

## Press Release – Synod Albany 2021

### *Opening of Synod*

It was a dark and stormy night in Albany, Western Australia, when eighteen delegates and many observers came together for the official opening of Synod 2021. After months of preparation by the hosting congregation of FRC Albany, the 14<sup>th</sup> of June had finally arrived. On behalf of the convening church, Rev H Alkema led a prayer service which centered on the rich words of Ephesians 1:15-23. He expressed the hope that delegates and churches alike would maintain a clear focus on Jesus Christ, the exalted Son of God. Because Christ sits at God's right hand as the triumphant Saviour and mighty King, we have every reason to trust in Him and obey His word, even during the tumultuous days of world history. We prayed for the Lord's favour to rest upon synod, asking that He would grant the delegates a full measure of wisdom and faithfulness to address the many items on the agenda.

### *Delegates and Officers*

After welcoming all those present, Rev Alkema confirmed that the credentials of the delegates had been found to be in good order. All the primary delegates from the three classes were present:

#### *Classis North:*

Rev R Bredenhof  
Rev W Bredenhof  
Rev D Poppe  
Elder H Ballast  
Elder H Faas  
Elder S Thompson

#### *Classis Central:*

Rev RD Anderson  
Rev R Eikelboom  
Rev AC Pol  
Elder W Pleiter  
Elder H van der Linde  
Elder B Veenendaal

#### *Classis South West:*

Rev H Alkema  
Rev R Pot  
Rev A Hagg  
Elder JB Lewis  
Elder J Plug  
Elder P Witten

The convening church then conducted a series of votes to select the four men who would serve synod as officers. Rev Alkema was elected as chairman, Rev R Bredenhof as vice-chairman, Elder B Veenendaal as first clerk, and Rev W Bredenhof as second clerk. Synod was grateful to appoint Sister K VanDuyn as an administrative assistant for the duration of the meeting. The chairman declared synod to be duly constituted, after which the delegates rose to express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. Rev Alkema then closed the evening in prayer and adjourned synod for the evening, giving an opportunity for everyone present to enjoy a time of fellowship.

### *Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise*

In the days leading up to synod, it was exciting to hear that a container with the long-awaited copies of the very first edition of the *Australian Book of Praise* was approaching the port in Fremantle and was now patiently waiting to clear customs. Synod 2018 had approved the publication of an Australian version of the familiar *Book of Praise*. This version would use the ESV translation of the Bible, include the FRCA version of the Church Order, and incorporate various small changes to the creeds, confessions, and liturgical forms. The standing committee for the *Book of Praise* had arranged with Premier Printing of Manitoba, Canada, to print the new book. Once the books are in

hand, the deputies for the *Book of Praise* will be busy distributing them for use in the churches. May these songbooks serve the churches well for many years in our worship of the triune God.

### *Foreign delegates*

Due to the ongoing restrictions on travel, most overseas visitors were unable to attend synod in person. We instead received written or recorded greetings from our sister churches as well as from some other churches with whom we have contact. After each of the addresses, the delegates spent time in prayer for these church federations, thanking God for the goodness and grace that He shows to our brothers and sisters in many places around the globe. A regular theme in these messages was the tension and difficulties that our sister churches have faced in the last year due to the severe effects of the pandemic on church life. We prayed for the Lord's mercy and His gift of perseverance, that Christ's people may continue to place their hope in Him.

As will be seen further, synod devoted much attention to the topic of sister church relations. Our churches pursue these relationships in the spirit of Christ's prayer for the unity of all His believers, and in the recognition that we share a common faith and hope with many around this world. Nonetheless, this has always been a matter that generates a lot of discussion in our congregations and at our broader assemblies. For instance, questions are asked about whether it is legitimate to have two sister churches in one country, or if there is merit in an 'alternate' form of ecclesiastical contact when a sister church relationship is not feasible. In this connection, synod mandated the Deputies for Interchurch Relations to develop and propose a set of guidelines which may provide consistency and clarity in these relationships.

### *Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea*

By a huge margin, our largest sister church is the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCCK), which numbers around 410,000 members. In his video address to synod, Rev Nakchoon Kim noted that the membership of the KPCCK has actually declined significantly in recent years. Korea's declining birth rate and increasing secularization were cited as key factors in this decline. Still, we were grateful to hear that our brothers and sisters in Korea strive to remain faithful to the Word of God and the confessions. Synod took note of the presence of a KPCCK mission church in the Perth area, and deputies were mandated to have contact and seek to assist them where possible.

### *Reformed Churches of New Zealand*

The only overseas visitor whom synod was able to welcome in person was Rev P Archbald from our sister churches, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). It was a blessing to enjoy fellowship with our brother and to discuss together the challenges and joys experienced by our two church federations. From him and the deputies, synod could hear about the present status of church life in our sister federation. Synod was grateful to note that the RCNZ continues to be vigilant in their relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Since our sister relationship with the RCNZ began in 2015, it has been pleasing to see how the connection between us continues to grow and mature.

### *First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore*

The First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC) is unique among our sister churches in being a single-church federation. This has presented challenges to the FERC, and in the past they have sought support from our churches in requesting ministers to teach and preach in their midst. In his recorded address, Pastor Chong Nam Tuck of the FERC spoke of how God has been blessing their ministries of mercy, teaching, and mission. If it is possible, deputies will seek to visit Singapore in order to offer assistance where it is requested and feasible. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless the relationship with our small sister in Singapore.

### *Website*

It goes without saying that almost everyone relies on the Internet as a source of current information. For this reason, synod mandated the Committee for the Website to activate a thoroughly revamped website for the FRCA at [www.frca.org.au](http://www.frca.org.au). It will be an online space where news and information can be shared with church members, and it will also provide opportunity for people from the local and wider community to learn more about the FRCA and the glorious gospel of Christ which we proclaim.

### *Reformed Churches in Indonesia*

Our geographically closest sister church lies to the north, the Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRI). Synod thankfully received written greetings from Rev Pila Njuka of the GGRI. We continue to seek ways to assist the GGRI in developing their Reformed character, such as through conducting seminars and giving support in theological training. Synod also decided to provide funds for the renovation of the seminary buildings in Waimarang. There are two other federations in Indonesia with whom we have ongoing contact, the Calvinist Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRC) and the Reformed Churches in Indonesia-Timor (GGRI-T). Synod received greetings from both federations, via a letter from Rev Soleman Dethan of the GGRC and from Brothers C Nguru and F Missa of the GGRI-T. Deputies were tasked to encourage the GGRI in their efforts to work towards federative unity with the GGRC and the GGRI-T, and we pray that God will continue to care for all of these believers.

### *Interpreting Article 31*

On synod's table were three appeals against a decision of Synod Bunbury concerning the right of an individual church member to appeal synod decisions which deal with the 'churches in common.' This matter is described in Article 31 of the Church Order. At issue is whether an individual may appeal such a decision directly to synod, or whether he needs to follow the ecclesiastical route: namely, interacting first with his consistory, then classis, and finally synod. Synod decided to deny these appeals, but acknowledged that historically there have been varying interpretations about whether an individual can in fact appeal directly to synod. The decision of Synod Bunbury on this matter sought to provide clarity on this process for the churches. If the churches desire more explicit direction on this question, they may propose a change to the Church Order.

### *Evangelical Presbyterian Church & Southern Presbyterian Church*

For some years there has been contact between the Free Reformed Churches in Tasmania and both the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) as well as the Southern Presbyterian Church (SPC). Synod 2018 had mandated deputies to investigate the EPC and the SPC and report back to the next synod concerning the feasibility of further ecumenical contact. After hearing the report of the deputies, synod decided to mandate them to continue investigating some of the differences in theological emphasis and church practice in these two federations.

### *Canadian Reformed Churches*

The connections between the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and FRCA are strong and deep. This was also evident around the table of synod, where a majority of the delegates were either Canadian or have lived in Canada for extended periods of time. In his video address to synod, Rev A Witten affirmed the close ties that are experienced by the members of our federations in many ways. Perhaps foremost is through the work of the seminary in Hamilton (CRTS), an institution which God continues to use to bring great blessing to our churches. Synod took note of the ongoing and at times difficult conversations in the CanRC regarding elements of church polity and liturgy, and observed that these are developments with which we should keep up to date through the deputies. We commend our brothers and sisters in Canada to the care of the Lord.

### *Reformed Churches of the Netherlands*

A brief report but one received with sadness concerned the visit that the Deputies for Interchurch Relations made to the Netherlands in 2019. They went to convey the decision made by Synod Bunbury to terminate the relationship between the FRCA and the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN). The serious calls for the RCN to repent from their unbiblical direction have not been heeded, but we pray that God may yet grant them the grace of repentance.

### *Training for the Ministry*

Faith comes through hearing the Word, so it is fitting that we place a priority not only on preaching but also preparing men to do this vital work. Our appreciation for CRTS is strong, and the churches continue to contribute generously toward its support. At the same time, our previous synod recognised that there is interest in the idea of establishing an Australian theological seminary in the medium to long term. Since 2015, deputies have been busy investigating the possibility of establishing a seminary in Australia, and they will continue to do so in the coming years. While it is a massive undertaking, both the urgency and the possibilities of an Australian seminary have been underlined in the last couple of years by travel restrictions and the rapid adoption of online learning. In relation to CRTS, deputies will continue to promote the work of the seminary in a variety of ways.

Because we want to make it possible for young men to study for the ministry, the churches seek to support them financially. In this connection, synod adopted new and

clearer guidelines for the support of needy students. The deputies were also tasked to develop guidelines for a vicariate (ministry internship) model of training. The vicariate model would see recent FRCA graduates from the seminary be given the opportunity to spend a full year working in a congregation under the guidance of a seasoned pastor in Australia. Such an experience would help to train and develop men for the future work of gospel ministry.

### *Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) is familiar to some of our members as a confessionally Reformed federation which is based largely in the United States. Synod Bunbury had mandated deputies to establish contact with the OPC and to report back about these churches. After considering the deputies' report, synod decided to gather more information about aspects of church polity and practice in the OPC. Synod also watched a video greeting from Br Mark Bube of the OPC. As we get to know these churches, we thank God for their Reformed witness and commitment to the truth of the Scriptures.

### *Free Reformed Churches of South Africa*

For many years we have enjoyed a relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA). It was encouraging to listen to the recorded greetings from Rev Johan Bruintjes of this federation. In his address, he outlined some of the blessings as well as the challenges that are faced by the FRCSA. Arrangements with CRTS have been put into place for distance education in South Africa, and this has proven helpful. As churches we are glad to have the opportunity to provide financial support for their theological training. It is our hope and prayer that the Lord will continue to uphold the churches of the FRCSA.

### *United Reformed Churches of North America*

A close 'sister' of the Canadian Reformed Churches is the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA). Because of their close ties with the CanRC, we have been aware of the URCNA for some time now. Our previous synod tasked deputies to take up contact with the URCNA and to gather more information about them. Written greetings from Brother G Swets of the URCNA were gratefully received at synod. The activity of getting acquainted with this federation will continue in the future with a view to possibly developing a sister church relationship.

### *International Conference of Reformed Churches*

Synod considered a proposal from one of the classes to send observers to meetings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). During its deliberations on this matter, synod noted that this issue has been discussed extensively by our churches in the past. Synod decided that prior to re-engaging with the ICRC, there is merit in reflecting on what has been said by previous synods about this topic, and addressing any matters that were left unresolved.

### *The DGK & GKN*

There are two church federations in the Netherlands which have arisen in the last couple of decades as the RCN has followed an unbiblical direction. These small federations are De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN). Synod received encouraging news about these churches' efforts to move towards unity. The deputies for Interchurch Relations will continue to monitor developments in both the DGK and the GKN, and work towards entering a sister church relationship.

### *Closing of Synod*

For seven full days of deliberating and discussing, the delegates were busy with the agenda of synod. It was tiring and trying, but we were well-supported by God with everything needful. The brothers regularly took time to read Scripture, to sing praises together, and to pray for God's strength and wisdom. We did this in the humble recognition that apart from the Lord's good gifts, synod's work would be in vain. The delegates were well-supported in other ways too, particularly through the community of believers—not only the congregation of Albany, but also her sister in West Albany. Delegates were grateful for all their outstanding efforts in organization and preparation. It was also heartening that during the daytime sessions, we often had visitors from the John Calvin School (just next door) attending as keen observers of the muddling machinations of synod.

In his concluding comments on the evening of 23 June, Rev Alkema as synod chairman expressed gratitude for how the delegates were able to work in a congenial and cooperative manner. By the grace of God, we could address many issues together. Sin and weakness stain all our work—also at synod—but we humbly commit our labours to the Lord. We ask for His blessing and favour so that all the decisions would be for the benefit of the church and to the glory of Jesus Christ, the exalted Son of God and our Saviour.

Rev Reuben Bredenhof  
Vice-chairman of Synod 2021