Kirk-Session but by the Presbyteries.

-It is competent for the Assembly to pass Declaratory Acts. These are acts which declare what the Assembly understands the law of the Church to be. Such an act may be passed, without transmission to Presbyteries in terms of the Barrier Act, when it is generally agreed that the declaration is in accordance with the old law. But if there be much difference of opinion on the subject, and if the point enforced be new, in any considerable measure, to the existing ministers and ruling elders, it has been held that, before passing of such an act, an overture on the subject ought to be transmitted to Presbyteries, in terms of the Barrier Act.

7 CONCLUSIONS

A. Although the Free Church of Scotland originates from an other tradition than the FRCA, there is still fundamental unity in faith. As regards their Confessional Standards, although they differ in emphasis and formulation with our Confessions, they do give faithful expression to the biblical truth.

B. As regards the marks of the true Church it is evident that according to art 29 BC the Free Church of Scotland can be called a true and faithful Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It governs itself according to the pure Word of God, whilst it really tries to reject all things contrary to it. The FCS takes resisting false doctrine seriously, whilst the preaching of the pure gospel is strongly emphasized.

C. As regards church Polity although the FCS adheres to the Presbyterian System many of the rules are similar to what is set out in our own Church Order.

D. There is only one thing that might be considered as an impediment for maintaining sister church relationship, namely that the FCS differs from us in interpreting such a relationship. In the Acts of the General Assembly of the FCS, 1982, it reads that such a full ecclesiastical relationship can hardly be practised. As such they have no difficulties to give heed to one another that there is no deviation of the Reformed Confessions as far as doctrine, worship and Church government is concerned, but they wonder how this actually is to be maintained. Moreover, courteous as they are, they doubt if it is really their right when necessary to warn other Churches in this respect. Futhermore their rules regarding ecclesiastical relationship with other presbyterian Churches differ from the rules we have. They have different levels of relationship, namely sister, church relationship, brotherly contacts, and other contacts. The sister church relationship is only maintained with those Churches which are more or less daughters of the FCS, e.g. the EPCI and PCEA.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Committee herewith recommends to Synod Albany 1987 to reconfirm that the Free Church of Scotland is a faithful church of the Lord, showing the marks of the true church as set out in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith and to propose to them to enter into a relationship of sister churches, on the basis of mutually accepted rules.

APPENDIX

Subscription Form to be subscribed by all office bearers at the time of their admission.

I, _____, do hereby declare, that I do sincerely own and believe the whole doctrine contained in the Confessions of Faith, approved by former General Assemblies of this Church to be the truths of God; and I do own the same as the confession of my faith; as likewise I do own the purity of worship presently authorized and practised in the Free Church of Scotland, and also the Presbyterian government and discipline thereof; which doctrine, worship and Church government, I am persuaded, are founded on the Word of God, and agreeable thereto; I also approve of the general principles respecting the jurisdiction of the church, and her subjection to Christ as her only Head, which are contained in the Claim of Right and in the Protest referred to in the questions already put to me; and I promise that, through the grace of God, I shall firmly and constantly adhere to the same, and to the utmost of my power shall, in my station, assert, maintain, and defend the said doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this Church, by Kirk-Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies, together with the liberty and exclusive jurisdiction thereof; and that I shall, in my practice conform myself to the said worship, and submit to the said discipline, government, and exclusive jurisdiction, and not endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion of the same; and I promise that I shall follow no divisive course from the doctrine, worship, discipline, government, and exclusive jurisdiction of this Church, renouncing all doctrines, tenets, and opinions whatsoever, contrary to, or inconsistent with, the said doctrine, worship, discipline, government, or jurisdiction of the same.

K. TAIWAN

1. CONTACT

- 1.1 Deputies were informed officially in November 1981 by the Moderator of the Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Taiwan that it was the wish of the RPCT to establish sister relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

Synod Kelmscott 1983 declared the RPCT to be a true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Deputies in advising the RPCT of that decision had also advised of the rules which must be agreed to before a sister church relationship could be considered.

- 1.2 In our report to Synod Launceston 1985, it was stated that a reply had not been received. Consequently in May 1985 a member of the Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott, Mrs J. Scholz was able to visit Taiwan and experience life there, also in the Reformed Presbyterian Churches. Mrs Scholz was able to deliver a copy of our letters and assist in their translation.
- 1.3 Subsequently deputies received a response from the RPCT indicating that they accepted our rules completely. Mrs Scholz reported to us on her return that our earlier letters had been misunderstood because of their difficulties with the English language.

2. CONTACT

In February 1987 deputies requested Rev. S.G. Hur to visit the Taiwanese Churches during his visit overseas to the USA and Korea. Rev. Hur acceded to this request and following his visit submitted the following report.

2.1

A visit was made to THE SECOND PRESBYTERY OF THE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN TAIWAN on behalf of the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad on February 21 - 23, 1987. Because of the lack of time a meeting was arranged at a restaurant in the Airport. Deputies of the Church were: Rev. Jeng-Hong Chen (vice chairman of the presbytery), Rev. Hwan-Joon Lyoo, and Rev. Byung-Chul Lee. The meeting lasted from 3 to 5.30 p.m.

2.2 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

These churches are no more than thirty years old, but they have a complicated history. They originated from mission work by the missionaries of various backgrounds. In 1950 some missionaries of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. established their mission stations in various places in Taiwan. Initially they gave support to the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan and one of the missionaries gave lectures at one of two presbyterian seminaries. Soon the lecturer was dismissed from the teaching position, because he criticised the doctrine of Karl Barth.

In those days (in 1958) a Korean missionary (Rev. Young-Jin Kim) arrived in Taiwan and opened a mission station. The missionaries of the two above mentioned churches cooperated well for their mission works, and consequently they opened "The Reformed Theological Hall" for the training of the ministry of the Word in 1962. In the meantime missionaries of the Christian Reformed Church in North America came to Taiwan; one female missionary in 1953 and two missionaries in 1959. They also opened a theological school which was called "Calvin Theological Hall" in 1961 for the same purpose. Further, some other missionaries came to the country from presbyterian and reformed backgrounds; The Reformed Churches in New Zealand and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in America (World Presbyterian Mission). In 1963 these five mission groups formed "Presbyterian and Reformed Mission Society." Their intention of forming this society was to make a preparation for establishing one church confederation consisting of the churches which they have respectively established by their mission works.

In 1966 the Reformed Theological Hall and the Calvin Theological Hall were united, and it was called "Calvin Union Theological Hall." In 1970 six Chinese students who were trained at these Theological Institutes were ordained as Ministers of the Word.

The Presbyterian and Reformed Mission Society had made efforts to organize one church federation of the churches which they have respectively established. But it was not easy, because the churches had grown from different backgrounds, and they had established different practices in their ecclesiastical life. Nevertheless, the aim was finally achieved, and on March 1st, 1971 delegates of five churches came together and organized a confederation of the churches which was called; "The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan." At the meeting they accepted the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith as the confessional standards of the churches.

However, very soon after the confederation was organized, the churches were confronted with many difficulties to put the confederative life into effect. They were many causes; different backgrounds of the churches, lack of training of ministers for the reformed life, some barriers between people from the mainland China and the people of Taiwan, some friction between missionaries and the people of the mission field etc. Three years later, the confederative life of the churches was practically paralised. (1974) Some people have made all efforts to restore the confederative life by organizing meetings for discussions, yet all efforts failed. In the meantime some ministers came to the agreement to organize the Second Presbytery, because the existing ecclesiastical body was not functioning. Hereby they did not intend to withdraw themselves from the confederation. They named their presbytery "The Second Presbytery", because they hoped (they are still hoping) that the original Presbytery (remaining churches) may be restored and that they may come together as the General Synod, when a third presbytery is organized. For the institution of this Second Presbytery the missionaries of the K.P.C. and the O.P.C. gave some advice and support in compliance with the request of the concerned churches. At present three Korean missionaries are members of the Presbytery, and the missionaries of the O.P. C. are attending the Presbytery as observers.

The Calvin Theological Hall was closed years ago, because there were only a few students. The Second Presbytery is preparing to reopen a Theological Hall in the near future for the training of the Ministry for the Word.

2.3 CONFESSIONAL STANDARDS

The churches have accepted the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith as their confession standards. These confessional standards are printed in their Hymnal book. They do not have a tradition of preaching the Catechism on Sundays, but they use it for the instruction of the congregation. The churches faithfully adhere to their confessional standards.

2.4 MARKS OF THE TRUE CHURCH

PREACHING OF THE WORD: It is difficult to evaluate the preaching of the Word because of language barriers. Korean missionaries gave the visitor their opinion that the Word is faithfully preached according to the Scriptures.

SACRAMENTS: Holy Supper - The frequency of the celebration varies from congregation to congregation. Once in two or three months is a general practice. Open table is not accepted. Every consistory is responsible for keeping the table holy.

Baptism - Whenever the Holy Supper is celebrated, baptism is also administered, when there are eligible infants or adults for baptism.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE: They believe the sanctity of the Church of Christ. Effort is being made to exercise church discipline according to the Words of Matthew 18.

2.5 CHURCH GOVERNMENT

The Second Presbytery accepted the Church Government which is fundamentally similar to the government of the Korean Presbyterian Church.

2.6 RELATIONS WITH CHURCH ABROAD

These churches have a close relationship with our sister churches in Korea. They consider themselves as their daughter churches. Delegates of both churches in various levels (ecclesiastical body, youth association etc.) frequently make mutual visits. Further, they do not have any official relationships with other churches abroad. The Second Presbytery made a decision to enter sister relationships with The Free Reformed Churches of Australia in 1978 and also with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Vrijgemaakt). They are waiting for positive replies from both these churches.

2.7 STATISTICS

The Second Presbytery - 6 organized churches and 7 non-organized churches.

Number of Communicant Members - about 300

Number of regular hearers - about 200

Number of Ministers - 5 (Chinese)

The Original (remaining) Presbytery - 5 organized churches and 5 non-organized churches.

Number of Communicant Members and regular hearers altogether - about 350

2.8 CONCLUSION

1. The Second Presbytery, in actual fact, is functioning as a confederative body, since it was organized in 1975. The visitor received an impression that the remaining Presbytery is not properly functioning as an ecclesiastical body. The people of the Second Presbytery are hoping and waiting patiently for a time when they can come together as one ecclesiastical body.
2. It is very difficult for outsiders to evaluate the divided situation of the churches, because in the matter many elements which we are hardly able to comprehend are involved. It was clear to the visitor that no doctrinal matter was involved in the division. One should not evaluate the situation according to the norms of one church which has long historical heritages and firm foundations.
3. The people of the Second Presbytery are making efforts to live ecclesiastically according to the Word and the accepted norms of the government.
4. These young small churches need a lot of spiritual encouragement and support to build reformed life in the country. It is very desirable to have a close contact with them and to assist them in every possible way, although the language barrier remains a big problem.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Our Committee herewith recommends to Synod Albany 1987 to reconfirm that the Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Taiwan are faithful churches of the Lord, showing the marks of the true church as set out in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith and to propose to them to enter into a relationship of sister churches, on the basis of mutually accepted rules.

L. JAPAN

In order to implement Synod Launceston's decision regarding the Reformed Church in Japan, deputies wrote to the secretary of the Liason committee to ascertain the latest information regarding their church's attitude to the RES. Deputies have to date received no response.

M. SRI LANKA

Deputies wrote to the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka in February, 1984 requesting information. A reply was not received so a follow up letter was sent in August 1986. This also failed to elicit a response.

Deputies propose not to initiate further correspondence.

N. UGANDA

There has been no further contact with the Presbyterian Church in Uganda since our last report.

O. NEW ZEALAND

1. CORRESPONDENCE

1.1

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand have been advised of Synod Launceston's decision regarding official contact between the FRCA and the RCNZ

1.2

Deputies of our sister churches in The Netherlands continue their contact with the RCNZ as is their instruction from Synod, also keeping us informed and seeking our advice. Consequently deputies continue to seek information regarding the developments within the RCNZ.

2. ACTS OF SYNOD 1986

From the Acts of the 18th Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand held at Mangere in August, 1986 we read:

2.1 Regarding the RES Synod decided (Acts Art. 81):

- a. to render its strongest pastoral protest against the non-compliance by the GKN to the RES decisions 1980 - 84.
- b. to convey to the RES Interim Committee, the member churches, and the GKN that the latter's non-compliance indicates her stubbornness against the Word of God and therefore ought to be expelled from the RES.
We therefore request the Interim Committee to take the steps as mentioned under the requirements of Art. 5 of the RES constitution, Section 2.
- c. to mandate the delegates to RES 1988 to use every constitutional means to ensure the expulsion of the GKN.
- d. that if RES 1988 should not expel the GKN, in case of their non-repentance, our membership should be withdrawn immediately.
- e. to convey to the RES in a clear way our reasons for the above decisions/actions.
- f. that point d. not be communicated to the RES.

2.2 Regarding the synodal churches in The Netherlands Synod decided (Acts Art. 104):

That our relationship with the GKN no longer be regarded as a 'correspondence' church.

2.3 As for the Dutch sister churches in Art 104 of the Acts called: the RCN (liberated) it was decided:

- f. that we continue with the initial approach and seek to further explore the possibilities of establishing a meaningful relationship with the RCN (liberated).

The section concerned in the report of the Synodical and Correspondence Committee reads as follows:

5.1 RCN (Lib.)

There has been a regular correspondence between both churches. Helpful in a better understanding and appreciation for each other has also been a meeting with the RCN Committee on Ecumenism by the Stated Clerk when he was in Europe in 1983. Acts of Synod, church magazines and booklets have been exchanged and these have helped to get to know each other much better. The RCN also publishes a half yearly magazine in the English language, Lux Mundi, which contains excellent topical study material.

For the RCN the criteria for determining a sister church relationship is for them to apply the tests for a true and faithful church (Belgic Confession of Faith, Art. 29) and to investigate each other's faithfulness to God's Word and the Reformed Confessions in the areas of doctrine, worship, church government and church discipline as marks of a true church of God.

Although in the exploration of possibilities of establishing a relationship, it had been stipulated by us that no preconditions must be part and parcel of our terms for a dialogue with one another, it has become obvious from a reading of the Acts of the RCN that for a proper future inter-church relationship, the following could and would become stumbling blocks.

i.e. our membership in the RES, our sister church relationship with the RCA and the CRC/Neth., our correspondence relationship with the CRC/NA and the one with the GKN by way of the RES.

In the event that there would be a mutual willingness for a close interchurch relationship, we would need to test each other whether we are in reality a true and faithful churches. And relationships must be true in all dimensions, i.e. the Free Reformed Church of Australia which is a sister church of the RCN (Lib.) would need to be consulted by the RCN (Lib.) before they could agree to a proper relationship with us. This is being consistent with the principle of a true and faithful church and consequential thinking as otherwise there would be a triangular problem where A and B establish close relationship while C who already has an intimate relationship with A still has principal objections to B.

It will thus be quite obvious that the journey towards this goal for a mutually acceptable close relationship is going to be a long one where much patience and understanding is required.

RECOMMENDATION:

That we continue with the initial approach and seek to further explore the possibilities of establishing a meaningful relationship with the RCN (Lib.)

2.4 Further it was decided:

- g. that we continue with the initial approach and seek to further explore the possibilities of establishing a meaningful relationship with the NRC (unaffiliated).

The section concerned in the report of the above mentioned committee reads:

5.2 Netherlands Reformed Churches (Unaffiliated) NRC

These are the unaffiliated Reformed Churches which broke away from the RCN (Lib) in 1967. We were asked to enter into a dialogue with them on the same basis as with the RCN (Lib). (Acts 1983, Art. 87)

A meeting was arranged with their committee in September 1983. This meeting was also attended by the Rev. P.G. Van Dam who represented the RCA. An exchange of Acts of Synod, Yearbooks and Church Magazines have been helpful in getting acquainted with one another. In May 1984 we were advised by the Interchurch Relations Committee that 'they had no problem at all with our ruling that 'no preconditions' must be attached to a mutual correspondence in seeking the establishment of a meaningful relationship'. In the beginning of 1985 we received a copy of a report by the Interchurch Committee to their National Assembly. This report included a paragraph on our Reformed Churches of NZ which had a recommendation to their Synod to propose to the RCA and RCNZ to accept each other as sister churches. The suggestion was made that this relationship would have to be on the same footing and basis as we have already with the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Chr. Geref. Kerken).

We must make mention here in this report that the CRC/NA and the RCA have accepted the NRC as 'Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship'.

We have not received an official confirmation of their proposal. The lean correspondence between the NRC and us does not give us sufficient assurance of a fruitful relationship as yet.

RECOMMENDATION:

To advise our committee to continue its mandate of Synod 1983, Art. 87.

- 2.5 From the sub 2.4 mentioned report we learn that the RCA (Reformed Churches of Australia) have accepted the NRC as 'Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship'.

P. THE EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH OF SINGAPORE

1 VISIT

During his journey from Western Australia to Europe Rev. K. Bruning and his wife came in close contact with the EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH OF SINGAPORE. They attended four church services, were the guests at a wedding feast, visited congregation meetings and had many discussions with the two ministers, pastor de Hartog from the United States, and pastor Lau Chin Kwee, a chinese minister, who has studied in America; and they enjoyed good fellowship with several members of the congregation. The following information is based on the experiences during the two visits which took place in July and October 1986.

This congregation in Singapore is a Reformed church based on the Holy Scriptures as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (see the official constitution of this church). The true reformed character of this church was immediately manifest in the worship services on the Sundays. A sermon was held on the 7th commandment in accordance with Lord's Day 41 of the Heidelberg Catechism. It was a very Scriptural and practical preaching with references to demoralizing influences of our days. In the afternoon service pastor Lau preached from the letter to the Galatians. It was an excellent administering of the gospel of salvation by grace only. References were made to the confession, especially the Canons of Dort. The church-going people were obviously fascinated by the clear and practical message. Young people made notes, which were discussed by them in groups after the service.

On the second Sunday the Holy Supper was celebrated. There is no open table, and only confessing members can attend this sacrament. It was a fine experience to hear the same Form for the celebration as happens in our own congregations. A full sermon was held before the celebration, which occurred without a table. Lack of space in the small hall was one of the reasons. In the afternoon-service, it was pastor Lau again with another sermon from the Galatians. The Sundays were real days of rest because of the sound preaching of the gospel.

The congregation has no old members. Young families and young to very young male and female members filled the chairs of the small room, where a piano accompanied the songs of the congregation. All the members are people who came to conversion from Buddhism, Taoism and Hinduism. Several of them have studied or are still studying at the University. They usually are christians who came to conversion as individuals; one out of a family. It means that their lives and struggle went through a most difficult crisis; and still they often suffer because of enmity, friction and rejection from their original relatives.

A serious problem e.g. is that the young christians cannot and will not partake in the heathen rites and ceremonies anymore. The other party, however, interprets this as betrayal of the old religion, and above all as betrayal of the ancestors, which is the same as a crime.

It is very encouraging to witness that the believers assist each other in the often painful circumstances.

The wedding ceremony does not differ from our practice. Parts of the same Form are read as teaching to the bridal couple. One point of difference was that the bride and bridegroom had to stand during the long ceremony; and that in a very sultry climate. The advice: give such couples in future a chair, was received with appreciation.

It is not necessary to go into all the details of personal impressions. One thing is certain: travellers with a stop-over in Singapore can be recommended to contact this interesting congregation, especially if a week-end is included in their stay.

The Evangelical Reformed Church has sister-relationship with the Protestant Reformed Church of the U.S.A. Much help came from there during the short period in which this congregation came into existence and made its first years of history in Singapore, that land of many Eastern religions, but with little knowledge of the true gospel of salvation. It is surprising to be in that place and to hear an up-to-date sermon from the old Heidelberg Catechism with the support of the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort. God's work for salvation is wonderful.

2 INFORMATION

After these more or less personal impressions, some official information should be given. The Evangelical Reformed Church has a contact committee which gave us its constitution, to get more acquainted with each other. We quote some essential paragraphs and articles:

PREAMBLE

The Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, in obedience to Scripture as interpreted in our Three Forms of Unity, confess that there is one holy, catholic Church (Eph. 4:4-6, Rev. 7:9). We believe that it is our sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the Church on earth by establishing sisterly relationships with all churches which have obtained like precious faith with us. (2 Pet. 1:1)

ARTICLE IV - PRINCIPLES

In negotiating and arriving at any official relationships with other churches, the following principles shall be determinative for the Committee.

1. In general, Holy Scripture, together with the Constitution of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession of Faith and the Canons of Dort.
2. Specifically, the Heidelberg Catechism, Question

and Answer 54, the Belgic Confession of Faith Articles 27-29.

ARTICLE V - GENERAL MANDATE

In seeking to establish sisterly relationships with other denominations, the following guidelines shall be observed:

1. A full official relationship with other domestic churches would imply organic union. Less complete ties may be established circumstances may require and indicate.
2. A full sister-church relationship with foreign churches implies:
 - A. Mutual acknowledgement of offices, so that ministers of sister churches are allowed preaching privileges in one another's congregations and are eligible to be called by congregations in sister churches.
 - B. Mutual acknowledgement of membership attests.
 - C. The delegation and reception of delegates to sister churches.
 - D. Taking heed to one another's life as churches, constantly acquainting one another with the decisions of their broadest assemblies and giving counsel when there are decisions to be made on difficult issues.
 - E. Mutual recognition be based on acceptance of the Reformed standards (examples: The Three Forms of Unity, The Westminster Confession of Faith, The Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms) and the consistent maintenance of these Standards in the churches' ecclesiastical life.
3. Less complete fraternal relationships with foreign churches may be arranged provided that the stipulations be laid down clearly.
4. No relationship shall be considered as established until it has been approved by the broadest assemblies of the churches concerned.
3. The Constitution of the Church itself also contains important information. We quote some parts of it.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH OF SINGAPORE (ERCS)

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of the Church shall be THE EVANGELICAL REFORMED CHURCH OF SINGAPORE (ERCS) hereinafter referred to as the Church.

ARTICLE II - THE ADDRESS

The place of business of the Church shall be at 356-J, River Valley Road, Singapore 0923, or at any other place as decided by the Session from time to time subject to the approval of the Registrar of Societies.

ARTICLE III - OBJECTS

The objects of the Church shall be:

A. To promote and maintain the true worship of the only true, righteous and holy God of heaven and earth (Exodus 20:1-5, Matthew 4:10, John 4:23-24).

B. To preach the gospel of Christ Jesus for the gathering and perfecting of the saints (Matthew 28:19-20, Luke 24:46-47, Romans 10:11-15, I Corinthians 1:17-31, Ephesians 4:11-16, II Timothy 4:1-2).

C. To observe the sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper according to the ordinance of Christ Jesus (Matthew 26:26-29, 28:19-20, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-20, I Corinthians 11:23-26).

D. To promote and maintain the fellowship of the saints in Christ Jesus (John 17:21-24, I Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4:1-16, Hebrews 10:23-25, I John 1:7).

E. To exercise Christian discipline in the Church of Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:16-19, 18:15-20, I Corinthians 5:1-5, II Thessalonians 3:6, I Timothy 1:20, Titus 3:10).

F. To minister the mercies of Christ unto the needy within and without the fellowship of the Church (Matthew 25:31-46, Acts 6:1-6, Galatians 6:10).

G. To defend the faith once delivered to the saints (Philippians 1:27, II Timothy 1:13, Jude 1:3).

ARTICLE IV - THE STATEMENT OF FAITH OF THE CHURCH

The faith of the Church shall be in accordance with the doctrine as contained in the Old Testament and New Testament of the Bible and in harmony with the historic Reformed and Presbyterian faith which is set forth in the Three Forms of Unity, namely the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordrecht.

ARTICLE V - MEMBERSHIP

A. TYPES

This shall be of two categories:

1. Communicant Members

They are persons baptized in obedience to Christ's command, who have made a credible profession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, whose conduct is holy and worthy of the Gospel of Christ and who adhere to the constitution of the Church. They are added to the Church by knowledgeable profession of faith in Holy Baptism, reaffirmation of faith or letter of transfer from a sister-church of like precious faith.

2. Non-communicant Members

They are baptized children of Communicant Members and are all other baptized persons who have not made profession of faith and are under the care of the congregation.

D. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Our Lord Jesus Christ has given to the Church the keys of the Kingdom which includes the authority of Church discipline. Thus the Church through the Board of Elders shall have the right to excommunicate a member from the Church whose confession or life is not in accord with the teachings of the Word of God as held by the Church. Excommunication is an extreme measure which shall be performed only after a member who has been repeatedly pastorally admonished refuses to repent. Any person so cut off from the Church shall be received again into the Church by the Board of Elders upon evidence of repentance and confession of sin.

ARTICLE VI - CHURCH GOVERNMENT

A. The Church shall be governed according to the Reformed and Presbyterian form of Church Government recognising:

1. The supreme and lordly authority and power of Jesus Christ over the Church.
2. Christ rules His church by His Word and Spirit.
3. Christ rules His church through the special offices of Elders and Deacons.
4. The office of all believers in the church
5. The autonomy of the local church.
6. The principle of church federation according to the principle of the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ.

B. The special offices in the church shall be the Elders and Deacons.

C. The governing body of the Church shall be the Session comprising the Board of Elders and the Board of Deacons.

ARTICLE XX - PROHIBITIONS

A. Gambling of any kind and the playing paikow or mahjong, whether for stakes or not, is forbidden on the society's

premises. The introduction of materials for gambling or drug taking and of bad characters into the premises is prohibited.

B. The funds of the society shall not be used to pay fines of members who have been convicted in Court.

C. The society shall not attempt to restrict or in any other manner interfere with trade or prices or engage in any Trade Union activity as defined in any written law relating to trade unions for the time being in force in Singapore.

D. The society shall not hold any lottery, whether confined to its members or not, in the name of the society or its office-bearers, Committee or members.

E. The society shall not indulge in any political activity or allow its funds and/or premises to be used for political purposes.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS:

4.1 To instruct the deputies to make contact with the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, and to stimulate nearer acquaintance with this congregation as much as possible; to exchange information, and to use all the possibilities to investigate whether this church can be recognized as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

4.2 To inform the churches about this congregation in Singapore, and to advise members who are planning to visit Singapore, to seek contact with this church, especially when a Sunday is included in their stop-over.

Q . THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

1 INTRODUCTION

In November 1985 a report on the first International Conference of Reformed Churches, held from September 2-10, 1985, in Edinburgh, Scotland, was sent to the consistories of the local Churches to inform them about the results of this meeting. With this report the Churches also received a copy of the papers which were delivered, except the paper delivered by the Rev. Prof. D. Macleod, of which a summary was only available.

Furthermore, one of the members of the Committee has extensively written about the ICRC in *Una Sancta*, Volume 33, no. 4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11.

Nevertheless, your Committee would like to bring to your attention the main points regarding this Conference.

2. ICRC - EDINBURGH 1985

2.1. MEMBER CHURCHES

2.1.1 After constituting the Conference, credentials were scrutinized from which it appeared, that the following member churches were represented:

- The Canadian Reformed Churches
- The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland
- The Free Church of Scotland
- The Free Reformed Churches of Australia
- The Presbyterian Church in Korea
- The Reformed Churches on East-Sumba/Savu
- The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

2.1.2 The Conference admitted as new members:

- The Free Church in South Africa
- The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
- The Reformed Presbyterian Church of the Ireland

This admission was granted after a sub-committee had scrutinized the documents presented and had interviewed the representatives of these Churches at length about the history and the faithfulness of their Churches and determined that each of them is striving for unity with Churches which are already members of the Conference.

2.2. PROPOSALS

2.2.1 Proposed amendments to the Constitution and Regulations could not be dealt with due to the fact that although some of the proposals were brought forward within the time-limit of two years as required by ART. IV, the number of member churches at that time was only one or two of the seven which are member churches now. That means that most of the member churches have not had the opportunity to deal with these proposed amendments in a proper manner. The

amendments already submitted will be placed on the agenda of the next meeting. Member churches are requested to react to these amendments, if they deem this necessary, 12 months before the next meeting by sending their replies to the Corresponding Secretary.

2.2.2.1. Regarding Conference Expenses the following proposal from one of the committees was moved:

(a) to establish a General Fund to cover the expenses incurred by the ICRC;

(b) to bear the costs of the Conference as member churches on the basis of the number of baptized members taking into account the estimated average per capita income of the baptized members in each member church;

(c) to have the member churches pay for the travelling expenses of their own delegates, and those member churches unable to pay such expenses may request assistance from the General Fund;

(d) to declare that the Churches sending observers or churches applying for membership will be expected to bear their own travel costs, as well as other costs which may be incurred, while attending the meeting of the Conference.

2.2.2.2. The delegates of the FRCA amended this proposal as follows:

to add to the above mentioned point (b) "including travelling expenses" after the words "costs of the Conference", and to delete the above mentioned point (c). However this amendment was defeated.

2.3. APPOINTMENTS

2.3.1. It was furthermore decided to appoint a Treasurer, with the following charge:

(a) to draw up a budget for the Conference with assistance of the Interim Committee;

(b) to request each member church to submit to him the number of its baptized members, as well as the estimated average per capita income of its members;

(c) to assess each church on this basis;

(d) to collect the instalments needed on a yearly basis (June 1);

(e) to reimburse all costs incurred by the Conference;

(f) to submit his financial report to the next meeting of the Conference.

2.3.2. Mr. H.A. Berends, 14572-60 Ave., Surrey, B.C., Canada, was appointed Treasurer.

2.3.3. The Conference appointed a committee to deal with matters relating to Missions. This committee received the following mandate:

(a) to gather information from the member churches regarding their missionary activities and training programs;

(b) to study the possibilities of co-ordinating the missionary activities of the member churches when it comes to training, mission fields and exchanging missionaries;

(c) to examine the need to produce listings of relevant missionary literature on an ongoing basis, and to promote the

publication of an introduction to Reformed missions;
(d) to report to the next meeting of the Conference.

2.3.4. The Conference appointed the following persons to become members of this Committee:

Rev. M.K. Drost - The Netherlands
Prof. K. Deddens - Canada
Prof. C. Graham - Scotland
Prof. A.C. Boyd - Scotland (Chairman)

2.3.5. This committee is only a study committee whose task is to gather information. Its findings are not binding on the members but are of an advisory character.

2.4.6. A committee to deal with the text of the Ecumenical Creeds was also appointed. This committee arose as the result of comments made by prof. J. Faber about the International Consultation Text drafted by an organisation based on the World Council of Churches. A duly seconded motion made by the Rev. G. Van Rongen was adopted. This motion gave the following ground for studying the Ecumenical Creeds:

- 1) In the respective member churches various texts of these creeds are used;
- 2) It is desirable that the International Consultation Text of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed be scrutinized to ascertain whether this text is faithful to the Received Text of the Creeds.

2.3.2. The Conference agreed that the abovementioned Committee be comprised of the following membership:

Prof. J.L. Mackay -Scotland
Prof. J. Faber -Canada
Prof. N.H. Gootjes -Korea/Wetherlands
Rev G. Van Rongen -Australia

2.4 PAPERS

The following persons addressed the Conference by on paper:

- 1) Prof. Dr. J. Faber delivered "The doctrine of the Church in the Reformed Confessions";
- 2) Prof. H.M. Ohmann on "Piety in the Book of Psalms";
- 3) Rev. Prof. D. Macleod on "The relationship of the Sacraments to New Life in the Spirit";
- 4) Rev. J.N. Macleod on "The doctrine of the Covenant and the Reformed Confessions";
- 5) Rev. J. Visscher on "The exercise of Inter-Church Relations".

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1 This first meeting of the ICRC has made clear once again that although there is difference in tradition between the Reformed and the Presbyterian Churches, there is still fundamental unity in faith. During the Conference there was favourable opportunity to speak frankly with each other about this difference in tradition, especially with respect to such questions as: Covenant, Church and

Church government. The representatives of the respective Churches were able to affirm that the Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries give faithful expression to the biblical faith and that while they differ in emphasis and formulation, they are united in their professions and promotion of the truth.

3.2. Unfortunately, the matter of Inter-Church relations did not receive quite the attention that had been hoped for. Because of the fact that in Edinburgh the discussion of this issue more or less concluded as an open ended matter it would be wise to include this issue once again on the agenda of the next meeting of the Conference. Hopefully the meeting in Vancouver will take time to discuss this issue properly. This is very important because of the difference in approach to Inter-Church relations between Churches of the Reformed tradition and Churches of the Presbyterian tradition.

3.3. The speaker on the topic of the sacraments and new life in the Spirit made quite a number of statements, not all of which it seemed were representative of the thinking in the Free Church of Scotland, nor of Scottish Presbyterian theology.

4. EVALUATION

4.1. Synod Launceston 1985 made the following decision regarding the ICRC:

- a) to send two delegates to the first meeting of the ICRC to be held in Edinburgh in 1985, with a specific instruction.
- b) that Synod 1987 is to make a decision regarding our continuing membership on the basis of the reports of conference delegates and on the report of the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad giving due consideration to the stated grounds for the decisions taken by Synod Launceston 1985.

In these grounds amongst others the purpose of the Conference as set out in Art. III of the Constitution of the Conference is duly evaluated and agreed upon. In this context reference may be made to the following grounds of this decision;

(7) Churches who have, and faithfully adhere to, a Reformed Confession have an obligation to promote their unity of faith and thereby also present a Reformed testimony to the world.

(8) The promotion of this unity in faith implies the exercise of ecclesiastical fellowship among each other, with the expectation that such fellowship leads to sister-Church relations;

(9) On reaching sister-Church relations, inter-church cooperation in mission and other matters is possible;

(10) Within sister-Church relations the study and resolution of common problems and issues also is possible;

(11) Sister-Churches have a duty to encourage each other to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

4.2. HISTORY

4.2.1. The original idea for an ecumenical Synod or Conference started within the FRCA.

In the Acts of the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Churches of

Groningen-Zuid (1978) a letter from the deputies of the FRCA, d.d. 11-03-1977, is mentioned, requesting the convening of an ecumenical Synod. The Acts of Synod Albany (1975), however, do not mention any proposal regarding such a Synod. This shows that the idea started within the circle of deputies, with which Synod Launceston (1978) agreed. Art. 38 of the Acts of this Synod reads: "Synod agrees with the principle for an ecumenical Synod as mentioned in the report of deputies." The idea was to convene an international Synod of sister-Churches to speak about common issues.

4.2.2. Synod Arnhem (1981) of the Dutch Reformed Churches changed this original idea by instructing their Deputies for Churches Abroad to convene a Constituent Assembly for a Reformed International Conference and to invite deputies of sister-Churches Abroad as well as deputies from those Churches with which they had only temporary contact (Acts art. 148 B I 4)

As a result of this the delegates of the CRCA, attending the Constituent Assembly in Groningen (1982), met representatives of Churches which the FRCA had not as yet acknowledged as true and faithful Churches in the Lord Jesus Christ. This acknowledgement came during Synod Kelmscott (1983).

N.B. This means that as such there is no difference between Groningen (1982) and Edinburgh (1985).

4.2.3. Although the original intent of the Conference had changed Synod Kelmscott (1983) still took the decision to join the ICRC. Synod did not touch on the difficulties which could be raised by being a member of a Conference in which the FRCA would also meet Churches which they had not as yet acknowledged as true and faithful churches in the Lord Jesus Christ.

4.2.4 Synod Launceston (1985) had to deal with several appeals against the above-mentioned decision. Appelants were requesting Synod to revoke the decision of Synod Kelmscott (1983) pertaining to the ICRC. Although Synod did not accede to this request it reviewed the decision in the light of the material presented by the appellants. This means on the one hand Synod was able to understand some of the objections forwarded by the appellants, on the other hand, however, Synod could not see any reason to withdraw from the ICRC. Therefore Synod decided to support the proposed constitutional amendments of the Canadian sister-Churches (Acts Synod Launceston 1985, art. 88, point 3.2.).

2.4.5. As has already been mentioned, because of formal reasons the Conference in Edinburgh could not deal with these amendments to the Constitution. It placed them on the agenda of the next meeting of the Conference.

4.2.6. As a consequence of the fact that Edinburgh 1985 did not deal with the proposed amendments to the constitution and seeing the decision taken by synod 1985 the FRCA must continue, to join the ICRC at least until the results of the discussions about these amendments are known, and have been scrutinised.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. To continue the membership of the ICRC Churches.

5.2. To submit to the next meeting of the Conference the following amendments to the Constitution:

a) a stipulation in the Basis of the ICRC that the delegates subscribe only to the standards of the Churches of which they are members;

b) that membership of the RES is an impediment to membership in the ICRC;

c) that "CONSTITUTION Art. V - Authority" be amended to read "The conclusion of the Conference shall be advisory in character. Member churches are to be informed of these conclusions and are recommended to work towards their implementation." (amendment underlined)

d) that "REGULATIONS Art. II" be amended to read: "Each Conference shall elect the following officers: a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Recording Secretary and a Corresponding Secretary." (amendment underlined)

e) that "REGULATIONS Art. II, 4, b, iv" be amended to read: "to forward to the Churches materials, reports or other publications as authorized by the Conference." (amendments underlined)

5.3. To ask the next meeting of the Conference:

a) to give matters related to the Constitution priority.

b) to place on the agenda once again the issue of Inter-Church relations and if possible to come with recommendations to the member churches;

c) to make a clear statement about the position of the observers and advisers, and furthermore which churches can be invited as observers by the convening church;

d) to reconsider the decision taken by the previous Conference regarding travelling expenses of delegates in line with the following proposal: "Travelling expenses should be borne by the member churches on the same basis as the ordinary costs of the Conference." GROUND: Without accepting this proposal the member churches which are bigger in number are privileged to compared to member churches smaller in number.

e) whether it is possible to finish the discussion about a specific issue and drawing some conclusions for recommendations to the member churches.

5.4. To send two members of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad as delegates to the next meeting of the Conference to be held in summer/autumn 1989 in Vancouver.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Deputies request Synod to renew its mandate to consult with the sister churches regarding the rules for ecclesiastical contact.

(C 1.7, page 6)

2. Deputies recommend to Synod Albany to continue the sister church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches in accordance with the adopted rules.

(D 3, page 14)

3. Deputies propose that Synod Albany decide to continue the sister church relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea in accordance with adopted rules.

(E 4, page 15)

4. Deputies recommend to Synod to continue the relationship of sister churches with De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland in accordance with the adopted rules.

(F 4, page 25)

5. Deputies propose that Synod authorise deputies to visit the Sumba/Savu Churches at the next Synod to be held late 1987. Because of the language difficulties and unfamiliarity with the Indonesian country and its customs, deputies recommend two delegates be sent. The cost per delegate is approximately \$800.00.

(G 1.4, page 26)

6. Deputies propose that correspondence with the Gereja-gereja Reformasi Indonesia Di Sumba Timor-Savu be continued under the established rules.

(G 1.5, page 26)

7. Deputies recommend to Synod to continue the relationship of sister churches with Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Africa in accordance with the adopted rules.

(H 3, page 30)

8. Deputies herewith recommend to Synod Albany 1987 to re-confirm that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland is a faithful church of the Lord, showing the marks of the true church as set out in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith and to propose to them to enter into a relationship of sister churches, on the basis of mutually accepted rules.

(I 8, page 43)

9. Deputies recommend to Synod Albany 1987 to re-confirm that the Free Church of Scotland is a faithful church of the Lord, showing the marks of the true church as set out in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession of Faith and to propose to them to enter into a relationship of sister churches, on the basis of mutually accepted rules.

(J 8, page 53)

10. Deputies recommend to Synod:

1. To continue the membership of the ICRC Churches.

(Q 5.1, page 72)

2. To submit to the next meeting of the Conference the following amendments to the Constitution:

a. a stipulation in the Basis of the IRCR that the delegate subscribe only to the standards of the Churches of which they are members;

b. that membership of the RES is an impediment to membership of the ICRC;

c. the "CONSTITUTION Art. V - Authority" be amended to read "The conclusion of the Conference shall be advisory in character. Member churches are to be informed of these conclusions and are recommended to work towards their implementation." (Amendment underlined.)

d. that "REGULATIONS Art II" be amended to read: "Each Conference shall elect the following officers: a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Recording Secretary and a Corresponding Secretary." (Amendment underlined.)

e. that "REGULATIONS Art II, 4, b, iv" be amended to read: "to forward to the Churches materials, reports or other publications as authorized by the Conference." (Amendments, underlined.)

(Q 5.2 page 73)

3. To ask the next meeting of the Conference:

a. to give matters related to the Constitution priority;

b. to place on the agenda once again the issue of Inter-Church relations and if possible to come with recommendations to the member churches;

c. to make a clear statement about the position of the observers and advisers, and furthermore which churches can be invited as observers by the convening Church;

d. to reconsider the decision taken by the previous Conference regarding travelling expenses of delegates in line with the following proposal: "Travelling expenses should be borne by the member churches on the same basis as the ordinary costs of the Conference." GROUND: Without accepting this proposal the member churches which are bigger in number are privileged compared to member churches smaller in number;

e. whether it is possible to finish the discussion about a specific issue and drawing some conclusions for recommendations to the member churches.

(Q 5.3, page 73)

4. To send two members of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad as delegates to the next meeting of the Conference to be held in summer/autumn 1989 in Vancouver.

(Q 5.4, page 73)

APPENDIX (1)

RULES FOR THE ENTERING INTO AND MAINTENANCE OF RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD (As proposed by Deputies of the Dutch sister churches to Synod Spakenburg)

1. Character of the relations

According to Article 47 of the Church Order of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (see below 1) and the considerations on these matters of the 1978 Synod of Groningen-South (see below 2), a relationship with a church abroad should be to the effect of recognizing one another as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ (as defined in the reformed confessions) and of practising ecclesiastical fellowship accordingly.

2. Entering into relations

Relations with churches abroad will only be entered into when, after a period of getting acquainted, primarily through the work of deputies, the General Synod has made sure not only that these churches have accepted officially the reformed confession of the Word of God, but also that they live up to their standards in doctrine, liturgy, church government and discipline.

Three things will have to be taken into account:

- a. Our Lord Jesus Christ gathers His church among many different peoples, which have their own special geographical situation, their own history and culture; the entering into relations, therefore, should not be rejected because of minor differences in the way churches abroad have expressed themselves in their confessions, or discrepancies in liturgy, church order or ecclesiastical practice.
- b. If a church abroad maintains relations with a third party, careful attention will have to be given to the question as to what these relations mean to the church concerned, so that the value of entering into relations may be assessed.
- c. Due to the power of sin still among us, the possibility of a relationship with more than one group of churches in a certain country cannot be ruled out. In the light of Christ's commandment of unity among his people, such a situation of 'double correspondence' may not be acquiesced in, but should remain a point of discussion.

3. The practice of relations

If a relationship has been entered into, the practice of this relationship must be ordered by a set of rules; these rules should serve to help one another to adhere to the true confession of the Word of God and to be true witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world.

The following rules shall be agreed on as a minimum:

- a. The churches will pay heed to each other's doctrine, liturgy, church government and discipline.
- b. The churches will receive one another's representatives at their general synods and invite them to serve as advisers (to the extent to which this is practicable). They will inform one another of the decision taken at these assemblies, if possible by exchanging the agenda and Acts or at least by forwarding those decisions which are relevant to the churches concerned (if necessary in translation).
- c. In case of changes in or additions to liturgical forms or church order, if these are of a doctrinal nature, the church concerned will lay these changes before the corresponding churches and draw their special attention to them, so that consultations can take place before final decisions are made.
- d. If an un hoped for deviation from the reformed standards should become apparent, in doctrine, liturgy or discipline, the church concerned will have to be spoken to. If error is allowed or even sanctioned, the church concerned must be warned of the consequences of this for herself as well as for the relationship with other churches, which would have to be suspended or, ultimately, brought to an end.

4. Further arrangements

- a. The relationship between churches, as described above, includes the acceptance of letters of testimony and the admission to the sacraments on presentation of such letters. It also includes, in principle, the admission of one another's ministers onto the pulpit, taking into account rules which have already been agreed upon in the several churches.
- b. This does not rule out the possibility that special rules be agreed upon between churches, if necessary or desirable. This will surely be necessary in cases of 'double correspondence'.
- c. General Synod will decide, as far as possible on the advice of deputies, in each separate case what action should be taken and which special rules should be agreed upon.

The above draft did not play a large role in the discussions at the I.C.R.C., where Rev. J. Visscher spoke on 'The Exercise of Inter-Church Relations'; yet the general tendency of the contribution of Rev. Visscher as well as the remarks made during the discussion gave deputies the impression that the churches represented at the I.C.R.C. have come to a better understanding on this issue.

In the opinion of deputies the rules as formulated above can make clear to those churches with which relations have been or are to be entered to:

1. what, according to the Reformed churches in The Netherlands, is or should be essential in maintaining these relations;
2. that the Reformed Churches can be held to these rules and intend them to be the basis for establishing relations with other churches;
3. that these rules express an expectation as to these churches' preparedness to discuss these matters and agree upon them as far as possible.

As to this last point, deputies are of the opinion that these rules cannot be prescribed in such a way, that inter-church relations will only be established if the rules have been accepted completely. If this point of view were to be taken by the Reformed Churches, much of the work that has been done in the past ten years, and which was, according to the deputies, acceptable in the eyes of the Lord, would prove to have been useless and would have been broken off before it has even begun.

All this has its consequences for the terminology used hitherto in discussing inter-church relations, for instance where a distinction was made between true churches with which we are in complete agreement (called sister churches) and true churches with which this complete agreement does not exist.

Deputies have come to this conclusion on the basis of their experience, acquired in discussions with Presbyterian churches, that these churches have rather different views on the matter of inter-church relations; they have never put such an amount of thought into these questions as we have, and they are not likely to start laying down rules like these in the near future. Growing towards a consensus will prove to be a process of years.

Duputies, therefore, are of the opinion that a relationship of 'sister church' can be entered into whenever:

- a. The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands have laid down clearly their own rules, the background to them and their aims;
- b. the rules adhered to by the 'sister church' are not in conflict with the above-mentioned rules;
- c. there is a clear prospect of a fruitful discussion on these matters.

Decisions will have to be made, however, from case to case. Deputies think that this is the only way in which our churches will be able to fulfil their ecumencial task.

If synod accepts the deputies' proposals, the 'temporary relations of ecclesiastical contact' will have to be withdrawn, without, however, changing the agreements entered into on the basis of that relationship.

PROPOSAL:

Deputies propose that new deputies:

- be allowed, pending the opportunity offered to sister churches to give their opinion on these new rules, to do their work on the basis of and in the spirit of the rules proposed in this report;
- be instructed (1) to discuss the new situation with those churches with which a 'temporary relation of ecclesiastical contact' has been established or to which this relationship has been offered; (2) to report on their experience in working with these rules, so that this experience may serve to improve the practice of ecclesiastical contacts between churches all over the world, under God's indispensable blessing.

NOTES

1. Article 47b of the Church Order reads:

General Synod decides on relations with churches abroad. As far as possible fellowship will be maintained with churches of a reformed confession in other parts of the world. Relations with foreign churches will not be rejected because of minor differences in church order or church practice.

2. The considerations on inter-church relations of the 1978 Synod of Groningen-South read as follows:

- a. According to the Word of God (John 17:11, 17, 20, 21; Eph. 3:14 - 4:6; II Timothy 3:15, 16) and the confession (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21; Belgic Confession, Articles 27 - 29) the church of Christ is scattered all over the world, yet it is united in one Spirit, in the unity of the true faith, by adhering to the true doctrine, liturgy and discipline according to the ordinances of Jesus Christ as its only Head;
- b. According to the Word of God and the confession, true believers and true churches in every place and in every country are called to establish ecclesiastical unity with those who confess the same faith and adhere to it in preaching, service, church government and discipline, by living together as a church at a certain place or as churches in a certain country; and if geographical distance, language barriers or other causes makes this impossible, by correspondence.
- c. True believers and churches are called to distinguish from the Word of God which is the true church, in order to have fellowship with that church, while rejecting fellowship with churches which depart from the doctrine and ordinances of the Word of God, or which have separated themselves schismatically from the true church.
- d. In fulfilling this call the churches should take into account that our Lord Jesus Christ gathers his church among many different nations, and that his church among these nations has its own history of persecution, and fighting against error, and reformation; that these different histories may have led to differences in the way in which these churches confess God's truth, as well as in the way in which church government and liturgy have been arranged; yet being one in confessing the Word of God, adhering to true doctrine and the administration of the sacraments, and keeping to the ordinances of Jesus Christ as the only Head of His church (cf. Belgic Confession, Article 32; Church Order, Article 86).
- e. In considering a relationship with churches abroad, which themselves have fellowship with churches with which The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands do not have fellowship, both c. and d. above should be taken into account.

DEPUTIES CONTACT WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

OF

EASTERN AUSTRALIA

Report to Synod Albany 1987

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DEPUTIES CONTACT WITH THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA
appointed by SYNOD 1985 of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia

R E P O R T

to SYNOD 1987 of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, convened
September 1987 at Albany, W.A.

Dear brothers in the Lord,

1. INSTRUCTIONS.

1.1 Synod 1985 instructed us (Acts, art. 68-3) to;

- a) convey our joy and gratitude with the mutual recognition of the need to seek unity of faith on the basis of God's Word;
- b) further investigate whether the P.C.E.A. can be acknowledged as a true Church according to Articles 27-29 B.C.of F.
- c) pay particular attention to the point of "three types of communicants" as mentioned in Deputies' report;
- d) submit their report to the Churches at least three months prior to the next Synod.

It also decided, according to Acts art. 95-8, that "Minutes of meetings with representatives of the P.C.E.A. have to be sent to the churches".

1.2 Item a) was dealt with by Synod itself (ref. 2.4 in this report). Instructions mentioned under b) and c) will be dealt with in sections 4 to 8 of this report.

1.3 Concerning the last-mentioned part of the instructions, Deputies despatched the following letter to the churches on 7-3-1987;

"Dear brothers in the Lord,

In pursuance of our mandate given to us by Synod 1985 (Acts art. 68) we have - over the past eighteen months - had some exchanges of correspondence with the relevant Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

Our primary aims have been to identify areas of difference between their churches and ours, and to have such areas discussed during a meeting. It finally appeared possible to arrange a meeting in Melbourne for 3 and 4 March last. We had requested Rev. Veldman and Rev. Bruning to assist by their attendance and by contributing papers, but regrettably both had to withdraw in February due to work pressures. We were indeed fortunate that we found Rev. van Rongen willing to step into the breach.

Synod's instructions mention (art. 95-8) the word "minutes". However, we found that a meeting of this informative nature does not lend itself to the making of minutes. We therefore decided to submit a brief report which follows below;

Venue: Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, Wantirna, Victoria.

Participants: Rev. K. Jonker, Rev. G. van Rongen, A.M. Hidding, J. VanderRos, Rev. John M. Cromarty, Rev. Peter Gadsby, Rev. Rowland S. Ward.

Rev. E.R. Lee of Taree, N.S.W. was present on 3 March only.

Chairman: Rev. Peter Gadsby

Papers presented:

1. What is implied in a sister church relationship - J. VanderRos
2. The invisible church - W.P. Gadsby
3. A few aspects of our reformed liturgy - G. van Rongen
4. Called children in the Covenant - K. Jonker
5. The concept of an adherent - J.M. Cromarty
6. Term eldership - R.S. Ward
7. The status of a minister in the Presbytery - R.S. Ward

During two days of extensive and intensive discussions, which were at all times frank and informative, we were given a considerable body of knowledge and background information which will assist us materially in the compiling of our Report to Synod 1987.

In the Report - it should be produced within a few weeks - we intend to elaborate on the items discussed and to evaluate them in the light of our mandate.

May our gracious Lord bless your labours and ours to the glory of His Name.

With brotherly greetings,

for Deputies
J. VanderRos, clerk"

2. Development of contact with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.

2.1 Synod 1978 decided to establish contact with the P.C.E.A. after it received a letter from its Inter Church Relations Committee (Acts 1978 art69) Wrote our Synod to the Committee: "We thank you for your Christian greetings and are indeed pleased to hear of your desire to have relationship with our churches. Synod has decided to appoint deputies for the initial contact and investigation. It is the wish of Synod that in this way we may come to know each other better".

2.2 There was no Report at Synod 1980, which appointed new deputies. A first meeting with a representative of the P.C.E.A. occurred in May 1981. Deputies reported to Synod 1983 that items clarified at the meeting included purity of worship, preaching by elders, Bible translations, membership of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod and the contents of interchurch relations. The P.C.E.A. withdrew from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod during 1981.

2.3 Synod 1983 appointed new deputies with the mandate "to further investigate whether those churches can be acknowledged as true and faithful churches of our Lord Jesus Christ, and report their findings to the next Synod so that this contact can be clarified, if possible, before the establishing of the International Conference in 1985".

The deputies arranged meetings with the P.C.E.A. delegates on 3-4-1984 and 1-3-1985.

These meetings produced further clarification on the points at issue. Subjects discussed included the Barrier Act 1697, church discipline, the sacraments, worship and music in church, adherents.

In their report to Synod 1985, deputies concluded:

"We acknowledge the Presbyterian System and the Standards of the P.C.E.A. as valid and Calvinistic.... Deputies recommend to Synod:

1. to acknowledge the P.C.E.A. as true and faithful church of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. to enter into co-operation to foster understanding and fellowship
3. to intensify relationship in the years ahead as the Lord leads us

- 2.4 Synod 1985 received a letter from the Synod of Eastern Australia held during May 1985, advising of that Synod's decision to acknowledge our churches as "true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.... at the same time recognizing our mutual responsibility to exhort one another to continued obedience to the Word of God, and the doctrine and practice which is according to godliness".

In its reply, our Synod expressed its "joy and gratitude with the resolution of the Synod of Eastern Australia. It is a reason for thankfulness that there is mutual recognition of the need to seek unity of faith on the basis of God's Word"

However, Synod advised also that the available information was not sufficient to come to a final decision in the matter of recognising the P.C.E.A. as a true and faithful church. "Synod wants to express the desire that further contacts by our deputies may lead to mutual recognition on the above-mentioned basis".

This basis is "what the Free Reformed Churches confess in art. 29 of the Belgic Confession concerning the true church".

New deputies were charged to "further investigate whether the P.C.E.A. can be acknowledged as a true church according to articles 27-29; pay particular attention to the point "three types of communicants" as mentioned in the report of Deputies.."

- 2.5 Deputies appointed by Synod 1985 acted on the observation that in our churches there was a considerable lack of knowledge of the P.C.E.A. by writing to the consistories, suggesting that they might take out subscriptions on The Presbyterian Banner, and encourage church members to do likewise.

Deputies concentrated their efforts on studying the history and practice of the P.C.E.A. and on arranging a meeting with members of the P.C.E.A. Inter-Church Relations Committee.

Eight meetings by Deputies were held prior to March 1987. Seven letters were sent to the Committee leading up to the meeting held in Melbourne early March 1987.

The meeting itself is covered by section 5 of this report.

3. History of the P.C.E.A. in a nutshell.

On December 14, 1832 the Presbytery of New South Wales was established in connection with the Church of Scotland.

Almost five years later, in December 1837, another body "the Synod of New South Wales" was formed. Since October 1840, both groups formed the "Synod of Australia in connection with the Established Church of Scotland", albeit independent from the Scottish church.

In 1843 the Disruption took place in Scotland because of the intrusion of the civil government into the affairs of the church.

On October 10 1846 the Australian Synod decided not to change its name, keeping its bond with the established church of Scotland intact, and refusing to enter into fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland, the Disruption church.

Three ministers and one elder protested against this. Their stance resulted in the formation of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in N.S.W. and Queensland, and of the Free Presbyterian Church of Australia Felix (afterwards: Victoria).

When in 1865 a majority of the much enlarged membership of the P.C.E.A. joined in a union which resulted in the establishing of the Presbyterian Church of N.S.W., a minority, with seven ministers, continued.

A schism in 1884 further reduced its membership, so that by 1908 there

were only three ministers left. Indeed, the P.C.E.A. considers itself 'a remnant church', tracing its roots right back to the Scottish Reformation.

In Scotland, a minority of the Free Church, also considering itself 'a remnant', remained out of the union in 1900. This continuing church recognized the tiny P.C.E.A. Co-operation with the above-mentioned Free Presbyterian Church of Victoria led to the amalgamation of this church's three congregations with the P.C.E.A. in 1953.

At this moment there are congregations in Sydney and its Western districts, the coastal towns of N.S.W, Armidale, Brisbane, Ulverstone in N.W. Tasmania and the Eastern suburbs of Melbourne - altogether 14 charges with 14 ministers.

As per December 1986, the total number of communicant members was 638.

The P.C.E.A. publishes a magazine, The Prebyterian Banner.

The ministers of the P.C.E.A. have been trained at the Free Church College, Edinburgh, or the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, Victoria.

In 1981 the P.C.E.A. broke with the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, becoming a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches in 1985. There is a sister church relationship with the Free Church of Scotland. The P.C.E.A. co-operates with its mission work in Peru, India and South Africa; it supports the Christian Witness to Israel and undertakes its own mission work in Fiji since 1983.

Note on the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia:

In 1690 a minority withdrew from the church of Scotland because of an alliance between Church and State which they could not accept. Wishing to maintain the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643, they have since been known as 'the Covenanters'. Their majority joined the Free Church of Scotland in 1876.

However, a remnant carried on as a separate church, and meanwhile other Reformed Presbyterian Churches had been established in Ireland and in North America.

The first Australian congregation was founded at Geelong in 1858, to be followed by Mc.Kinnon (Vic.) in 1946.

In 1959 they were organized in a Presbytery, independent of the Irish Church by 1974.

New congregations were established at Frankston and Sunbury in Victoria.

Training for the ministry occurs mostly through the Reformed Theological College at Geelong, which has staff members belonging to the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia.

There is no formal allegiance to the Scottish covenants above-mentioned. Worship and practice are similar to those in the P.C.E.A.

There are approximately 100 communicant members in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia.

4. Some data

For the sake of clarity we will repeat some data occurring in a previous report. Others will be added to fill in the picture.

4.1 The Supreme Standard of the P.C.E.A. is the Scripture of the Old and New Testament.

The chief Subordinate Standard is the Westminster Confession of Faith as explained by Acts of the Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647 and of the Synod of Eastern Australia in 1952, together with the Questions and Formula set out by the latter.

Other Standards are, according to the P.C.E.A.'s Constitution: the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of 1648 - for instruction purposes - ,

the Directory for Public Worship 1645 - for Worship -, as also the Directory for Family Worship 1647; for Church Government the Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government 1645;

All of these documents understood in the light of the Acts passed by the church when adopted.

As for Practice and Procedure, the P.C.E.A. makes use of the Free Church of Scotland's Book of Practice 1964, together with "Practice and Procedure of the P.C.E.A. 1983".

Other documents of real import are the Barrier Act 1697 and the Acts against Innovations in the Worship of God 1707.

- 4.2 In practice, actual amendment of the Confession is not an option, nor can one contemplate amendment of the text of the Standards of Worship and Government. The Catechisms could be amended in a manner consistent with the doctrine of the Confession, although considerable care would be required. Other decisions of the Church within the framework of the Subordinate Standards may be amended or repealed.

Another point worth noting is that subscription to the Confession is to its 'whole doctrine', not to its fundamental or chief doctrines, as is the case in other churches.

Subscription is to the doctrine of the Confession, not to the document itself or to its mere words, as if were a perfect and infallible expression of faith. This means, for instance, that no one is bound to the distinction between the invisible and the visible church, ch. 25, 1-3: or to consider the pope to be 'that antichrist, that man of sin and son of perdition', as in ch. 25, 6, the context relates to the church.

The terms of subscription, which are binding upon office-bearers, commit one to acknowledge the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the Church as founded upon the Word of God and agreeable thereto.

Acceptance of the basic thrust and the principles in other standards of the church is required, though subscription does not apply there.

- 4.3 Follows the text of the vows taken by elders and deacons in the P.C.E.A.

- 1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and the only rule of faith and manners?
- 2) Do you sincerely own and declare the Confession of Faith approved by General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland to be the confession of your faith; and do you own the doctrine therein confessed to be the true doctrine, which you will constantly adhere to?
- 3) Do you own and acknowledge the Presbyterian Church Government of this Church, by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies to be the only government of this Church; and do you engage to submit thereto, concur therewith, and not to endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion thereof?
- 4) Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, as King and Head of the Church, has therein appointed a government in the hands of Church officers distinct from, and not subordinate in its own province to civil government, and that the Civil Magistrate does not possess jurisdiction or authoritative control over the regulation of the affairs of Christ's Church, and do you approve of the general principles embodied in the Claim, Declaration and Protest, adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1842, and in the Protest of Ministers and Elders, Commissioners from Presbyteries to the General Assembly, read in the presence of the Royal Commissioner of 18th May 1843, as declaring the views which are sanctioned by the Word of God, and the standards of this Church with respect to the spirituality and freedom of the Church of Christ, and her subjection to Him as her only Head and to His Word as her only standard?

- 5) Do you promise to observe uniformity of worship and of the administration of all public ordinances within this Church, as the same are at present performed and allowed?
- 6) Do you accept the office of an Elder (Deacon) of this congregation and promise, through grace, faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully to discharge all the duties thereof?

4.4 In the P.C.E.A. there are three Presbyteries - Northern, Central and Southern. Ministers are answerable to the Presbytery, being members of it. A Presbytery consists of the minister(s) plus one elder of each congregation. Synod is convened each year. It acts as the supreme court of the church and consists of all the members of the Presbyteries.

4.5 The Barrier Act 1697 ensures that a Synod cannot pass any Act in doctrine, worship, discipline or government - binding the Church - without the consent of the majority of the Presbyteries.

The Act reads as follows:

The General Assembly, taking into consideration the Overture and Act made in the Last Assembly concerning innovations, and having heard the report of the several commissioners from Presbyteries to whom the consideration of the same was recommended, in order to its being more ripely advised and determined in this Assembly: and considering the frequent practice of former Assemblies of this Church, and that it will mightily conduce to the exact obedience of the Acts of Assemblies, that General Assemblies be very deliberate in making of the same, and that the whole Church have a previous knowledge thereof, and their opinion be had therein, and for preventing any sudden alteration or innovation, or other prejudice to the Church, in either doctrine or worship, or discipline, or government thereof, now happily established; do, therefore, appoint, enact, and declare, that before any General Assembly of this Church shall pass any Acts, which are to be binding Rules and Constitutions to the Church, the same Acts be first proposed as overtures to the Assembly, and being passed by them as such, be remitted to the consideration of the several Presbyteries of this Church, and their opinions and consent reported by their commissioners to the next General Assembly following, who may then pass the same in Acts, if the more general opinion of the Church thus had agreed thereunto.

5. The Melbourne meeting of 3 - 4 March 1987.

5.1 As mentioned in 1.3 of this report, delegates of the P.C.E.A. and our own churches met in the new Knox Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in Wantirna, Vic.

On the side of the P.C.E.A. those present were the Revs. J.M. Cromarty of Geelong, Vic., W.P. Gadsby of Armidale, N.S.W., and R.S. Ward of Melbourne Vic. Rev. E.R. Lee of Taree, N.S.W. attended on the first day.

Our churches were represented by deputies appointed by Synod 1985, i.e. Rev. K. Jonker, Br. A.M. Hidding and Br. J. VanderRos of Launceston. Br. S. Reitsema was unable to attend. The original plan was that another two ministers of our churches, who had been appointed by Synod 1985 as advisors of the deputies, would take part also. Neither of them, however, was in a position to do so.

Deputies therefore invited Rev. G. van Rongen to attend.

5.2 After personal introduction, goals of the meeting were briefly clarified, the main one being expressed as 'mutual understanding and exploration of our responsibilities in Christ' and 'identification of points of significant disagreement and/or misunderstanding'. Deputies found this to be completely in line with the mandate given them by Synod 1985.

5.3 The first paper was on the question 'What is implied in a sister church relationship?' Like most of the meeting papers, it had been sent to the delegates in advance.

It was prepared by Br. J. VanderRos, who outlined the 'rules for correspondence' with the help of two articles: one by T. Jagersma on 'Relationships and Contacts' in Lux Mundi, March 1982; and one by the Rev. J. Visscher of Canada on 'The exercise of inter-church relations', for the 1985 I.C.R.C. gathering.

Attention was paid also to the new draft rules submitted by the Dutch 'Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad' to the sister churches, and also to the Free Church of Scotland, for their comment. The reason for this consultation lies in the fact that, until now, most Presbyterian churches have not adopted a set of formal rules governing their inter-church relationships.

Discussion of this paper by the Melbourne meeting involved comparison of Articles 27-29 Belgic Confession and the Westminster Confession, Chapter 25. While the former speaks on the church in terms of true and false, making a clear distinction between them, the latter speaks in terms of more or less pure.

However, while the Westminster Confession does not use the terms true and false, it does state that some churches 'have so degenerated as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan' (ch. 25-5).

On the other hand, the Belgic Confession does not exclude the possibility that one false church is in more serious decay than another.

Decay is usually a growth process. Prior to the final decisions taken by the Dutch General Synods in the 1940's, De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland were not considered to be a false church; only after those decisions had been taken and imposed and all avenues of appeal used, the situation changed: no longer could they be counted as faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was pointed out from the side of our delegates that the Scots Confession of 1560 does speak in terms of true and false. Though it was superseded by the Westminster Confession, its contents have never been condemned or rejected.

Moreover, we learned after the meeting that in 'The Practical Use and Saving Knowledge or a Brief Sum of Christian Doctrine' and in the National Covenant of 1638 - documents held in high esteem in the Free Church of Scotland and the P.C.E.A. - reference is made to 'the true Kirk', 'the true church of God', 'the true and holy Kirk of Christ Jesus' and 'the true Kirk of God'.

The brothers of the P.C.E.A. stressed the fact that their church has been a sufferer from church union, and needs to learn again what fellowship with other churches means.

Their experience with the R.E.S. was far from happy. Moreover, their situation as 'remnant churches' caused lack of interest in this respect. However, the P.C.E.A. has no difficulty acknowledging other churches to be true churches of the Lord, without at once following through to full ecclesiastical fellowship.

The P.C.E.A. does not see the need to establish formal relationships with all kinds of churches. Up till now she has a sister church relationship with the Free Church of Scotland, and in the past she had a relation with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Tasmania.

It was clearly stated by P.C.E.A. delegates, meanwhile, that they stick to the wellknown three marks of the true church for the evaluation of other churches.

Our conclusion was that at this point there are no fundamental differences between both churches, though the moment at which we adjudge the 'impurity' to make a church a false church may vary.

5.4 The second paper, delivered by Rev. W.P. Gadsby, dealt with the distinction 'visible/invisible church'.

The paper firstly referred to John Calvin, who in his 'Institutes' did use the distinction, but was careful at the same time to stress that there is only one holy universal church.

It went on to say that the Belgic Confession, though not employing the distinction in those terms, makes mention of 'hypocrites who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it' - and in this way making an analogous distinction.

In the Westminster Confession we find the strong reassertion of divine election, which emerged from the Synod of Dordrecht, reflected in Chapter 25. The Westminster Larger Catechism speaks similarly in nos. 64-65. At the same time, the Westminster Confession (25-2) recognized that there is but one church of God. Consequently, commentators on the Westminster Confession stress the fact that the distinction should not be understood as though it would speak of two churches, or as though one part of the church were visible and another invisible.

The paper continued; 'the distinction is, of course, confirmed by experience; there are those who are accounted members of the (visible) church who turn away from Christ, and are never restored. The Lord speaks of those who, on the day of judgement will say "Lord, Lord". And Paul states that they are not all of Israel.'

It referred also to a contribution by Prof. John Murray, published in volume I of his 'Collective Writings' and entitled "The Church: Its Definition in terms of 'visible' and 'invisible' Invalid", which was attached to the paper as an appendix.

Some of its most striking sentences read thus: 'As noted earlier, there are those aspects pertaining to the church that may be characterized as invisible. But it is to 'the church' those aspects pertain, and 'the church' in the New Testament never appears as an invisible entity and therefore may never be defined in terms of invisibility.

This is why, at an earlier point, the advisability of the use of the actual term 'invisible' had been questioned'.

Rev. Gadsby appeared to agree with this, for he concluded: 'we must avoid letting the invisible/visible distinction control our definition of the church, for then we will either fall into the 'pure church' error, or we will begin to depreciate the importance of the 'visible' church. There can be no question that what Jesus founded upon earth, in continuity with God's Old Testament Church, is a visible entity. Indeed, if we accept Professor Murray's argument, to say 'visible church' is a tautology. Nevertheless, the (visible) church does have its invisible attributes, and basic to the church's existence is the fact of the unseen election and regeneration of God.

Remembering this fact will keep us from nominalism and carelessness about the means of grace'.

From their side, deputies were able to refer to a newspaper report on a conference recently held in London, where Professor Donald Macleod of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, referred to the role of the local church as it appears in the New Testament.

He stressed the fact that more emphasis is given to the visible local church as the assembly of confessing believers.

The P.C.E.A. delegates were very interested in the objections raised against the distinction over the years. They were given a copy of this brief list:

- 1) the distinction finds its origin in Plato's philosophy, and from there found its way into theology through the teachings of e.g. Augustine;
- 2) it easily leads one to the idea that there are two different churches;
- 3) the 'invisible' church can readily be regarded as a Platonic ideal whilst the 'visible' then has minor importance;

- 4) it promoted the idea of pluriformity in the church;
- 5) it tends to distinguish two different groups within the church, and to support the distinction 'external/internal' in e.g. the doctrine of the Covenant;
- 6) even the use of the term "aspects' is debatable as 'aspects' suggest visibility;
- 7) similar distinctions could be advocated for other matters, e.g. marriage; does not 'true love' in married life lie in the hidden corners of the heart?;
- 8) it easily promotes the idea of 'being concerned' within an apostate church, thus hindering genuine reformation.

The discussion showed that -

- i) the description of the church under the aspects of visibility and invisibility has a long history in the Reformed churches of the 16th and 17th centuries. In the Dutch situation, controversy in the 20th century made the distinction more suspect. In the English-speaking world, cautions were expressed, such as by J. Murray rejecting the definition of the church in such a manner. Murray's article was regarded as quite representative of the P.C.E.A.'s viewpoint.
- ii) because of the difficulties in the use of the terms, care and wisdom are needed to avoid misunderstanding such as conveying the suggestion that the 'visible church is of minor importance'.

5.5 The third paper was produced by the Rev. G. van Rongen. It dealt with a few aspects of our Reformed liturgy on which the P.C.E.A. delegates had requested some information, in particular in the Scriptural underpinning.

5.5.1 Its first section dealt with the covenantal character of our church services as a 'sacred discourse' between the LORD and His church, the 'Israel of God' (Galatians 6,16), the continuance of ancient Israel.

5.5.2 The second part referred to the New Testament background of Catechism preaching. The apostle commands to have the 'sacred deposit' passed on to the generations that follow (2 Tim. 2,2).

After an exposition of some historical aspects of Catechism preaching it was pointed out that Catechism preaching is administration of God's Word in the full sense. Dealing with the whole of the revealed counsel of God concerning our redemption, it has been a rich blessing to our churches, contributing to keeping the members by the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

The P.C.E.A. delegates stated that their church, too, is committed to preach the whole counsel of God. She does not object to catechism preaching as the means of covering the doctrines of faith properly, but does not require it, and cautions that the catechism not be placed above the Word.

5.5.3 Congregational singing was the next item in the paper.

Reference was made to 'the commandment of David' (2 Chr. 8,14, Neh.12,45/46) regulating the musical part of temple worship and being added to 'the commandment of Moses (2 Chr. 8,13). When the temple was built and dedicated, salvation in Christ Jesus and God's world-wide redemption work progressed strongly. No wonder that at that time it pleased the LORD to institute the musical 'sacrifice of praise'.

In the New Testament era, there is the more reason for us to offer it because the all-sufficient atoning sacrifice was offered at Calvary (Heb. 13,15). This may be done by the singing of the 150 Psalms as 'songs of the covenant', but also with 'a new song' (Ps. 33,3: 96,1; Is. 42,10; Rev. 5,9) which means: a song with new contents, regarding the progress made in the history of salvation. And since God loves 'whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, gracious' (Phil. 4,8) our churches have the congregational singing accompanied by an organ, aiming to make it more acceptable in His ears.

- 5.5.4 This paper finally dealt with the day of rest and the festival days. It referred to Lord's Day 38 H.C. and art. 62 C.O. for the calling together of the congregation.

As for the festive days, mention was made of the fact that the New Testament pays special attention to the great events commemorated on the festive days mentioned in art. 65 C.O. These events are also confessed in credal songs (Phil. 2,6-11, Titus 3,4-7 a.o.) and in the ecumenical creeds. Admittedly, the magistrates had a strong hand in re-introducing these Christian festivals. Our churches, however, limit themselves to the commemoration of the great events stressed in the New Testament.

The P.C.E.A. does not observe such days, being of the conviction that they have not been commanded by the LORD (ref. under 5.5.5).

- 5.5.5 On 4 March the meeting continued with further discussions of the issue mentioned under 5.5.3 and of the booklet written by Rev. P.J. Bloomfield, one of the P.C.E.A. ministers. Entitled 'Instrumental Music in Public Worship', its initial sentences explain the author's stand: 'It is the argument of this paper that instrumental music in the public worship of God is not allowed because it was part of the Old Testament ceremonial worship. Since that Old Testament ceremonial/cultic worship has been done away with, then so has the instrumental music'. The author refers to what is called ^{the} 'Regulative Principle', as stated in the Westminster Confession, chapter 21-1:

'the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in holy scripture'.

He states further:

'Especially important is the biblical teaching that God is ^{be} worshipped ONLY as he himself declares and wills. He is not to be worshipped as we will'.

The P.C.E.A. does not ^{only} apply this principle to the use of instrumental music but to other aspects of worship as well. Only the 150 Psalms are sung; no festive days are observed besides the Sunday; they have a very simple 'order of worship service'.

One of the main points in our discussions around this Regulative Principle was the context in which the Westminster Confession makes its statement: that of the 2nd commandment, over against Rome and, indeed, the Church of England. Lord's Day 35 H.C. has the same context.

Your deputies stated that, in accordance with Lord's Day 35, they could agree with the Principle in this sense that what the Westminster Confession puts in Chapter 1-6 is incalculated (there it refers to what 'by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture').

The Principle itself and its application to the musical part of the worship in the P.C.E.A. is a matter of deduction. So, when those who advocate 'Purity of Worship' in their application of the Principle contend that deduction in matters such as the singing of songs other than the 150 Psalms, or the use of musical instruments, is not allowed, they are inconsistent.

The booklet by Rev. Bloomfield was not amply discussed, although deputies had the opportunity to point out that its thesis was based on an incorrect reading of 2 Chr. 29, 25-30 and other weaknesses in exegesis. P.C.E.A. delegates gladly accepted a written exposition of these weaknesses when this was offered.

'Purity of Worship' was a condition at the union of the Free Presbyterian Church and the P.C.E.A. in 1953. P.C.E.A. delegates explained that it is not a matter of doctrine which would bind the consciences, but of practice. The application of the Principle should be seen against its historical background: the struggle against Anglicanism, parallel to John Calvin's struggle against the church of Rome and its liturgy.

The P.C.E.A. does not condemn others who do not adhere to the concept of 'Purity of Worship'.

In its aversion to a fixed liturgy, the P.C.E.A. - so it was put by the delegates - has perhaps given inadequate attention to the structure of worship, in its nature as dialogue with the God of the Covenant.

The P.C.E.A. also is not happy to require things which are not mandated by the Scripture, though they be good and useful. She gives a rather wide discretion to the minister, and though there is a fairly regular pattern, there is far less form and structure than in our churches.

- 5.6 Then the Rev. K. Jonker's paper on 'Called children in the Covenant; the position of the children within the church' was discussed. This paper dealt with the structure of the Covenant of Grace, and explained the position of the children of believers with the help of a translation of the 'Declaration of Opinion' (Verklaring van Gevoelen) submitted to the Dutch General Synod in the early 1940's by a number of concerned brothers. Rev. Jonker had added his own notes. The Scriptural doctrine of the Covenant, and the position of our children in the Covenant, may be deemed to be familiar as they are confessed and taught in our churches.

From the conclusion of Rev. Jonker's paper we quote:

'By the Lord they are called to be saints. They are covenant children. And so we work with them, not questioning God's call. But their position as God's children gives a great responsibility to parents and office-bearers in respect to the instruction in the fear of the LORD'.

'In this we are not hindered by theological systems on presumptive regeneration or on inward/outward covenant and the other distinctions belonging to it.... The history which God goes with each one of his children cannot be explained in our systems! Let us simply listen to His Word'.

During the discussion of this paper it became obvious that the preaching in the P.C.E.A. shows a different emphasis because this church has few members born in it; largely its membership consists of people who have come 'from outside'. It is understandable that, unlike our own churches, the emphasis is not so much on Christ's work of gathering the church in the line of the generations. And there is a fear of the danger of 'nominal membership'.

In both churches, the responsibility of the parents is stressed. In the P.C.E.A. this is not done in so structured and ordered a way as in our churches. Both churches accept responsibility for the catechetical instruction of the covenant youth, and in both churches baptized members are subject to discipline.

During the discussion it became clear that some of the expressions used in our churches are capable of misunderstanding in the P.C.E.A. However, there is basic agreement on the place of the children in the Covenant.

It also came out that the doctrine of election received its place in the Westminster Confession since, and due to, the Synod of Dordrecht. Chapter 10-3 of the Confession speaks of 'elect infants, dying in infancy'. Your deputies drew attention to the fact that the Canons of Dordt, ch. 1-17, give more comfort to the parents and remind them of their responsibility.

A similar difference in approach is apparent in the baptismal prayers as quoted in the Westminster Directory for Public Worship and the Baptismal Form used in our churches.

Quote from prayer in Westminster Directory of Public Worship:

... that the Lord ... Would graciously vouchsafe to sanctify and bless his own ordinance of baptism at this time ... that he make this baptism to the infant a seal of adoption, remission of sin, regeneration and eternal life, and all other promises of the covenant of grace ...

Quote from prayer in Baptismal Form:

... we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ. Thou hast received us through Thy Holy Spirit as members of Thy only Son, and so adopted us to be Thy children. Thou hast sealed and confirmed this to us by holy baptism ...

5.7 The paper on 'The concept of an adherent' was delivered by the Rev. J.M. Cromarty. A clear distinction is to be made - he said - between those whom the Session admits to the full privileges of communicant membership and those who are not admitted and yet are regular hearers of the Word. An adherent is a person who, though attending the worship services regularly, has not been admitted into the communicant membership of the local congregation.

While sometimes baptized children who decline to profess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ but who continue to associate with the congregation and have a general sympathy with its work, are counted among the adherents, they remain under the oversight of the elders, and are warned against ultimately becoming covenant breakers.

Others, from 'outside', who have not been baptized but regularly associate with the congregation, welcoming the prayers and the visits of the elders, are also counted as adherents.

A third group consists of persons who evidence a credible Christian profession and attend the services regularly, but who for various reasons have not been received into full membership, e.g. because they have diverging views on baptism, on church government, or are recent converts and desire a competent knowledge of Christian truth before deciding upon joining a local church.

The paper went on to say:

'The Session at its discretion and in the responsible exercise of its role of oversight may admit certain adherents in the above-mentioned category (3) to the Lord's Table, although they are not as yet on the Roll of Members of the congregation.

However, this must not be an indefinite arrangement.

Session should work toward the resolution of all those matters which constitute a barrier to full communicant membership. All adherents are under the oversight and discipline of the Session'.

This quotation would make it clear why the concept of adherents has been omitted altogether from the second draft of the booklet on the Practice and Procedure of the P.C.E.A.

The discussion brought out that adherents are a more serious problem in the Scottish Highlands - with people querying their 'worthiness' to participate in the Lord's Supper.

Our delegates explained that our church services, too, are attended by regular hearers who are not members, though their percentage is low.

Some adherents in the P.C.E.A. are allowed to partake in the Lord's Supper. It was stated by the P.C.E.A. delegates that this is related to the unique historical situation (the Scottish background, effects of evangelism, small membership). It is not a regular provision in the constitution of the church, nor is such a situation accepted as indefinite.

This led to a discussion on the supervision of the elders over the administration of the Lord's Supper.

In our churches, only communicant members of the local congregation and guests from sister churches - with testimony from their consistory - are admitted.

The P.C.E.A. also admits members in good standing of other Christian churches. This does not mean that the P.C.E.A. has an 'open table'. There is a fencing of the Table, commonly delegated to the minister.

The P.C.E.A. delegates were of the opinion that a more careful discipline is spreading in their church.

- 5.8 A paper on 'Term Eldership' was delivered by the Rev. R.S. Ward. Whilst the First Book of Discipline 1560 made provision for the annual election of elders and deacons, the Second Book of Discipline 1578 states that the office of elder is a perpetual one. However, 'such a number of elders may be chosen in certain congregations, that one part of them may relieve another for a reasonable space, as was among the Levites under the law in serving of the temple'.

The basic idea of this rule is that when God has given certain men the gifts required for the eldership, these gifts must be acknowledged.

The paper referred to an article by Prof. John Murray, Collected Writings, vol. 2, entitled 'Arguments against Term Eldership', which was added to it as an appendix.

It was explained in the discussion that in this respect our churches follow John Calvin, who supported a 'term eldership' because of the danger of hierarchy - conspicuous in the church in the Middle Ages, From the very beginning of their existence the Reformed Churches (Wesel Convent 1568, Dordrecht Synod 1578) deemed it wise to use the system of term eldership, lest family life, too, should suffer under the persecutions and other tensions of the Reformation era.

- 5.9 The final paper was on the status of the minister in the Presbytery. It was delivered by Rev. R.S. Ward.

It stated that the early position of the Scottish church is similar to the position prevailing today in our churches.

Both Books of Discipline, 1560 and 1578, ruled that the elders have to take heed to the preaching of God's Word, the right administration of the sacraments and the right maintenance of discipline. The same applies to the life, manners, diligence and study of their minister. The elders should, if necessary, admonish and discipline him.

The presbytery is the youngest body in the Scottish church government. It was not established as such until 1581 and was given the force of law in 1592, confirmed with the Revolution Settlement of William and Mary in 1690. The presbytery has an equal number of elders and ministers.

The local congregation is responsible for the honorarium of the minister. He is answerable to the Session as regards pastoral visits, sermons, etc. However, in matters of discipline he is answerable to the Presbytery of which he is a member.

The Presbytery handles any judicial action which may affect the minister's standing. (compare art. 14 C.O.).

The historical background of this arrangement is that in matters of discipline the minister is to be judged by his peers. The danger of hierarchy is offset by the composition of the Presbytery: equal numbers.

- 5.10 Deputies came away from the Melbourne meeting with the conviction, that, on both sides, there was willingness to listen to each other on the basis of the Scriptures.

One immediate benefit of the discussion was that our churches are, time and again, confronted with the question how various aspects of our ecclesiastical life are based on the Word of God.

The P.C.E.A. delegates stressed this repeatedly, and it is a question which is typical of their church life: what saith the Word of God?

Where both sides in the discussions on divergencies strongly held the conviction that Scripture is our final authority, they urged each other to submit to that authority, accepting in gratitude that the meeting took place in a Christian, informative and edifying manner.

1 The P.C.E.A. in the light of art. 27 to 29 BELGIC CONFESSION.

a) preaching

The sermons we have heard were plain teachings of Scripture truth. The Word of God is preached, not man's opinion or experience. Emphasised are the sovereignty of God and the redemption of man through Christ, Who is the Head of the church. It is man's duty to accept the Gospel and to apply it in life in order to be saved. He can do this only by God's grace.

So the three solas - sola fide, sola gratia, sola scriptura - are adamantly maintained by the P.C.E.A.

Taking into consideration the situation of these churches - only a small remnant church, tracing its roots back to the Reformation, with strong emphasis on outreach - it is not strange that the sermons have an evangelistic character. The ministers will often end their sermon with a strong urging to accept the evangel and to live in the Christian hope. In relation to this, some ministers view their audience as a meeting of believers and unbelievers, while others will not make this distinction but address them as the people of the Lord who need daily repentance.

The children's address, which is often given before the sermon, has a catechetical character. There is no formal requirement to preach from the catechism (ref. 5.5.2).

In some congregations the session is encouraged to occasionally discuss the preaching of the Word.

The preaching is subject to the oversight of the presbytery. Complaints about the preaching have to be lodged there.

Preaching is examined during church visitation - usually once in five years, due to the vast distances between congregations. Then the minister is asked, among other things:

- do you prepare carefully for your pulpit work?
- is it your chief concern to bring sinners to Christ and to build up believers in faith and holiness?
- do you preach mainly on extended portions of Scripture, or on particular topics? - describe -

b) sacraments

The sacrament of Baptism is administered in the Scriptural tradition. This may be illustrated with the questions to parents as mentioned in Practice and Procedure of the P.C.E.A. (1983):

- a) do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the true and complete Word of God, and do you believe the interpretation of the Scriptures taught in this church to set forth the true message of salvation?
- b) do you affirm in the presence of God and these witnesses that you are trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour; and that you are saved, not by any works or merits of your own, but only through faith in Jesus Christ?
- c) do you acknowledge that Baptism is not a saving ordinance, but the instituted sign and seal of God's covenant for the redemption of your life through Jesus Christ, and that your child has a responsibility to believe in Christ for salvation as he/she reaches the age of understanding?
- d) do you promise, with God's help, to nurture your child in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, instructing him/her in the truths of God's Word, praying with him/her and for him/her; and to live before him/her as Christian parents who are yourselves subject to the will of God?
- e) do you promise to avail yourselves of all the means of grace, and to do your utmost to lead your child into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ?

Baptism causes the following question to be asked of the congregation:

--- Do you, the members of the congregation, receive this child of the covenant; and will you endeavour, under God, so to order your life and witness that he/she may grow up in the knowledge and love of God and be continually surrounded by Christian example and influence?

There is no commonly adopted 'form' for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The frequency of this celebration is left to the discretion of the session, but is usually on a three monthly basis. Practice and Procedure (1983) states that 'the session is responsible to see that no person openly known to be ignorant or delinquent in doctrine or life be permitted at the Table'.

Communicant members are 'baptized persons professing saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who satisfy the session as to their knowledge of the Word of God, whose life and outward conduct appears consistent with a Christian profession'. Members are not required to subscribe the Confession of Faith as are office-bearers (ref. 4.3.).

c) discipline

Church discipline in the P.C.E.A. is a matter of correcting and punishing sins.

According to the nature and gravity of the offence it is exercised by means of:

- 1) admonition - solemnly addressing the person found guilty, placing his sin before him, warning him of his danger, exhorting him to greater circumspection;
- 2) rebuke - expressing reproof and censure in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and administered when a person is charged with a scandalous offence is either convicted, or has made confession of guilt;
- 3) suspension of privileges or office - when the gravity of the offence demands it; also when, after a profession of repentance, the profession is not borne out;
- 4) deposition of an officebearer - on conviction or confession of gross immorality, heresy, serious inconsistency of conduct or departure from ordination vows;
- 5) lesser excommunication - declaring the offender to be no longer a member of the church; this 'purging of the roll' does not necessarily imply censurable conduct; someone may have left the district without asking for a disjunction certificate, or failed to attend the church services for a year;
- 6) greater excommunication - pronouncing the sentence of excommunication for grave and flagrant sins, after due public intimation and public prayer for his repentance; after this sentence, the people are to be warned that they hold him to be cast out of the communion of the Church.

Confession and a sincere profession of repentance, when found satisfactory, form sufficient ground for removing a sentence of suspension or excommunication and restoring the person to the full communion of the Church.

Inevitably, the matter of church discipline is closely linked with the Lord's Supper practice and the fencing of the Table (ref. 5.7).

The unity we enjoy with our Canadian sister churches gives us occasion to draw on the resources gathered in the report to Synod Burlington 1986 by the Committee for Contact with the O.P.C.

This report, in its study of 'The Hofford Case', made ample study not only of the local circumstances which led to the schism at Burtonsville, Maryland, but also of the background to the controversy around the 'fencing of the Table' in that congregation.

Pertinent to our investigation is firstly the Committee's finding that, where the Hofferd complaint focused on the supervision of visitors at the Lord's Table, 'apparently, this matter of supervision is not explicitly covered in the standards. The Session, who has the task to supervise the Lord's Table, must thus use the principles of its standards. One principle that is mentioned more than once in the reply of the General Assembly concerns the matter of recognizing 'evangelical' churches'.

'.. when the General Assembly answers that the Session had the full right to administer the Lord's Supper as they do, this answer seems to agree with their Form of Government.

The General Assembly, in our view, could have made a reference to the fact that the O.P.C. has Inter-Church relations with a number of churches in the U.S.A., and that these churches could have been listed, instead of using the vaguer concept of 'evangelical Churches', as the Burtonsville Session does'.

After an overview of the Session's task re the admission of visitors, the Committee discusses the Church Order of Dordt and concludes that 'our Churches never adopted a general rule (in the Church Order) for admission of guests to the Lord's Supper, and that we therefore cannot ask this from the O.P.C. either'.

Bouwman and Rutgers are quoted on the question what should be done when there is no attestation from a sister church, and then the Committee sums up as follows:

'...indeed the local Session should not leave it solely to the individual (guest) to determine to partake or not of the Lord's Supper. This decision must be made by the overseers. It is our impression from the answer of the General Assembly to the complaint that in the O.P.C. individual responsibility is stressed.

Corporate responsibility for the sins of others as it relates to the celebration of the Lord's Supper is either denied or diminished in scope'...

The Committee refers to Q. and A. 82 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which confession 'makes it more urgent for us to fence the Lord's Table closely, i.e. also in deciding which guests may attend the Table'.

'On the other hand, we should not take too rigoristic an approach, as though the admission to the Lord's Table of someone who does not have an attestation from a sister church is against the Bible, Confessions, and the Church Order. Our study of our standards and the quotes from H. Bouwman and F.L. Rutgers as well as actual practices in the Reformed Churches should caution us against this. Accepting guests from other churches under certain conditions is not disallowed in our Church Order, and should be decided by the local church council. That the General Assembly approved of this same procedure in the Burtonsville Session cannot thus be outrightly condemned. At the same time we mention that more direct measures should be taken by the overseers to ensure that their guidelines are kept. We thus conclude that this is 'a matter of mutual concern' and should be a subject of our ongoing ecclesiastical contact with the O.P.C.'.

All this information from the Canadian churches (found in the Appendices, Acts 1986, pages 131-137) is of great import as we find ourselves confronted with similar circumstances in Australia.

To be sure, there is no 'Hofferd Case'.

But as Deputies we feel strong rapport with the conclusions reached by the Canadian Committee. Practice in the P.C.E.A. is that 'members in good standing of other evangelical churches are welcome at the Lord's Table'. Whilst we cannot condemn this practice as being against the Bible, the Confessions or the Church Order, we should recognize the matter as one requiring further attention.

6.2 Church Government in the P.C.E.A.

1. The P.C.E.A. has the full constitution of the Church of Scotland, reformed in 1560. This constitution is derived from the principles and practices set out in the two Books of Discipline and the Form of Presbyterial Church Government (1645).

Its basis is undeniably Reformed in character.

To quote from Practice and Procedure 1983:

- 1.1 The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head and Lord of the Church. He alone in his wisdom and his authority has appointed offices, instituted ordinances of worship, and enacted the principles and laws of fellowship in his Church.
- 1.2 The Lord Jesus Christ has appointed in his Church a government vested in church officers - a government distinct from civil government and, in all things spiritual, independent of it. The principles of church government, its institutions and offices, are made known in the Word of God. In Christ's name and by his authority, officers are ordained in the Church, Church Courts are constituted, and judicial and authoritative decisions are pronounced and enforced'.

On the subject of Presbyterian government, we again quote:

- 1.9 in accordance with the Presbyterian form of government set forth in the Standards of the church, the church is governed by ministers and elders acting in orderly association in a gradation of Courts of the Church by which its organic unity is expressed and maintained, and which, in ascending order, are the Session, the Presbytery and the Synod.
- 1.10 The authority of the courts of the church is a delegated authority received from Christ, the only Head and Lord of the Church; it is therefore an authority to declare and apply the mind of Christ revealed in Scriptures'.

The importance of these statements is such that - although our mandate does not specifically mention Church Government - they merit the full attention of our churches in the context of our evaluation.

2. This applies equally to the place of the Presbytery in the government of the P.C.E.A.

Persecution and the almost total absence of ordained ministers in the Reformation days loom large in the Scottish Presbytery's background. After 1592 it became a permanent feature in church government. The present position of the P.C.E.A. is that the Presbytery plays a prominent part in church life. It has 'a general responsibility and duty relative to the well-being of the church and its work, and of the congregations, and all congregational property, organizations and activities within its jurisdiction'. (Practice and Procedure 4.33). It also has a duty to erect 'new charges or preaching stations' in developing areas. The Presbytery furthermore has the duty to visit each congregation within its bounds at least once in every five years. The congregation will be given two week's notice of this visit, and the visitors will use questions which have been prepared in advance. The aim is 'to acquaint itself with the state of affairs...to strengthen the hands of the minister, session, office bearers and members of the congregation, to advise them should anything appear to be unsatisfactory - and in general to give counsel and encouragement as may be suitable.' Comparing the Presbytery with the Classis in our Church Order, the first impression is that of the Presbytery's greater authority. It should be born in mind, however, that our Classis meeting has been given considerable involvement in e.g. discipline procedure, as evinced by art. 73, 74, 76 and 79 C.O. Although we reject the 'ascending order' in principle, the difference in practice appears to be one of degree. In practice, our churches adopt the 'ascending order' e.g. in appeal matters.

3. Ministers of the P.C.E.A. are allowed to preach in other pulpits. They are licensed by the P.C.E.A. to preach the gospel wherever the opportunity presents itself.

They are not bound to the place of their own congregation. This does not imply, however, that they can do as they see fit. They remain accountable to the Presbytery in this regard.

The ministers are bound by their promise at ordination.

Before they are licensed to preach, these questions are asked:

(Q. 1 to 4 are virtually identical to those quoted in 4.3)

5. Do you promise that, through the grace of God, you will firmly and constantly adhere to, and in your station, to the utmost of your power, assert, maintain and defend the said doctrine, worship and discipline, and the government of this Church by Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods and General Assemblies?

6. Do you promise that, in your practice you will conform yourself to the said worship, and submit yourself to the said discipline and government of this Church, and not to endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion of same?

7. Do you promise that you will follow no divisive courses from the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of this Church?

8. Do you renounce all doctrine, tenet, or opinions whatsoever contrary to, or inconsistent with, the said doctrine, worship, discipline and government of this Church?

9. Do you promise that you will subject yourself to the several judicatories of this Church?

6.3. The marks of Christians (art. 29 Belgic Confession)

'Those who are of the Church may be recognized by the marks of Christians'- this we confess in article 29 Belgic Confession.

In their contacts with P.C.E.A. members, Deputies have consistently experienced these people as trusting Jesus Christ as their only Saviour; fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness; loving God in a total commitment, and loving their neighbour unselfishly.

The Lordship of the Head of the Church is reflected in their words and in their actions. There is constant concern, not only with the sheep of Christ's flock, but also with those as yet unreached by the Word of God. There is Scriptural piety, a humble demeanour.

The recognition of these marks caused considerable joy and thankfulness to Deputies during investigation.

7. Conclusions

1. Employing the Scriptural yardstick, formulated in articles 27 to 29 of the Belgic Confession, Deputies have found that the P.C.E.A. is a true Church; it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head.

2. In comparison with our Churches, the P.C.E.A. knows fewer formal structures in its ecclesiastical life. This report has related some of them (5.3, 5.7, 6.1 b), 6.1 c), 6.2.3). Such lack of organization does not preclude recognition of the P.C.E.A. as a true Church according to our Confession.

3. In the 19th century our fathers sought the unity of the Reformed faith with faithful Presbyterian Churches, as true Churches of the Lord. Maintaining this faith, the P.C.E.A. should be seen as the continuation of the Churches of the Reformation of the 16th century, like The Free Reformed Churches of Australia.

4. Contacts already existing with the Free Church of Scotland, via the International Conference of Reformed Churches and via our sister churches overseas, confirm that the unity recognized in history is also today an important given.
It enhances our responsibility, as the P.C.E.A. is a daughter of the Free Church of Scotland and since 1985 a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. (refer Acts of Synod 1983, art. 84).
5. Continued fellowship in the unity of the true, catholic faith, and continued study and discussion of existing divergencies should show that as Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ in Australia we may be a hand and a foot to each other, enriching the upbuilding of the Body of Christ under His gracious blessing.

8. Recommendations

Deputies thus recommend to Synod that

- a) Synod decide to recognize the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia as a true Church according to articles 27 to 29 of the Belgic Confession.
- b) Synod discharge Deputies appointed by Synod 1985.
- c) Synod appoint new Deputies with instructions to give practical effect to the recognition of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ and to study the longer term implications.

We pray that the Lord will grant you His indispensable grace and wisdom.

With brotherly love,
the Deputies,

A.M. HIDDING,

Rev. K. JONKER,

S. REITSEMA,

J. VanderROS.

Launceston, May 1987.

