

DEPUTIES REPORTS

(as mandated by Synod Albany 2021)

to the

2024 Synod

of the

Free Reformed Churches of Australia

to be held at

Darling Downs, Western Australia

June 2024

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General Secretary's Report

Activities

5 The Deputies' Reports were nearly all received on time for this Synod. Sr K. van Duyn has once again been found willing to typeset the reports. After feedback from several brothers, it was decided to once again produce the reports in A4 size, with line numbers on the margin.

Several copies of the bound volume of the reports will be made available to the Free Reformed book shops. An electronic copy in PDF format will also be made available on the website.

Recommendations

10 Synod Darling Downs discharges the current deputy and appoints a new deputy with a renewed mandate:

1. to distribute any pertinent mail to the deputies, and acknowledge correspondence not applicable to deputies, and if necessary, pass it on to the churches; and
- 15 2. to collate all Deputies reports (apart from that of the Treasurer) and have them printed in an appropriate format. Deputies reports are to be submitted, six months prior to the next synod, so that they can be printed and distributed to the churches as per the Rules of Synod.

J den Boer

Deputies FRCA Website

Bronya Mulder
Len Vermeulen
Wes Bredenhof
5 Winston t'Hart

10 December 2023

Report to General Synod Darling Downs
C/- Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs
10 CC: General Secretary Deputies jack.denboer@frsa.asn.au

Dear Brothers,

Synod Albany in Article 39, mandated *Deputies – Website Committee* (WebCom) with the following mandate:

- 15 1. To maintain and keep current the content on the FRCA website and the associated technical functions;
2. To set up an email address to be included in the church year book for news and content updates
3. To invite the churches to send news items and press releases to the website committee for inclusion on the FRCA website;
- 20 4. To investigate options around improvements to email hosting;
5. To investigate and implement improved Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) in the interests of promoting the churches in the local and wider community;
6. To investigate the possibility of social media integration including guidelines for management
- 25 7. To serve Synod 2024 with a report of their activities, a financial statement, a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding additional content or functionality.

WebCom have met a number of times over Teams and kept in contact via email. Our first order of business was to get the new site, approved by Synod, live. After a number of tweaks to the staging site the website went live on September the 8th 2021.

30 To address the mandate of Synod Albany the following has been done:

Point 1 is an ongoing process for the committee:

We having been having some issues with Wordpress updates and the current Theme. WebCom plans to look into this further in the coming year and hope to create a custom theme in due time to alleviate some of the issues.

Br Martin Pot has requested to hand over website hosting to WebCom. Our plan is to move the website hosting (including associated email addresses) over to Data Smart. This will not change anything for the frontend user.

Point 2 was completed with the publishing of the 2022 year book.

- 5 Regarding **point 3**, Rev Bredenhof has contacted the ministers of the various churches to send relevant news updates for inclusion on the site.

Point 4 was discussed but after getting feedback on how this has worked in Canada it was decided not to proceed. It was noted that the cost was huge and yet out of some 90 Canadian ministers, only 6 have taken up the canrc email address.

- 10 Regarding **point 5**, SEO currently included in Wordpress seems to be working effectively. Google analytics has been setup to provide more detail on how the website is being accessed. Please see Appendix A for some relevant site statistics.

- 15 **Point 6** was discussed but it was decided that this should be the role of the churches rather than the role of WebCom. Onus needs to be on individual churches to maintain their own social media feeds. Churches are intended to attract local community so it is unclear who would be the target of a federation Facebook page. We had a look at 5 other federations across the globe and noted that the only federation out of the 5 investigated that used social media was the OPC which operates a more centralized federation then our model.

- 20 Please see Appendix B for the financial statement since last Synod and the proposed budget going forward.

Therefore, WebCom recommends that Synod give the committee the following mandate:

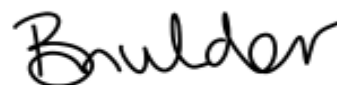
1. Maintain the existing content on the FRCA website and the associated technical functions.
2. Allocate a \$1200 budget.
- 25 3. Serve Synod 2027 with a report of their activities, a financial statement, a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding additional content or functionality.

Wishing you wisdom in your preparations for the coming synod.

With Christian greetings



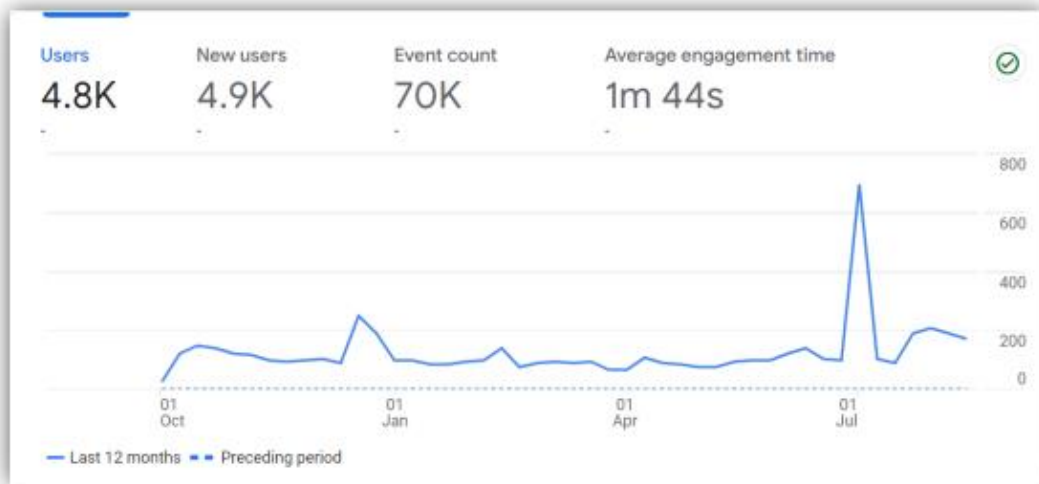
Len Vermeulen



Bronya Mulder

Appendix A: SEO Statistics


October 2022-August 2023 – How many users?



October 2022-August 2023 – What Country?




October 2022-August 2023 – Page Popularity

Views by
Page title and scree... 

PAGE TITLE AND S...	VIEWS	
FRCA Free... Australia	5.8K	-
Churches FRCA	3.3K	-
News FRCA	2K	-
Our Federation FRCA	1.9K	-
Synod FRCA	801	-
Contact FRCA	404	-
Sister Churches FRCA	323	-

October 2022-August 2023 – Where are people navigating from?

Sessions ▾ by
Session default c... ▾ 

SESSION DEFAULT ...	SESSIONS	
Organic Search	4.3K	-
Direct	2.5K	-
Referral	247	-
Organic Social	27	-
Unassigned	25	-

APPENDIX B: Financial statement

The financial statement showing costs since the last synod is below:

Website hosting for frca.org.au	\$400.00
Domain name registration for frca.org.au	\$32.00
WordPress themes and plugins updates	\$152.58
	\$584.58

The proposed budget for 2021-2024 is:

Website hosting for frca.org.au	\$800.00
Domain name registration for frca.org.au	\$70.00
WordPress themes and plugins updates	\$330.00
	\$1,200.00

Overall Deputies' Report for Interchurch Relations – outside Australia

Introduction

5 With thankfulness to the Lord the deputies appointed by Synod Bunbury for Interchurch Relations outside Australia were able to engage with the mandates given in a spirit of good cooperation and harmony and under the blessing the Lord. We continue to see benefits in having one deputyship for interchurch relations outside of Australia. For practical reasons we divided our deputyship into three sections:

- 1a. New Zealand, Korea, Singapore, South Africa
- 1b. Netherlands, North America
- 10 2. Indonesia

In addition we had a separate committee to do most of the work with respect to the mandate of Synod Albany art. 48.

15 Each section met separately as required but were always accountable to the entire deputyship. Deputies met altogether in plenary session twice in 2021 & 2022 and four times in 2023. Those unable to attend in person due to distance have joined in through a video conference call. This makes it more manageable to have deputies from different regions in Australia. Meeting in-person is still preferable however, and deputies are asked to attend in person where possible.

Personnel

Of the deputies appointed by Synod Albany,

- 20 • Rev. Alkema (FRC Albany) requested to be relieved of his appointment in 2021 and was replaced by alternate br. S. Groenewold (FRC Melville).
- Br. R. Groenewold (FRC Legana) requested to be relieved of his appointment in 2022 and was replaced by alternate br. G. Numan (FRC Mundijong).
- 25 • Br. E de Haan requested to be relieved of his appointment in 2023. Due to no further alternates being appointed and it being determined that we didn't need a replacement to complete our mandate, he was not replaced.

Since it is the norm for deputies to serve no more than three terms of three years in any one deputyship, we wish to bring to the attention of Synod that the following delegates have completed three or more terms of service: Rev. S. 't Hart, Rev. A. Hagg and br. P. Witten.

30 We also advise you that br. H. Terpstra respectfully requested not to be reappointed as deputy at this time.

35 With respect to the appointment of deputies, with the day-to-day management of the seminary in Sumba Indonesia now being taken care of by a committee, we suggest that the number of deputies be reduced from 13 to 12. We do, however, request that at least half of the deputies appointed be ministers as it is deemed preferable to have at least one minister attend official visits.

Reports

In writing our reports we have attempted to keep their lengths manageable for consistory members and Synod delegates. We have therefore kept the inclusion of appendices, full reports of visits made and minutes of meetings to a minimum. Should a consistory of the FRCA or a Synod delegate consider it necessary to have more information about a particular matter, they may contact the deputies directly.

Archives - Acts 2021, art. 115

The deputies received a letter from the Second Clerk of Synod Albany, dated July 27, 2021, requesting us to forward all available material relevant to the archives that had not been previously submitted, by 31st December 2021. For our deputyship this will require a substantial amount of work in which we will need to sort through our digitally stored documents that go back to at least 2009. We regret that to date we were unable to even begin this task. With the completion of the mandate given us by Synod Albany 2021, art. 48, we expect to be in a better position to do this in the next inter-synodical period. We may also request the assistance of a brother who has previously served as one of our deputies.

Budget

Overall our deputyship was able complete our tasks on budget. Although there was a substantial increase in the cost of some airfares, we were able to make savings elsewhere. Further, a visit to South Africa wasn't possible due to the Covid disruptions at the time. The same applied to the RCNZ synod. On occasion, trips could also be combined with other travel or were paid for by the other church on account of ministry work done for them.

1. With respect to Indonesia, we request a substantial increase in the amount budgeted, in line with all that is mandated for deputies to be busy with there.
2. We appreciate \$1000 being available for deputies in general in the 2018 budget and request that this be made available for the next inter-synodical period also. We consider it necessary for deputies in Tasmania to attend a meeting in-person at least once, and this will help with flight costs in the event that their trip can't be combined with Classis or other business.

Auditing

With respect to auditing the accounts connected to the FRCSA and GGRI, Deputies decided not to put forward a recommendation (as was done re: FRCSA in Synod 2021) since this is a task for the Deputy Auditor for Synod Treasurer and should be recommended there. We consider this to be the responsibility of the Auditor to arrange, and not the Deputies for Interchurch Relations.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev Stephen 't Hart 2012 (convenor)

Br John Bruning (snr) 2021 (Metro)

Rev Kelvin Dekker 2021 (Albany)

Br. Sam Groenewold 2021 (Metro)

Rev Axel Hagg 2015 (Busselton)

Br Colin Mulder 2018 (Tasmania)

Br. Geoff Numan 2021 (Metro)

Rev Abel C Pol 2021 (Metro)

Rev Anthon Souman 2018 (Metro)

Br Henk Terpstra 2018 (Metro)

Br Bert Veenendaal 2018 (Metro)

Br Pete Witten 2015 (Albany)

Church Acronyms	
FRCA	Free Reformed Churches of Australia
CanRC	Canadian Reformed Churches
CRCA	Christian Reformed Churches of Australia
CRCNA	Christian Reformed Churches of North America
DGK	De Gereformeerde Kerken (formerly RCNr)
EPCA	Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia
FERC	First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore
FRCSA	Free Reformed Churches of South Africa
GGRC	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis
GGRI	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia
GGRI-KalBar	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia - Kalimantan Barat
GGRI-NTT	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia - NTT
GGRI-Papua	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia - Papua
GGRI-T	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia - Timor
GKN	Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland
HRC	Heritage Reformed Congregations of North America
KPCK	Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea
NGK	Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken

OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
PCEA	Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
RCN	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)
RCNZ	Reformed Churches of New Zealand
URCNA	United Reformed Churches of North America

Ecclesiastical Abbreviations	
Art.	Article
BC	Belgic Confession of Faith
CCCNA	(Canadian Reformed) Committee for Contact with Churches in North America
CECCA	Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)
CEIR	Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC
CERCU	Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URCNA
CO	Church Order
CRTS	Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
EC	Ecclesiastical Contact
EF	Ecclesiastical Fellowship
GA	General Assembly
GS	General Synod
ICRC	International Conference of Reformed Churches
MARS	Mid-America Reformed Seminary
NAPARC	North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council
RCNZ-IRC	Reformed Churches of New Zealand Interchurch Relations Committee

Investigation of Guidelines for Church Relations – Report to Synod 2024

Executive Summary

5 In response to the mandate of Synod Albany 2021, deputies have assembled this interim report in formulating guidelines for the establishment of sister church relations. The following aspects of sister relations were considered: history and reasons for having sister church relations, criteria used to establish sister church relations, types of church relations, relations with multiple churches in the same region, relation to ICRC and the overall guidelines for church relations.

10 The history of the church through the time of the Reformation to the present day establishes the fact that finding unity in Christ with other churches is not optional, but a faithful response to Scripture. Acknowledging the catholicity of the church and unity in faith with other churches finds its way into our confessions (especially Belgic Confession Art 27-29, Heidelberg Catechism LD 21) and Australian Church Order (Art 46).

15 The foundation of Scripture and confessions and acknowledging the limitations of mankind and the church on this earth underpins the fact that we need to use certain criteria to decide when to establish sister church relations. Various criteria were identified from past synods, churches in our bond and sister churches. A number of observations and principles derived by deputies from the wealth of information received are used to recommend three (3) groups of criteria: faithful, meaningful and manageable.

20 We deduce from Scripture, confessions and church order, that we need to aim for one type of relationship, namely, sister church relations. Various forms of contact and interaction with other churches occur in the process towards sister relations and in other ecumenical activities including mission and assistance. Using the criteria referred to above, not all churches in contact would progress to a sister church relation. Deputies recommend to adopt a relation referred to as *Ecclesiastical Contact* for churches whom we recognise as true and faithful but with whom it is not deemed feasible to establish a sister church relation at this point of time due to them not being sufficiently manageable. Deputies also suggest rules that would distinguish such ecclesiastical contacts from sister church relations; this also would help inform our churches as how to manage interaction with these churches.

30 In regards to multiple churches in the same region, the only consideration by the FRCA in past synod decisions is when two churches in proximity are unwilling or show no evidence of seeking or expressing unity of faith. Deputies recommend to maintain this.

35 In regards to the role of the ICRC for the FRCA, deputies recognise the differences within the FRCA regarding the meaning of especially the first article of the ICRC constitution, namely, to “express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have”. After relaying the background and issues in discussion, a brief synopsis of the perspectives is given and four options are put forward as recommendations in order to best serve the next synod.

A final section lists the guidelines for church relations that incorporate and bring together the recommendations of the earlier sections of this report. May the Lord guide and bless this work and the deliberations of the forthcoming synod.

40 1. Introduction

45 Deputies for Interchurch Relations were given a task by Synod Albany 2021 to propose guidelines for church relations in order to assist future synods and deputies. This task involves considering past synod decisions, obtaining input from the churches and sister churches, and using Scripture and Confessions to put forward recommendations to the next synod to decide the way forward.

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) have, in faithfulness to Scripture and the Confessions, expressed the catholic unity of faith by extending and maintaining sister church relationships with many churches throughout the world over the course of years from 1954 to the present.

5 Through their synods and deputies, the FRCA have used the following approach to the establishment of sister church relationships:

- a. Acknowledge the calling to maintain sister church relations with churches of Reformed confession (Church Order Art 46).
- 10 b. Since 1985, recognise only one form of permanent ecclesiastical relationship, namely a sister church relationship (Synod 1985, Art 74 Sub II). Note that “temporary ecclesiastical contact” was discontinued in 1992 (Synod 1992, Art 95). Acknowledging a church as true and faithful is part of the process of coming to that relationship of sister church (Synod 1985 Art 67).
- 15 c. A realisation that in taking mutual responsibility, there must be a realistic expectation that we are able to fulfill our obligations/promises in maintaining a sister church relationship. We are a small federation with limited resources (Synod Armadale 1990 Art 58).
- d. To concentrate on relations and contacts with churches who are geographically closer to us and for whom we have a greater responsibility (Synod Armadale 1990 Art 58).
- 20 e. In order to avoid duplication of effort, where a church has a sister church relation with one of our sister churches in close geographic proximity, to leave the sister church relationship to our sister church (Synod Armadale 1990 Art 58).

25 After outlining the mandate of deputies, this report looks at the need for church relations from a church political and historical perspective, as well as the foundation of church relations from Scripture and Confessions. The range of criteria for deciding on relations, as well as the principles and practical working out of these criteria is then considered together with a recommendation on how to apply them in practice. The report then considers types of relations taking into account the Scriptural norms and practical limitations of church relations. Then follows a section on how to deal with multiple churches in the same region. 30 The report then looks at the ICRC and its relation to the FRCA. Finally, guidelines for establishing church relations are proposed.

2. Mandate and approach

Deputies for Interchurch Relations were given the following mandate by Synod 2021:

- 35 1. develop and propose to synod guidelines with whom, how, and when to establish sister church relationships. These guidelines ought to be in line with Articles 27- 29 of the Belgic Confession and Article 46 of the Church Order. This process ought to take into consideration previous synods’ decisions and guiding principles;
- 40 2. as part of this, give attention to the question whether it can ever be legitimate or beneficial to have two sister churches in one country including cases when those two churches are unable to find unity;
3. consider the merits of an alternate form of ecclesiastical contact with churches of Reformed confession with whom a sister church relationship is not immediately feasible;

4. seek input regarding the manner in which we maintain relationships with other churches from both the churches of the FRCA as well as our sister churches; and
5. report to the churches, if possible, 15 months before the next synod, to enable adequate time for the churches to interact with deputies about this, and to enable deputies to present a final report with recommended guidelines 6 months before the next synod.

Further, Synod 2021 decided to await the requested guidelines on church relations in order to give guidance and direction in progressing our contact with the OPC, DGK and GKN, URCNA and EPC/SPC (Synod 2021 Arts 67, 68, 96, 102). Specifically with regards to the EPC/SPC, Synod decided in Decision 3 to "Take note that synod has mandated Deputies for Interchurch Relations to develop guidelines for interchurch relations, which will have implications for any future decisions about a relationship with the EPC and SPC, including the relevance of Synod Launceston 1985 Art 67."

In order to carry out this mandate, a number of deputies were appointed to a *Church Relations Guidelines Steering Committee* to coordinate and drive the work and involve all deputies in making contributions to the work. All sister churches and those with whom we have official correspondence were requested to contribute information to assist our efforts.

Deputies considered it wise to involve our own churches early on in the process so that they can begin to consider some of these matters, provide some input and thereby also be better prepared to comment on an interim report to the churches. A request went out to the churches in February 2022 and responses were received by May 2022; a wide range of very useful responses was integrated into the interim report.

We also canvassed all our sister churches and the churches with whom we have contact and received from them very informative and useful responses which we have also integrated into this report.

The interim report was sent out to the churches in June 2023 and two final sections were sent in early September 2023. Consistories considered the report and provided very useful feedback which was incorporated into this final report.

The Steering Committee met 7 times and the plenary session of (all) deputies discussed the progress, draft papers and interim report in 8 meetings. The result is this deputies' report to Synod Darling Downs 2024.

3. Purpose of church relations

The purpose and obligation for church relations is based and grounded in Scripture and the confessions. The catholicity and unity of the church in Scripture brings with it the obligations for the church today. Also, the rules that guide the practical interrelation between sister churches are based on Scripture and confessions.

3.1. The catholicity and unity of the Church

Although in some respects the New Testament prioritises the importance of the local church, its catholicity is never forgotten. In fact, the book of Revelation ends with the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven for God, and a voice that said, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people." (Revelation 21:2-3). These words reach back to the Old Testament Church and Bible texts such as Leviticus 26:12 and Ezekiel 37:27 where the Lord spoke the same words concerning his covenant people Israel. The Belgic

Confession is correct, therefore, to emphasise the fact that the Church is catholic with respect to time: "This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects." (B.C. Art 27).

5 The Lord Jesus was referring to the catholic Church when he said to Peter in Matthew 16:18, "And on this rock I will build my church." It was this same church that Christ prayed for in John 17:20-21, "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may know that you have sent me." Then following his death and resurrection, Christ's missionary command was that the gospel be preached "to the whole creation" (Mark 16:16), disciples were to be made of all nations (Matthew 28:18), that "repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations" (Luke 24:48), even "to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). "Paul in his letter to the Romans speaks of 'all the world' (1:8), and knows himself under obligation to barbarians (1:14). Psalm 19 is fulfilled in the universal preachers of Christ, whose voice has gone out to all the earth and their words to the end of the world (10:18). Paul writes to the church of God at Corinth, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours (1:2)." (Faber 1990, p. 88).

In the New Testament, the church was no longer centralised since the temple worship was no longer needed and Christ's church gathering work now permeates the whole earth. Hence, we read in Scripture of local churches in places such as Corinth, Ephesus and Philippi, and that Paul wrote to the churches (plural) in the region of the Galatians. Revelation 2-3 also records seven letters given to seven churches. The Scriptures teach us that elders were to be ordained "in every town" (Titus 1:5). Nevertheless, the Scriptures never give the impression that these churches would be completely independent of one another. The emphasis of Scripture falls on the "unity of the true faith" (Heidelberg Catechism LD 21), "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3) and of there being "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). Belgic Confession Article 27 says, "Yet, it is joined and united with heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith".

The New Testament also gives us no suggestion that churches might live independently of one another by separating themselves along racial or ethnic lines. To the contrary, we read that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28). And, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." (Colossians 3:11). This diversity in the body of Christ is a foretaste of what will be experienced on the Last Day when the Church will be seen to be a "great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb." (Revelation 7:9).

This unity is a spiritual unity. It is not something made by human decree or a synod decision, but it is the "unity of the Spirit." Churches "do not create unity among themselves, but express and manifest their given unity, created by Christ" (Wielenga p.224). At the same time, this unity is not only a reality but also a requirement. The clear reading of John 17:21,23 is that the unity of Christ's Church is to be expressed in such a way that it is observable to the world. "For the one congregation's need for help concerns all churches, since the Word of Christ binds them into a community of life. In this way common matters arise in the community of churches: out of the Word of faith which is common to all, we accept each other in our concrete needs. No one

can say to another, 'Go on, see to it yourself that you be warmed...what do I have to do with you?'" (Kamphuis, p. 221). Schilder says that "Christ's 'work of bringing together' is the daily focus of his prayer. It is thus the way toward the completion of the world. Consequently, one can be his co-worker, and thus really social, only if one accomplishes the work of gathering the church, insofar as faith can see it, in obedience to his commandments. His revealed Word alone indicates to us the paths along which His prayer proceeds and seeks to move the Father, and does indeed move Him into moving us." (Schilder, 1935 quoted in Batteau, 1995).

The Scriptures also teach that the unity of Christ's Church is a unity in the truth. Indeed, the Church itself is "the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth" (1 Timothy 3:15). It is in the church that we are to hear this truth proclaimed through those given to the church "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:13-16). We recognise, therefore, that we must separate ourselves from that which is not the true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ while at the same time join and unite, maintaining the unity with Christ's Church wherever it may be found.

In determining where the body and the communion of the true church can be found, this church will be recognised by the marks of the preaching of the gospel, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the right exercising of church discipline. "In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head." (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). With such churches we are eager to be united, manifesting the unity we have in Christ for the glory of God's name (John 17) and in obedience to God's command. In obedience to God then, we ought to aspire to the highest level of unity that is possible between church federations which we commonly refer to as sister church relations. "A sister-church relationship indicates full communion between the churches - approval of one's membership, officers, and discipline." (Galbraith 1986).

This does not mean, however, that all churches with whom we have fellowship will be identical in the way they express the faith and in their practice. Ephesians 4 teaches us that it is through the ministry of Christ's servants and our mutual submitting to Christ that the body of Christ is built up "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). It is through inter-church relations that we have the opportunity to grow in the truth and we in turn are able to encourage others¹. As we seek to speak the truth in love to others, we are eager for them to do the same to us.

3.2. Rules for exercising sister church relations

The FRCA maintain their sister-church relations through rules adopted for that purpose by Synod Bedfordale 1992 (Art 95):

¹ A current example would be that with respect to the GGRI, we "continue to offer assistance in improving the Reformed character of the GGRI and addressing existing concerns by the current means of theological training support and seminars", all the while continuing our sister relations (Acts Synod Albany 2021, Art. 97).

1. Sister relations shall be used to mutually assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world.
2. The churches shall mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.
- 5 3. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or their Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to their respective churches (if possible in translation).
- 10 4. The churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties.
- 5 5. The churches shall accept one another's attestations, which also means admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of these attestations.
- 15 6. The churches shall in principle open their pulpits to each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted by the respective church federations. Also the churches agree in principle to the possibility of calling each others ministers, while the churches reserve for themselves the right to maintain their own rules in connection with the extension and approval of calls.
- 20 7. In cases of substantial changes or additions to the confession, church order or liturgical forms this intention shall be brought to the special attention of the sister churches, so that as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached.
8. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as advisers, as much as possible.

25 Biblical guidance for inter-church relations (ICR) finds expression in the love and care of the early churches for each other. The Apostle Paul describes how the churches of Asia Minor helped the churches in Judea (Romans 15:28). Those churches had become very poor due to persecution (see also 1 Cor. 16:1-2). On his missionary journeys, the apostle Paul collected money for those churches. The ICR of those churches was built and filled with love. As faith is dead without works, so too is an ICR without love. This guiding principle is reflected in the current rules for sister-church relations:

- (1) Sister relations shall be used to mutually assist, encourage and exhort one another to live as churches of God in this world.

35 Another guiding principle for ICR is found in the account of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). The churches gathered together to resolve a doctrinal conflict. When faced with much dispute, these churches used their ICR to seek council together. They rejected the spirit of independentism and worked together to maintain the unity of true faith. The council carefully considered God's revelation to Peter that he should preach the Word to the gentiles. This accorded with what the prophets had spoken. The council concluded with a letter to the church at Antioch and sent Paul and Barnabas to further explain the meeting's conclusions (Acts 15:7, 15, 25). The unity they encouraged among the churches was therefore based on the truth of God's word. The

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45 guiding principle for ICR is unity of true faith.

5 The report in Acts 15 of the Council of Jerusalem indicates the churches had an intimate understanding of each other's situation. Furthermore, the conclusions (set down in writing) of the Council meeting were an important element for the instruction and defence of the Gospel in many similar situations that would arise in other churches. For example, see the letter of Paul to the Romans.

The rules for 'sister-church relations' echo the above mutual care among the early churches.

- 10 (2) The churches shall mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.

15 The above biblical examples serve as guiding principles for ICR. However, it is the Lord's high priestly prayer (John 17) which guides and motivates ICR. Christ made known his love and desire for church in his prayer. He prayed "that they all may be one" (John 17:21). Christ did not want his followers (his church) to be splintered and scattered abroad without a Shepherd. He added, "as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us" (John 17:21). It is the command of this prayer which guides ICR. In John 17 Jesus Christ also teaches that the main purpose of the church being one is the glory and honour of the Lord of the church. This purpose permeates the entire prayer. In John 20 17:17 Jesus also prays "Sanctify them in the truth". The purpose of this sanctification is also to glorify the Lord. These are also key points which guide ICR, especially but not solely rule 2 above.

25 Jesus also says in John 10:16 "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd". Furthermore Philippians 1:27 says "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel". This adds the element of a continuing action to strive for the one faith.

30 Later, the apostle Paul stresses this church unity to the Ephesians, with these words, "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:4-6). The desire to seek and maintain ICR is an obedient and thankful answer to the prayer of Christ. It is a guiding belief evident in these rules for sister-church relations:

- 35 (3) The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible, by sending each other their Acts or their Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to their respective churches (if possible, in translation).

- (4) The churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties.

40 The confessional guidance for ICR is biblical. Yet, ICR do encounter beliefs which endanger them. Hence, as a summary of God's Word, the confessions (e.g. Lord's Day 21, Belgic Confession Articles 27-29) provide added guidance for ICR. Some examples of threats to church relations unity are considered: isolationism, denominationalism, pluriformity and overreach.

45 **Isolationism**

5 The church is gathered by Christ, “out of the whole human race” (HC Q/A 21). Rather than hidden through isolation, the church through its ICR acknowledges Christ as its head. In humble submission to Christ, ICR can expand beyond national borders: “Moreover, this holy church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world” (BC Art 27). The rules for sister-church relations reflect this truth in a practical way:

- 10 (5) The churches shall accept one another's attestations, which also means admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of these attestations.

Denominationalism

15 The Lord gathers, not multiple churches but, a church “in the unity of true faith” (HC Q/A 21). In Christ’s prayer “that they all may be one” (John 17:21), the unity for ICR is particular, i.e. it is a visible or tangible unity in doctrine and conduct. Likewise, this guidance is understood with these words: “But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it.” (BC Art. 28). The true unity of ICR must be absolute, complete and uniform. There can be no tolerance among churches for non-confessional practices and beliefs. The rules for sister church relations evidence this truth:

- 20 (6) The churches shall give account to each other concerning the establishing of relations with third parties.

Pluriformity

25 The church of Christ is a *true church*. Although not perfect, it must practise the pure preaching of the gospel, maintain the pure administration of the sacraments, and exercise church discipline for correcting and punishing sins (BC Art 29). To help maintain these three, the churches have adopted the Church Order which honours the Scriptural injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:40 “Let all things be done decently and in order”.

30 Concessions or compromise of true faith and doctrine, makes impossible the true unity needed for ICR. Hence, these confessional words, “In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it...” (BC Art 29). Non-confessional truths will lead to various concepts of the church, e.g. pure and less pure, visible and invisible, ecclesia and congregational, etc. Unity is inseparably linked to the doctrine of the church which is grounded in God’s Word and collectively upheld. The rules of sister-church relations highlight this guidance via this rule:

- 35 (7) In cases of substantial changes or additions to the confession, church order or liturgical forms this intention shall be brought to the special attention of the sister churches, so that as much consultation as possible can take place before a final decision is reached.

40 Within the Biblical and confessional guidance for ICR there exists a balance between a safeguard for true unity, based on the truth of God’s Word, and the outreach to churches, seeking to establish a united inter-church relationship. Ultimately, the work of ICR must be a work that brings praise, honour and glory to God.

Overreach

Another potential problem in taking ICR too far is overreach, that is, extending it to so many churches that it becomes very difficult, even ineffective and therefore not responsible. An example: our former sister church in the Netherlands (GKv) pursued ICR with more than 40 churches / federations, many of which are in very different contexts, including language and customs. This makes meaningful ICR very difficult if not impossible to “mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy” (Sister Church Relations Rule 2). As already stated, unity of the church is the work of Jesus Christ. He will continue to gather, defend and preserve it. A church federation is not responsible to pursue ICR to extremities. We are comforted to know that God has promised that “in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

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15 4. Church relations from a church political and historical perspective

Article 46 in the Church Order of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia reads as follows.

ARTICLE 46 – Relationship with other churches

The relationship with other churches shall be regulated by synod. With churches of Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained as much as possible. On non-essential points of ecclesiastical practice other churches shall not be rejected.

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This article in its final form was adopted by the synod in 1994. It was in a somewhat different form when initially adopted by Synod 1992 which is also the text used by our Canadian sister churches:

Canadian Reformed Churches: ARTICLE 50 – Churches Abroad

The relation with churches abroad shall be regulated by general synod. With foreign churches of Reformed confession a sister-church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice churches abroad shall not be rejected.

25

FRCA 1992:

The relations with churches abroad shall be regulated by synod. With foreign churches of Reformed confession a sister church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice churches abroad shall not be rejected.

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An amendment in 1994 changed the words ‘churches abroad’ to ‘other churches’, and in the second sentence the words ‘with foreign churches a sister-church relationship shall be maintained’ to ‘with churches of Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained’. With that this article not only applies to churches abroad but also to churches in our own country.

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The Canadian Reformed Churches had taken this article over from the new church order of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (‘vrijgemaakt’) which was adopted in 1978.²

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² The text in the Dutch Church Order was:

Artikel 47 – Relatie met buitenlandse kerken

Before this article was added to the Church Order, all three church federations worked with the Church Order of Dort 1618/1619. The Church Order of Dort only had the last part of this article.

Artikel 85

5 In middelmatighe dinghen salmen de buyten-Landtsche Kercken niet verwerpen / die een ander ghebruyck hebben dan wy.³

10 The Church Order of Dort had two other articles which dealt with the relationship between the churches using the Dutch language and the churches using the Wallon (French) language. These churches throughout the Netherlands each had their own consistories, classes and Regional Synods (Art 51) but did come together in the General Synod. Nevertheless, the Synod of Dort approved (Art 52) that in the cities where both Dutch and Wallon churches existed, the ministers and elders of both sides could come together to encourage harmony and maintain correspondence with each other, and as much as possible assist each other wherever there was a need.

15 4.1. Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) 1618-1619

20 The absence of a specific article about relations with churches abroad did not mean that there were no relations. It was generally accepted that there were contacts and relationships with churches of the Reformed confession in other countries. That was very clear at the Synod of Dort 1618/1619.⁴ The States General ('Staten Generaal') called this synod together because of unrest and disagreements regarding the Arminians which were dividing the provinces and endangering the unity of the Republic. In the legislation which was adopted by the States General in order to call together the synod, arrangements were made for the invitation of delegates from the Reformed Churches in France, as well as several other European countries.⁵

25 The French delegates were not able to come because the French king forbade them to travel to the Netherlands. Delegates were present from Great Britain, from the Palatinate (Palz), Hessen, the Four Reformed Republics of Switzerland, from Geneva, Bremen, and Embden. Just like the Dutch delegates from all the provinces, they came with credentials and were formally seated as delegates. They participated
30 in all the discussions of the synod and their contributions are extensively recorded in the Acts. In essential matters they gave their opinion, but in practical matters they deferred to the Dutch delegates because they had a better idea of the situation in their own churches.

Over de relatie met kerken in het buitenland beslist de generale synode.

Met kerken van gereformeerde belijdenis in het buitenland zal, zoveel mogelijk, kerkelijke gemeenschap geoefend worden.

Op ondergeschikte punten van kerkorde en kerkelijke praktijk zullen buitenlandse kerken niet veroordeeld worden.

³ "In indifferent matters the foreign churches which have different customs from our own shall not be rejected." (Translation from www.semperreformanda.com/creeds/church-order-of-dordt/)

⁴ The Acts of the Synod of Dordrecht mentions the delegates from churches outside the Netherlands on page 10, the third session, after first the rulers of these countries and cities were thanked for sending these delegates on page 5, the first session. The Acts are available online at: <http://www.kerkrecht.nl/node/1857>

⁵ See the 'Voorrede', pages XXXIII to XXXVI, where we read that the rulers of these countries and cities, as well as the deputies of the French Churches are asked to send theologians to attend the synod and to help the synod to come to a judgment regarding the controversy of the Arminians. On the pages 13-16 the laws adopted by the 'Staten-Generaal' on 11 November 1617 are recorded.

The foreign delegates participated in the rejection of the doctrine of the Arminians, in the adoption of the Canons of Dort, which they even signed together with all the Dutch delegates, as well as the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, as official confessions of the churches. The foreign delegates strongly encouraged the Dutch churches to abide by the doctrine as summarised in these confessions.

The foreign delegates also participated in other important discussions, regarding the Bible translation, the catechism teaching, and several other matters.

The Synod of Dort 1618-1619 was the last one in a series of synods, starting with the synod of Embden 1572, which dealt with the organisation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. In 1579, at the 'Unie van Utrecht', the Netherlands was established as the Republic of the Seven United Provinces. The Netherlands was at war with the king of Spain, but increasingly gained independence from Spain. During that time the situation for the Reformed Churches changed and from persecuted churches they became established churches which enjoyed the freedom and protection from the government. This situation was different from the Reformed Churches in other countries and therefore it was necessary to create a certain order for these churches in the Netherlands. However, there was at the same time also a strong bond with the Reformed Churches in other countries. There was no article needed in the Church Order to make any arrangement for that, because it was already happening.

For two centuries after the synod of Dort, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands did not have a General Synod. The churches did not so much function as a federation, as well as a number of local churches which sought cooperation with each other at classical level and the level of Provincial Synod. There was not much emphasis on being a church federation during those centuries.

To understand the situation as it was in the time of the Synod of Dort, and also see the importance of the developments after the Synod of Dort and its impact on church life, it is important to look at church history.

4.2. The Church in Europe before the Reformation⁶

In the first centuries of the Christian Church, after the ascension of our Lord, the Christian Church was spreading all over the Roman Empire and beyond. For three centuries, the church was separate from the government and from time to time persecuted or at least did not receive the protection of the government. This all changed under Emperor Constantine. From that time on, church and state were very much connected. With the fall of the Western Roman Empire, there came more and more separation between the Eastern and the Western Church, which became definitive in the Great Schism of 1054. Before that, there had been many schisms in the church but in those cases, schismatic groups were considered sects and many of them had left the church or were excommunicated. As a result there was only one Christian Church, worldwide, and locally it was clear what the Christian Church was. From 1054, there were the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Eastern

⁶ This is a very short summary of the church history of many centuries, and only that is mentioned here that is of importance for the topic of church relations. This history in much more detail can be found in most church history books. Books used here are K.D. Schmidt, *Kirchengeschichte*, Göttingen, 1984; Dr. S.G. de Graaf, *Hoofdlijnen in de Kerkgeschiedenis*, Kampen, 1948; and volumes 3, 4, and 5 of the series 'Geschiede Europas', WBG edition, München, 2010 – 2021. However, this information can just as well be found in many church history books which are readily available within our circles.

Orthodox Church in the East. Nevertheless, this was a geographic division, and had no impact on the local church.

5 During the second half of the 11th and the first half of the 12th century, the investiture controversy led to an increased power of the Church and specifically the Pope over the state. The large majority of the population was member of the church and being separated from the church was considered as detrimental for your salvation (extra ecclesiam nulla salus est: there is no salvation outside of the church). The Pope had the power to excommunicate even kings and emperors from the church, it was thought, and these rulers, out of concern for their own salvation, did not dare to speak out against the Pope.

4.3. Reformation

15 This all changed in the time of the Reformation, when Luther had the courage to burn the papal bull 'Exsurge Domine' in December 1520. This was the beginning of a process which would break the power of the Pope in large parts of Europe. In many countries other reformers stood up against the Pope and threw off the yoke of the false church.

20 During that time Guido de Bres wrote the Belgic Confession (1561) in which he explained in Articles 27 – 29 what the true church is and how she can be found. That was in a time of great confusion, where the people had been taught for ages already that there is only one Christian church and outside that church there is no salvation. Guido de Bres expressed his agreement with that but explained that that church was not necessarily the Roman Catholic Church. This church had become a false church and people should separate from it and join the true church, the Reformed Church. This true church was not always the 'church' which was protected and promoted by the state. In some countries it was, but in others it was not and there the true church was being persecuted or at least not protected by the state, as it was in the first three centuries of the Christian Church.

30 It was also during that time that the country borders in Europe were in constant flux. In those centuries, princedoms, kingdoms, empires were constantly being formed, changed, divided and swallowed up by others. There were no clear borders. Kings and emperors were dependent on the support of regional princes, nobility. Germany (the Holy Roman Empire) for instance consisted of lots of electorates which all had much power, which limited the power of the emperor. The emperor, strongly under influence of the Roman Catholic Church, tried to resist the Reformation. However, he also needed the support of the princes in his fight against the Muslims. As a result the princes were able to demand freedom for the Reformed Churches in their states. The power of the Roman Catholic Church was broken in Germany, and in other parts of Europe. We see here the enormous impact of the Reformation on the formation of several countries in Europe, and especially in the Netherlands. The situation in Europe started to change from one in which the (Roman Catholic) Church was all powerful, to one in which the local or regional government determined the religion. The phrase 'cuius regio eius religio' was first used in Germany but could just as well be applied to any country in Europe in those days. Regional independent states started to form⁷. The Netherlands (Republic of the Seven United Provinces) was one of the first. Many states in Germany and countries in other parts of Europe became

⁷ There was an increasing separation between Reformed and Lutheran churches and as a result the division, especially in Germany, was not only between Roman Catholic and Protestants, but also, within Protestantism between Reformed and Lutheran. Several of the German states became Lutheran, and Lutheranism also spread to Scandinavia, where it became the dominant religion. See K.D. Schmidt, page 360-362.

Reformed and the Reformed Churches could establish there. In France, the government remained Roman Catholic, but their Reformed Churches, even though often persecuted, were able to form a federation of churches and adopt a church order, which would later be a guide for the Dutch churches to develop the Church Order of Dort⁸.

The synod of Embden 1572, and later synods in the Netherlands, were working on developing a church order to arrange the affairs of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Many Dutch people had fled to areas in Germany and to London, where there were governments favourable towards the Reformed churches. The main contact of the Dutch churches with Christians abroad in those days was with these refugee congregations, as well as with the French churches.

4.4. Reformed Churches in Europe⁹

It was generally known which churches in Europe were Reformed churches.

In Germany there was a growing division between Lutheran and Reformed churches. The situation in Germany was such that the government of each state could determine the religion of that state (as determined in the peace of Augsburg, 1555). The northern states were mainly Lutheran or Reformed while most of the southern states were Roman Catholic. The prevailing churches in protestant states became the Landeskirche and the ruler often became the head of the church. Starting in 1814, there was a movement to unite all the Lutheran and Reformed churches into one. The king of Prussia tried to impose this union without consultation, which led to resistance among some Lutheran and Reformed churches. The Evangelical Church of the Prussian Union was formed. However, from 1845, separate 'free churches' were allowed, which only had nominal government control. The constitution of the Weimar Republic, formed in 1919, determined that there was no state church and there was freedom of religion.

In England, under Henry VIII, the church in England became independent from the church of Rome: the Church of England. Under subsequent rulers, the Church of England went back and forth between different forms of Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism. This back-and-forth led to many religious tensions. In 1646 the Westminster Confession of Faith was drawn up to be a confession of the Church of England. It also became the subordinate standard of doctrine in the Church of Scotland, which was strongly Reformed. This was adopted by the English parliament in 1648, but this was annulled again in 1660. However, when in 1668 William of Orange took over the throne from king James II and became king of England, Scotland, and Ireland, he enacted the Act of Toleration on 24 May 1689, which gave freedom of worship to many Reformed groups and churches. This settlement greatly impacted the policy up until 1830. The Church of England was the dominant church and those who were not a member of this church were blocked from many positions in national and local government and other important positions.

⁸ Although Lutheranism came to the Netherlands already in the twenties of the sixteenth century, it was still heavily persecuted. It was mainly through the French refugees, who were Calvinist (Reformed), that the Netherlands were influenced and therefore became Reformed. See K.D. Schmidt, page 370.

⁹ In addition to the sources mentioned earlier, for many of the details in this part the 'Encyclopedia Britannica' has been used, which can be found online: <https://www.britannica.com/>.

In France the government was strongly Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches were often persecuted¹⁰. The Reformed Churches in France and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, up until the beginning of the 80 years' war (1568-1648) were very much in the same position, and much of the church policy in the Dutch churches was taken from the French churches.

In general, we see that the situation in Europe was, for many years, one in which there was a constant struggle about the state church: was it Reformed, Lutheran, Roman Catholic¹¹? There often were other churches besides the State Church, which were sometimes persecuted, sometimes tolerated. However, it was still quite clear which churches were Reformed and which were not.

In the Netherlands, the government was supportive of the Reformation and the church was Reformed. When at the beginning of the 17th century division arose about the articles of the Remonstrants (Arminians), the federal government ('Staten-Generaal') ordered the churches for the sake of peace and quiet in the country to come together in a synod and deal with the controversies within the Reformed churches (the errors of the Arminians). This was the Synod of Dort which met in 1618-1619. Assistance was requested and received from several of the reformed churches in other countries in Europe.

There was a strong sense of unity between the reformed churches, while at the same time there was a realisation that it was important to formulate the Reformed faith properly, which led to the confessions being adopted by the churches. It is remarkable that two of the three confessions were adopted with the help and advice of foreign delegates (The Canons of Dort and Belgic Confession) while the third one, the Heidelberg Catechism, was already widely spread among the Reformed churches in Europe. There was a strong recognition of each other as Reformed Churches.

There was no need to make special arrangements for synod to determine how to enter into sister church relationships. There was a strong feeling of unity with Reformed Churches all over Europe, and also overseas churches (in the East Indies). There was still a strong sense of being part of the holy catholic church. This Holy Catholic Church, according to the Belgic Confession, was easy to recognise.

After the synod of Dort, for two centuries, there were no general synods in the Netherlands. Before 1618, every general synod in the Netherlands had adopted a church order and included it in the acts. The church order was a set of rules that could be changed at a next synod, and we see quite some development from synod to synod until 1618. After 1618 the Church Order was never fully implemented everywhere due to the political situation, and, in the absence of general synods, remained unchanged.

4.5. Separation of Church and State

The situation started changing in the 19th century, when through the Secession and Doleantie in the Netherlands and other divisions in other countries, there were more

¹⁰ The words often used by French kings and their ministers are "Un roi, une loi, une foi" (one king, one law, one faith). The French kings were strongly Roman Catholic and the Reformed Churches, as a result, always were a minority. See K.D. Schmidt, page 369.

¹¹ The Anabaptists strictly adhered to the idea of 'separation of church and state', and repudiated armed conflict, and were therefore not part of these struggles. See Robert G. Clouse e.a., *The Story of the Church*, London, England, 2002, page 163.

and different churches who used the name Reformed. Not every church that had the name Reformed, abided by the Reformed confessions.

5 Under the influence of the American war of independence and the adoption of the American constitution, there was a growing separation between church and state. In the time of Guido de Bres, the big church, supported by governments, was either the true church or the false church. If the government supported the Roman Catholic church and persecuted those who were not part of it, true believers had to secede from it and join the true (Reformed) church. If the government supported the Reformed Church (true church) no one should secede from it. In those times it was not hard to discern what the true and the false church were. That changed when the idea of separation of Church and State was spreading over the world. We can differ about what is the cause and what is the consequence. It is not the place here to determine why this did happen, but we just note these facts.

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15 The situation starts to develop in which there are more Reformed church federations in one country. In the Netherlands, the first synod of the united Reformed Churches after the union in 1892, mandated the deputies for correspondence with foreign churches, to attend synods in which Reformed Churches abroad were coming together. It was still a general mandate, and nothing was mandated with regard to specific churches. In 1896, we see however, in article 132, that more and more the focus shifts to specific churches abroad. However, until then the contact with churches abroad was mainly by correspondence, exchanging of greetings at assemblies, in general just formalities. The synod however concluded that relations with foreign churches should be more than that.

20
25 *The Reformed confession in the part about the church demands that our churches take on that important task in a different way. The confession does not know a State Church in the usual sense of the word, but maintains with emphasis the catholicity of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. The national form of church life is determined by language, customs, culture, etc., but nevertheless the Reformed principle does not tolerate that we lock ourselves up in our own country. On the contrary: it demands that we confess the unity with all Reformed churches in the world, and acting in accordance with this confession, maintain fellowship with those churches, also for the increasing cleansing from everything in their and our midst that does not agree with the Reformed principles. In the time that our churches flourished, this thought was alive; and it worked powerfully so that at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618 and 1619 the foreign churches of the Reformed confession had a very active participation in the labour of this famous synod, as we all know.*

30
35
40 *In 1648 the well-known synod of the English churches, gathered together in Westminster, still lived in accordance with this principle.*

45 *As a result of the increasing influence of the collegial church polity, that brought with it the locking in of ourselves in our own little country, and the decrease of Calvinist conviction, also this part of church life was deflated.*

Where, however, according to the graceful providence of our God in our country Calvinism was revived, there also our churches must make the correspondence with churches abroad subservient to the reviving and promotion of the Reformed principles in the churches with which we are in a relationship of

*correspondence. From this perspective, the matter of correspondence is of the highest importance.*¹²

5 The situation, as it started developing in the 19th century and became more pronounced in the 20th and 21st century, is quite new and unique in the history of Christianity.

10 This made the churches realise that it is not always easy to determine which churches in other countries are truly reformed churches and which churches are only reformed in name but not in practice. And that led to the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands deciding that it was important that sister church relationships would be dealt with at the level of synod.

15 Although it was already the practice in the first half of the 20th century, it is important to note that this change in the Church Order only came in the second half of the 20th century, in a time that the secularisation tendencies became very strong and Christians became more and more a minority. During that time the need for stronger relationships among Reformed churches all over the world was felt as increasingly important for the churches to remain in the Calvinist tradition. As formulated in the Acts of 1896, article 132, limiting of contacts with Reformed churches abroad was seen as a deviation from Calvinist principles.

4.6. Sister churches and other churches

20 The text of the church order articles of the Canadian Reformed Churches dealing with sister relationships is:

ARTICLE 50 – Churches Abroad

25 The relation with churches abroad shall be regulated by general synod. With foreign churches of Reformed confession, a sister-church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice churches abroad shall not be rejected.

Our former sister churches in the Netherlands had adopted this same article already in 1978¹³. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa have a text, which also is very much in line with that in the Canadian Reformed Church Order¹⁴.

¹² See Synod Acts 1896, Article 132, page 85-86; translation by A Souman.

¹³ The Dutch text is:

Artikel 47 – Relatie met buitenlandse kerken

Over de relatie met kerken in het buitenland beslist de generale synode.

Met kerken van gereformeerde belijdenis in het buitenland zal, zoveel mogelijk, kerkelijke gemeenschap geoefend worden.

Op ondergeschikte punten van kerkorde en kerkelijke praktijk zullen buitenlandse kerken niet veroordeeld worden.

This text is almost literally translated in the Canadian Reformed Church Order.

¹⁴ *Artikel 47 - Verhouding met buitelandse kerke*

Die algemene sinode beslis oor die verhouding met kerke in die buiteland. Daar sal, sover dit moontlik is, kerklike gemeenskap beoefen word met buitelandse kerke van gereformeerde belydenis.

Die buitelandse kerke sal nie op grond van ondergeschikte punte van kerkorde en kerklike praktyk veroordeel word nie.

The United Reformed Churches in North America have a bit different approach:

Article 34 – Ecumenical Relations on a Church Level

Churches are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with Reformed congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and demonstrate faithful allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Each church is to give an account of its ecumenical activities to classis. Fraternal activities between congregations which need not be reported to classis may include occasional pulpit exchanges, table fellowship, as well as other means of manifesting unity.

Article 35 – Ecumenical Relations on a Classis Level

The churches of a classis may, as a group, enter into ecumenical relations with an individual church or group of churches such as a classis or presbytery. The classis shall keep synod informed of such ecumenical relations, thereby honoring our federative bond.

Article 36 – Ecumenical Relations on a Federation Level

The federation may enter into ecumenical relations with other federations by synodical decision. Such a decision with respect to ecclesiastical fellowship shall require ratification by a majority of the synodically approved Consistories in the federation. Such a decision with respect to church union shall require a two thirds vote of a synod and shall require ratification by two-thirds of the synodically-approved Consistories in the federation.

And the OPC stands in a tradition which does not go back to the Synod of Dort, but is based on the Westminster Confessions:

OPC, Book of Church Order, chapter IV:

4. The visible unity of the Body of Christ, though not altogether destroyed, is greatly obscured by the division of the Christian church into different groups or denominations. In such denominations Christians exercise a fellowship toward each other in doctrine, worship, and order that they do not exercise toward other Christians. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have gravely departed from apostolic purity; yet all of these which maintain through a sufficient discipline the Word and sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true manifestations of the church of Jesus Christ. All such churches should seek a closer fellowship, in accordance with the principles set forth above.

4.7. Conclusion

From church history as well as from the documents of other Reformed churches it becomes clear that in the Reformed tradition, maintaining relationships with Reformed Churches in other countries is not a matter that is left to our discretion, but it is imperative to maintain contacts as much as possible in order to fully continue in the Calvinist (Reformed) tradition.

The Reformed doctrine emphasises the unity of the Holy Catholic Church, which must lead to correspondence and relationships between churches of Reformed confessions. This is what is summarised in our Church Order Article 46: With

churches of Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained as much as possible.

The situation we are in now, with often two or more Reformed church federations in one country, is new and developed at the end of the nineteenth and especially in the twentieth century. This is not a situation that is in accordance with the Bible. However, the question is if the principle that we can have only one sister church in one country, is in accordance with the Bible. In the past the Reformed Churches generally have been generous in accepting all those who are known as Reformed Churches. The position of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia is an exception.

5. Criteria for relations with other churches

5.1. FRCA synods on church relations

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) right from their inception recognised that we are part of God's church gathering work worldwide. Church Order Article 46 says "With churches of Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained as much as possible". Hence, the FRCA had a desire to seek church relations with known reformed churches at the time, namely, with Holland, Canada, South Africa and Indonesia.

The very first synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, held in 1954, asked their deputies to seek contact with overseas reformed churches known at that time (Synod 1954 Art 14 3a). The result was that the following synod in 1956 (Art 51) agreed on sister church relations with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, Canadian Reformed Churches and Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. Note that Indonesia was also listed by Synod 1954 but not mentioned at all in the acts until Synod 1980. Presumably, very little contact was maintained in that ensuing period.

Synod 1970 recognised that church relations go beyond only those you know historically and that we should seek unity with churches worldwide. This synod (Art 35) instructed deputies "to be active in seeking to establish contact with Churches that are faithful to the Holy Scriptures and to examine whether we can enter into correspondence with them". So, the criteria for sister relations were extended from those churches we already know to those churches that we come across that are faithful to Scriptures. This mandate to deputies was repeated by Synod 1972 (Art 53.6) and subsequent synods.

Synod 1980 (Art 30, towards end of decision) gave priority to geographically closer churches by deciding that "Closer contacts with geographically close churches will be developed wherever possible. Sumba, Sri Lanka and Taiwan are mentioned in this context". Synod 1983 focussed on churches known by our sister churches in its instruction to deputies "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" (Synod 1983, Art. 77).

The question now arose as to how far the number of contacts may increase. The proliferation of contacts by 1990 brought to light the difficulty, in terms of time and effort, of managing church contacts all over the world. How do we do justice in getting to know all these churches in an effort to establish a full sister church relationship?

By 1990 we had contacts with no less than 12 churches. In addition to our existing (historical) four sister churches, these included church federations in Australia (RCA - Reformed Churches of Australia and PCEA - Presbyterian Church of Eastern

Australia), New Zealand, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Singapore, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Scotland, Ireland and Uganda.

In regards to the contact of FRCA with the RCA, Synod 1992 (Art 78, Obs 7c) made the general observation that “the FRCA must be ready to assist those who desire to be truly reformed. As long as the door is open, we must use the opportunity [for] confessional ecumenicity”.

Synod Armadale 1990 (Art 58) decided that there needs to be some restraint on the number of sister churches that we can practically have. If we have a sister relationship, there is a realistic expectation to fulfill our obligations/promises in maintaining the relationship according to the rules set out for that purpose. We have to do justice to extending and maintaining our church relationships. The synod identified three items of concern: a) limited manpower resources of the churches, b) workload of deputies and c) time devoted to preparing for synods. Hence, synod decided to concentrate on relations with churches that are *geographically* closer.

This geographic proximity constraint was used by a number of synods in the decades following. For example, Synod Rockingham 2003 (Art 84) decided to suspend contacts with the FCS (Scotland), EPCI and RPCI (both in Ireland) and leave it to the Dutch sister churches to “allow them to exercise relations with these churches in a meaningful way”. Synod Baldivis 2015 also used this geographic proximity criterion in its decision on the Canadian Reformed Churches regarding other churches in North America (URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ) (Art 96) and in its decision on the Reformed Churches in Brazil (Art 129). Note that with the latter synod decision, the grounds recognise that the FRCA are a small bond of churches and that providing support (e.g. theological, academic or financial) does not require a sister church relationship. Hence there is some meaning to such a relationship, but it is not manageable.

Yet a further change in direction took place in 2015 and 2018 where our synods decided to have contact with two churches in North America (URCNA and OPC) even though they are not in geographic proximity to us. We have an existing sister church (CanRC) in proximity to them on that continent and to this point were keeping informed of the URCNA and OPC via the CanRC sister relationship.

Synod Baldivis 2015 (Art 39) made a decision to pursue contact with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) because it found “compelling reasons to pursue this relationship”. In 2018, Synod Bunbury decided that it finds “compelling reasons to pursue this relationship” with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in North America (Art 83). This same synod also decided to continue contact with the URCNA to decide whether we can proceed to establishing a sister church relationship. These two synods decided to go beyond the geographic proximity constraint of Synod 1990 for “compelling reasons”. While not really defining what they meant by “compelling”, they did specify reasons that they considered compelling. For the URCNA the reasons were: of similar language and culture, our CanRC deputies encouraged it, there are church members visiting both ways, they have resources and experience we could benefit from and they have mission work in our region (Synod 2015 Art 39 III) and for OPC the reasons were: they desire a relationship with us, same language, have a history for standing for the truth and they have sister church relations with several of our sister churches (Synod 2018 Art 83 III).

Synod Albany 2021 received a request from deputies to give some guidance for extending sister church relations since past synod decisions did change direction somewhat and were not always consistent. Synod decided to mandate deputies to propose guidelines, realising that this would also impact how we progress with

relations with OPC, URCNA, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Southern Presbyterian Church and also ICRC.

5.2. Evaluating the choice of criteria for church relationships

5 The unity of Christ's body, the church, is worldwide. If it were possible, we would be united in helping each other throughout the whole world (Belgic Confession Art 27; Kamphuis, p. 218; Schilder) in accordance with Art 46 of the Church Order. However, we need to recognise our limitations and inability to maintain a large number of relationships. We ought to be good stewards of our time and resources, seeking out those relationships that prove to be mutually beneficial for the upbuilding and accountability of both churches. The rules governing sister church relations need to be able to function as intended and we must do justice to the relationship by getting to know and stay informed about our sister churches.

10 Synod 1990 (Art 77, Consideration 1) summarised the considerations of previous synods regarding church relations as follows:

15 *Previous synods (1983, Article 96; 1987 Article 115) considered:*

- 20 a. *That the catholic church of Christ is spread and dispersed over the whole world and yet is joined and united in one and the same Spirit in the unity of the true faith by means of preserving the true doctrine and administration of the sacraments and the discipline in accordance to the ordinances of Jesus Christ as the Only Head. This is so, according to the Word of God (John 17:11, 20, 231; Ephesians 3:14-4:16; 2 Timothy 3:15,16) and the confessional documents based on the Word of God (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21 and Belgic Confession Articles 27-29);*
- 25 b. *That it is the calling of true believers and of the true churches to strive for unity in every place and every country with those who possess the same faith and maintain the pure preaching of the Word, the pure administration of the sacraments and the pure exercise of church discipline;*
- 30 c. *That the true believers and true churches ought diligently and circumspectly to discern from the Word of God which is the true church so as to practice unity of faith and ecclesiastical fellowship, and reject unity of faith and ecclesiastical fellowship with churches which publicly and continuously despise the Word of God and the true faith;*
- 35 d. *That churches ought to consider that the Lord Jesus congregates His church in other countries along other roads of historical progress so that differences become manifest in the way other churches profess their faith and practice ecclesiastical fellowship, e.g. as to liturgical and church government, whereas they do not deviate from the Word of God and maintain the true doctrine.*

40 Note that it was this same synod that also decided to reign in the number of church relationships being pursued at that time using geographic proximity as the criterion and taking into consideration the limited manpower resources needed to manage these relationships.

45 The following observations are noted by deputies with regards to seeking and establishing church relations:

1. By true faith we are all grafted into Christ (Lord's Day 7 of the HC) and are one body with all believers. As believers we are called to seek unity at the local level (Belgic Confession Article 28) and as local churches. In accordance with Article 27-29 of the Belgic Confession, we seek unity with other local churches in the form of sister relations. These sister relations are a practical application of expressing the unity in Christ as found in Scripture passages such as John 17 and Ephesians 4.
5
2. The unity of the church in Christ is catholic, that is, spread throughout the world "out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end" (Heidelberg Catechism LD 21)". Because we are created man and mere creatures, and because of sin, we cannot fully see this catholic church, not even in its existence today. Rather than seeing it, we simply believe a holy catholic Christian church as we confess it in our Apostles Creed (VanVliet 2021). We belong to Christ's church locally, and we recognise some true and faithful churches as sister churches, but cannot comprehend the extent of true churches in this world at any one time.
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3. We are not obligated to seek out every true church that we can find in the world. We need to responsibly and effectively manage each church relation. For example, being able to "mutually care for each other that they do not depart from the reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy" (Rule 2 of *Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations*) takes extensive time and resources to effectively accomplish. The unity of the church is the work of Jesus Christ. He will continue to gather, defend and preserve it. A church federation is not responsible to pursue church relations to extremities. We are comforted to know that God has promised that "in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).
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4. Of the 45,000 Christian church groups worldwide (VanVliet 2021), there are many true churches that we do not know or we may know something of but do not officially recognise as a sister church. In other words, of Christ's true and faithful churches in existence today, we only recognise some of those that cross our paths. Just because we may not officially recognise them as a true and faithful church, does not mean that they are not true and faithful. In fact, when we enter into contact with them with a view to becoming a sister church, we do so on the basis that they are a true church and we don't have evidence to the contrary; this of course happens well before our official recognition of them as true church.
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5. Our churches have had many other true churches cross our paths, but we have decided not to recognise all these churches but only selected ones based on such criteria such as geographic proximity, limited resources on our part to be able to manage these relationships, etc. (see Synod 1990 Art 58).
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6. In deciding which churches to progress towards a sister relationship, there must be clear criteria based on having meaningful relations and being able to manage these relations. We also need to know how to use these criteria to make a determination so that the final decision is faithful to God's Word and not subjective or biased.
45

So what are the criteria for deciding which churches to pursue relations with? The following list is gleaned from past synods and from responses to our request received from FRCA churches, sister churches and churches with whom we have contact.

- 5 1. Faithfulness to Scripture and Confessions. This is the primary and most important reason and includes maintaining the marks of the true church (BC Art 29). It is important that we pursue relations with those who love and fear the LORD (Mal. 3:16-18), tremble before his Word (Isa. 66:2), act justly, love kindness and walk humbly with their God (Micah 6:8).
- 10 2. Historical. Historical ties are important, particularly for those churches with which we share a common history and for churches with whom we have had a long-standing relation. Having shared the development and progress of our churches within these historical church relationships over a period of time brings also an obligation in maintaining our responsibilities towards them. Such ties would not easily be broken off apart from unfaithfulness or if proving to be unworkable.
- 15 3. Geographical. In the early decades of our churches our world was somewhat smaller in that we had limited contacts, but how about today where we have an increasing number of contacts globally using online communications technology and frequent world travelling? There are many more churches that cross our paths nowadays. Does the “geographic proximity” of 1990 still apply today? Although communications technology and virtual communication have made contact and meetings much easier across distances, the value of face-to-face interaction and personal visits and experiences cannot be replaced by technology. Hence, geographic proximity does have a role in the amount and level of meaningful contact with the people and places of the churches we meet.
- 20 4. Language and culture. Linguistic and cultural backgrounds very different to our own give an added challenge to maintaining sisterly relationships and, without any other reason for doing so, can be a rationale for not proceeding with such a relationship. However, the use of technology and people for translating languages and understanding cultural differences can also be of great assistance.
- 25 5. Need for mutual assistance. We may at times be responding to requests for assistance, requiring assistance ourselves and be able to grow ourselves in understanding and learning from the challenges, struggles and encouragements from other churches.
- 30 6. Interaction. This includes both quality and quantity of interaction. There may be opportunities and interactions that may (or can) be happening among individual churches and individual members. There may be practical engagements within the relationship such as sharing of information, exchange of ministers, sermons for reading elders, movement or engagement of people, sharing of articles and other practical interactions in the relationship.
- 35 7. Cooperation in mission. We ought to be especially ready to engage with and establish relationships with churches with whom we have contact or even cooperate with regards to aspects of the mission work conducted by the FRCA. Also, we should welcome the opportunity to have relations with our mission churches when they become instituted.
- 40 8. Similarity in church polity. There is value in a relationship where churches experience a high degree of unity in Scripture and Confessions.
- 45 9. Worldwide. The RCNZ have considered it might be worthwhile to have sister-churches in various regions e.g. Europe, Asia, Africa, in order to better

understand the needs of each part of the world, support missions and have a faithful church through whom aid can be sent in the event of a crisis.

- 5
10. Limited resources among the small bond of FRCA. Deputies, including ministers and elders, should not be overburdened to the point that deputy work in maintaining church relations has a significantly negative impact on their primary ministry and calling in their home church.

5.3. Recommendations regarding criteria for relations with churches

Deputies used the following principles to guide and underpin the criteria (and subsequent guidelines) used to decide which churches to have relations with:

- 10
1. Sister church relations are only to be extended and maintained with churches that are true and faithful to Scripture as summarised in the Reformed confessions.
 - 15 2. The manner in which sister church relations are to be maintained is in accordance with the rules adopted by Synod. These rules require a reasonable level of engagement and sufficient time and energy on the part of the churches to ensure that our mutual obligations as sister churches are met.
 - 20 3. Since Christ's Church "is not limited to one particular place or to certain persons but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world" (Belgic Confession Art 27) it must be acknowledged that it is impossible to have a formal ecclesiastical relationship with every true church. That also means that we need to be charitable with respect to our attitudes towards other churches, particularly those of the Reformed and Presbyterian persuasion, with whom we have no relationship.
 - 25 4. Once a sister church relationship is entered into, ending such a relationship ought to be done prayerfully and for compelling reasons. Sister relations ought to be broken off if the sister church proves to be unfaithful to the Word of God and refuses to heed the warnings to repent. Sister church relations *can* be disbanded with no judgment intended if the said relationship proves to be unworkable and/or unfruitful.

30 Deputies organised the criteria for relations with churches into three broad groups: *faithful* to Scripture and Confessions, *meaningful* in that there is a purpose and reason to maintain such a relationship, and *manageable* so that the relationship can function in terms of mutual obligations.

- 35
- 1) Faithful. The church must be a true church faithful to Scriptures and bearing the marks of the church (BC Art 27-29). This criterion is mandatory for all church relationships.
 - 2) Meaningful. A church relationship must have a purpose and substance to it. The following identifies such purposes (*in order of priority*):
 - 40 a) Catholic. The first purpose is, of course, to maintain the unity of faith and recognise the catholicity of the church. It is an expression of putting into practice Christ's high priestly prayer of John 17, Eph 4:4 and Art 27 BC.
 - b) Historical. Historical church relations involve those that we have recognised from across the world with whom we share a common history

or with whom we have had relations over a considerably long period of time. We have come to know these brothers and sisters and share in the struggle of faith to live before the Lord, show thankfulness for the grace and unity in Christ, and together fight the secularity in the world around us. As we have grown over many years and decades in getting to know and interact with our historic sister churches, we build up a responsibility and obligation to these brothers and sisters in mutual assistance in the struggle of faith. These are not contacts that are broken off lightly or easily.

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- c) Need for mutual assistance. There may be requests for assistance from other churches or we may require assistance from other churches. These are opportunities that need to be examined to decide if a church relationship provides an appropriate foundation to respond to and assist in such requests. Kamphuis (p. 204) comments that churches need to bear each other's burdens and assist each other, not just when asked to help.
 - d) Ability to communicate. Being able to communicate, and that on a regular basis, is important to be engage with each other and be mutually active in maintaining the rules for relations. Such interaction should preferably be face to face and include visits, meetings, sharing information with each other and informing our own churches. Are we able to maintain a reasonable level of communication? If there are differences in language and culture, is it possible to translate written material and have effective communication in meetings to engage and understand each other?
 - e) Level of interaction. What is the current level of interaction of our churches and members with these churches? Is there regular contact between individual churches in either bond? Are there activities happening between the churches at the local level? Are there interactions among individual members including visiting, attending worship services, and sharing in common struggles and challenges of faith? Even if only one or a few local churches or a few individuals are engaged, this small level of interaction may be a reason to have a church relationship that is maintained by the FRCA bond.
 - f) Cooperation in mission. There may be churches with whom we may come into contact via mission work, conduct mission work in regions near our own mission fields, or are the result of mission work that we have been involved with in the past. Church relations with them may be beneficial in order to work together with them on the mission fields and/or help each other for mutual encouragement and exhortation.
 - g) Church polity. Although different churches have different histories that have led to differences in church polity and practice, the need to mutually struggle to maintain our reformed heritage and build on how the Lord has guided and led His church through church history is important. We need to stand on Scripture and what our church fathers have fought for to maintain a true and faithful church of Christ. Differences in church polity such as reformed and presbyterian, as long as they are based on the foundation of Scripture and reformed confessions, need not be an obstacle to unity. There may need to be patience and encouragement to acknowledge that there are differences in history and practice and we need to learn from each other and grow. With churches of similar polity

and worship to our own, our relationship with them may be deeper and more meaningful as a result.

5 h) Worldwide. It is worthwhile to have sister-churches in various regions e.g., Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, to better understand the needs of each part of the world, support missions and have a faithful church through whom aid can be sent in the event of a crisis. This criterion would be particularly used for churches in regions where we have no existing church relationships.

10 3) Manageable. When moving forward in a church relation, we must be able to manage the relationship and do justice to the rules for maintaining the relationship. This may involve the following aspects (*in order of priority*):

15 a) Geographical proximity. It is important to maintain a good and appropriate level of contact in a church relationship and this involves interaction and visits on a regular basis. Although there are very good virtual and online means for communicating, there is no substitute or better interaction than through direct face to face communication. Churches closer together geographically or in the same country are better able to manage contacts and communications than churches more distant or dispersed geographically. For example, note that our FRCA bond of churches is geographically located in one country, Australia, albeit some 1000s of kilometers apart from west to east. As another example, note how the contact of FRCA with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Tasmania lies essentially with the churches in Tasmania and not via the other churches located elsewhere in Australia. Our focus should start locally in our own country, before going further abroad in the Asia/Pacific region, and then in the rest of the world.

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30 b) Language and culture. Where there are differences in language and/or culture, there may be much work required in translating materials and speeches or researching history and culture to understand, be informed and build a better appreciation and awareness of each other within a church relationship. Are we able to put in sufficient time and effort with appropriate tools and persons to manage this relation?

35 c) Ability to resource. Are we able, as a relatively small bond of churches, able to resource the time and effort needed to maintain our church relationships and even increase the number of church relations? We must be mindful that our ministers and elders need to, in the first place, spend sufficient time and energy in their own congregations and in our own bond of churches. Many relations mean many trips, visits, meetings, readings and writings for which we must ensure we have sufficient attention, time and energy in order to do justice to our relationship according to the rules.

Recommendation

In our contact with another church, each of the three following criteria must be met to determine whether or not to proceed to a sister church relationship: faithful, meaningful and manageable (see above for elaboration of these criteria).

Grounds

1. Well-developed and articulated criteria are important for the process of seeking and establishing a sister church relationship.
2. The three categories encapsulate all of the various criteria identified by the churches or used in past synods.

6. Types of relations with other churches

Article 46 of the Church Order states that:

“The relationship with other churches shall be regulated by synod. With churches of Reformed confession sister relations shall be maintained as much as possible. On non-essential points of ecclesiastical practice other churches shall not be rejected.”

Essentially one form of relationship exists which is that of “sister relations”. This has been recognised by past synods and forms the basis on how we proceed with a relationship. However, this article and our synods have recognised that a sister relation may not be possible. This article, in stating “as much as possible”, leaves room for the possibility that such a relationship may not be possible, and our Synod 1985 (Art 67) recognises “the fact that historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still lying on the road to a practical realization of unity”.

We first examine how our synods have dealt with types of church relations, how we deal with it formally and informally, some suggested options and a recommendation forward.

6.1. Types of relations with other churches in history of FRCA

The Australian synods first took up correspondence with “buitenlandse” churches presumably with awareness of the calling of being faithful to Scripture and the call to unity in Christ. At the 1959 synod they were first referred to as *sister churches*. In practice, synods would enter into correspondence with a church with the view to work towards a sister church relation.

Synod 1983 (Art 112 5i) instructed deputies to “formulate rules for temporary contact with churches which do not yet belong to the sister churches”. The following synod, Synod 1985, recognised that deputies deal with both sister churches and non-sister churches as evidenced by the decision (Art 74 I) to change the name of deputies from “Deputies for Correspondence with Foreign Sister Churches” to “Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad”.

Synod 1985 decided to be cautious in the use of the term “temporary relations” and made the decision (Art 74 II): “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”.

Because deputies did not yet complete their mandate to formulate rules for temporary ecclesiastical contact (TEC), Synod 1987 (Art 49 C3, D3) gave them a further mandate to do so. This synod also decided (Art 79 D3) to offer a temporary relation to the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPCI). The reason provided was that there were still some questions in the discussion leading to a sister church

relation. Synod 1987 also decides to reassess this temporary relationship at the 1989 synod (Art 79 D4).

5 Synod 1987 (Art 82 D5) also decided to offer TEC to the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) because of some practical issues with them accepting the rules for sister relations. As reasons for offering TEC this synod said that this “shows them our sincerity in recognizing them” and it also “requires official correspondence and discussion of items of mutual concern”. At the same time, Synod 1987 (Art 82 C8) also referred back to the principle of Synod 1985 Art 74 to indicate that TEC can be used “as long as this relation does not become permanent and as long as it is actively used to come to relations as sister-churches”.

10 Synod 1990 (Art 139 Rec 3a) used the TEC to further the relationship with the EPCI and continue discussions with the FCS.

15 Synod 1992 (Art 95 Consid 5, Recomm 5) decided to discontinue offering TEC for the reason that there ought only to be one form of ecclesiastical relationship. Although synod made this decision to be uniform with the Netherlands, they also gave as reason that TEC “was a temporary measure occasioned by the reluctance of reformed churches with a presbyterian form of government to adopt our rules for sister relations”.

20 Synod 1994 continued to use TEC in existing contacts (Ireland and Scotland). Apart from using TEC for some existing relations to aim for sister church relations, that brought the FRCA back to having only one official relationship, namely, sister church relations.

25 Our synods have also seen the need to maintain contact with a non-sister church when they are geographically in proximity to one of our sister churches and engaged with them as a sister church seeking closer unity. An example is from Synod 2006 used as grounds for a decision that “Seeing that the GGRI and GGRC are sister churches of each other, relations with the one makes contact with the other mandatory.” (Synod 2006 Acts Art 58 Ground b). This was also used for the GGRC and GGRI-Timor churches by Synod 2018 (Art 105 II 2e).

30 There is, however, another way that the FRCA have had some contact with other churches, and that is via our sister churches. Synod Baldivis 2015 indicated that where there are churches close in proximity to our sister churches, we can avoid duplication of effort by leaving the main contact with these churches to our sister churches. Further, this synod also asked deputies in its decision on CanRC to stay informed of the CanRC sister church developments in North America in relation to the URCNA, OPC, RCUS and ERQ churches (Synod 2015 Art 96 VI 2c). Hence, this is a way we currently get to know and remain informed about some other churches beyond our immediate sister churches. We can also have direct contact when we meet them at our sister church synods.

40 **6.2. Considerations surrounding types of relations with other churches**

45 The Scriptural call to unity and the Church Order reference to “sister relations” makes clear that there should only be one type of church relationship which we should aspire to. The human and practical reality of the limitations of man and living in a broken world is that this is not achievable on a world-wide basis. Churches exist and progress in time and geography in different ways among varying cultures and diverse experiences. Many true and faithful churches exist in this world. We *believe* that rather than see that according to our Apostle’s Creed “I believe a holy catholic Christian

church” (VanVliet 2021). We may recognise some of Christ’s work by crossing paths and getting to know some churches through various times and in various places. We will never see the full extent of God’s church gathering work in this world and we don’t need to, but we can recognise some of the unity in Christ along the pathways in which the Head of the Church leads our FRCA churches.

The FRCA synods have consistently maintained the principle that there ought to be only one form of permanent church relationship which is a sister church relation. Although synods did use TEC in a formal way for some time, that was only temporary and used to accommodate presbyterian churches who were reluctant to accept our sister church rules. Synod 1985 emphasised the principle of one church relationship and Synod 1992 discontinued the use of TEC; as a result, the FRCA churches reverted to one official type of church relationship.

However, in practice, the FRCA corresponds with churches to get to know them better prior to acknowledging them as a sister church, although this relationship is not given an official term. Further, the FRCA also gets to know other churches via its sister churches, and in particular the sisters of our sister churches, such as, for example, the URCNA, OPC and RCUS via the CanRC.

Many of our sister churches use the ICRC as a means of keeping contact with other churches without pursuing unity to the level of sister church relations. When the FRCA was a member of the ICRC (prior to 1996) we became aware of other churches, but did not use the conference as a means of initiating contact with other churches.

The submissions from the FRCA churches vary from suggesting we must only have one form of relationship, namely, sister church, to some suggestion for a second tier of church contact, also referred to as corresponding relationship, for churches with whom we decide not to pursue a sister church relationship but want to maintain some form of contact.

The recommendation (now being further investigated) of synod deputies to the CanRC Synod 2021 suggested three categories of relationship, namely: Ecclesiastical Fellowship – equivalent to our sister church relation, Corresponding Relationship – which is a less intense relationship used for churches with a less intense meaningful contact such as for more geographically distant churches, and General Contact – for mutual contact with other churches from NAPARC and ICRC.

The OPC has three categories of church relationships. The Corresponding Relationship is used for initial contact with a church with a view to entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the latter being equivalent to our sister church relationship. These two categories are used for churches in North America and any other churches that have substantial contact or history with the OPC. The Ecumenical Contact category is used for churches outside of North America.

The URCNA uses its Phase I Ecumenical Contact relation as a period of exploration in preparation for Phase II Ecumenical Fellowship which focusses on the unity in Christ with a sister church.

One of the FRCA churches commented that we should be using the term *ecclesiastical fellowship* instead of *sister church relation* since this term is more commonly used among our sister churches and others.

Some options for types of church relationships are as follows:

1. Maintain the current practice of the one formal church relation of *sister church*. Informally keep some contact with other churches via our sister churches as we currently do. Our synods decide on the churches with whom we may want to maintain contact with the goal of entering into a sister church relationship.
2. Have two formal relations: sister church relations and ecclesiastical contact. The former is as we currently have it. The latter is for a church where our synod decides not to progress to a sister church relationship (at this point in time) but sees value in maintaining some contact.
3. Have three formal relationships. In addition to the two types mentioned in (2) above, include a further one called Corresponding Relation. This would be used for churches with whom we have contact and are working towards a sister church relationship but have not yet reached that point in our interactions.

6.3. Recommendations on types of church relations

In working towards establishing a sister church relationship, our current practice is to enter into contact with a church while investigating it further to see if we can recognise it as true and faithful. Note how our Synod 1985 decision (Art 67) ties this recognition to the fact that we can now extend a sister church relationship, apart from some practical stumbling blocks should they arise. The implication of this is that we don't refer to a church as "true and faithful" until we are essentially at the point of time where we are prepared to offer a sister church relationship.

Article 67 of Synod 1985 was appealed by FRC Launceston to Synod 1987 which denied the appeal, and FRC Launceston appealed the 1987 decision to Synod 1990 which also denied it. The FRC Legana appealed the 1985 decision to Synod 2006 which subsequently denied it. Although decisions about the PCEA were being made at the time, the 1985 Art 67 decision was intended to apply to all church contacts "in the present situation of developing contacts with many other Churches both in Australia and abroad" (Ground 1, Art 67, Synod 1985). This was confirmed by Synod 1987 which stated "what applied to the PCEA would also apply to other churches" (Art 41 C3) and Synod 2006 which stated "This article applies our confession regarding other true churches, and does not go beyond our confession." (Art 59 III Grounds c). Deputies have used this Art 67 decision according to this interpretation.

One further aspect put forward by Art 67 of Synod 1985 is that "that our church members must join that church, and vice versa, in the case that such church is their nearest church, in accordance with article 28 of the Belgic Confession". The Committee for Contact with the EPC and SPC in their submission to Synod 2021 stated that "From a practical perspective, it would never work to insist that a sister-church relationship with either the EPC or SPC (or both) would require that members from these churches must join the church nearest them." (Deputies Reports to 2021 Synod, 4.3.2 p 194/5). The statement of Art 67 is in agreeance with Art 28 BC which states "But all and everyone are obliged to join it [holy assembly and congregation] and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church.". The phrase "nearest church" is simply a given obvious, as it was in the case of the PCEA in 1985, and it is not intended to micro manage church attendance by geographic distance. For example, it is quite apparent from looking at the church boundaries of the FRCA in the Perth metropolitan area that there are people who are members of one church but quite obviously closer in geographic distance to another (e.g. members of Kelmscott closer

to Armadale, of Cardup Brook closer to Byford) and Art 67 is not perceived or intended as an impediment.

5 Before getting to the stage of recognising a church as true and faithful, we have contact with a church over a period of time during our investigation and discussions. We don't have a formal name for this level of contact, since it is expected to be transitory as the contact develops into a sister church relationship, the Lord willing. Synods in the past did use a term called *Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact*, especially for when the process became drawn out with some practical obstacles in the way (refer above to discussion surrounding EPCI and FCS) but Synod 1992 discontinued the term as it could potentially not be temporary and not be actively used to develop into a sister church relationship. We do not suggest to resurrect this temporary relationship nor change the manner in which we seek to establish a sister church relation.

15 In addition to churches with whom we seek a sister church relationship, our churches do have informal contacts and correspondence with other churches who are not a sister church. This could be churches with whom we cross paths in the mission fields, know something about via our sister churches and meet at sister church synods and events, or from whom we receive requests or offers of assistance. Examples of recent interactions with our churches include:

- 20 1. The OPC whom we have come to know via our CanRC sister relations, even prior to our direct contacts with them, stood together with us and our sister churches at meetings and through correspondence against the deteriorating directions of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands (lib).
- 25 2. Recently, we had a request from the OPC for them to visit the Kosin Korean churches together with the CanRC and FRCA each year on a rotating basis; the KPC is a sister church to all three of us.
- 30 3. The church of Baldivis is doing mission work in the Philippines which intersects with work being done there by the URCNA and RCUS (both sister churches of the CanRC).
- 35 4. Our churches recently received a request for assistance from the Covenant Grace Church of Penang, Malaysia, who is a sister church to our FERC sister church in Singapore.
5. The churches at Launceston and Legana have had contact with two local churches, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Southern Presbyterian Church, and have put forward proposals to synods to seek church relations with them.
6. Many of our churches have received requests for attendance at Lord's Supper or even for membership from sisters of our sister churches (URCNA for example).

40 If there are some ongoing meaningful and useful interactions with such churches, it may be valuable to maintain some contact, even if we decide that these interactions are not sufficiently meaningful or manageable for establishing sister church relations with them.

45 Deputies propose that the sister church relationship as currently maintained by the FRCA continue to be used, and that a relationship of Ecclesiastical Contact (EC) be

also established. EC would be used for a true and faithful church for whom it is not sufficiently manageable (using the criteria/guidelines referred to in Section 5.3) to establish a sister church relation at this point of time. At any point of time, when and if it is deemed appropriate by a synod, this contact may develop further into a sister church relation.

Establishing EC with a church/federation would function as follows:

1. A full investigation is conducted to determine whether or not this church can be recognised as a true and faithful church in accordance with Scripture and confessions. This involves gathering information directly from the church, from sister churches who have a relationship with them, via written and online documentation, and/or using other opportunities that may be available. This process is the same as the equivalent step for churches with whom we are working towards a sister church relationship.
2. The relationship is maintained through keeping in contact with the church directly, meeting with them at synods and other gatherings of our sister churches, via our sister churches themselves who have a relationship with this church, and/or via other opportunities for contact. Rather than maintain an intensive relationship with this church as we do for sister churches, we would do due diligence through our sister churches, who would have a more intensive relationship with them; in cases where a sister church of ours has a relationship with them. This means that we build on the trust and knowledge of our sister churches as a judgement of charity. Our contact with these churches would be maintained with an attitude of mutual trust as expressed by Article 15 of Chapter 3 & 4 of the Canons of Dort. A less intensive direct relationship with these churches means also less resources and time that our churches need to invest into maintaining the EC relationship. Because of this, we also must take due diligence in exercising this relationship and our churches would need to take further measures when granting their members access to sacraments or receiving them as members. These further measures would include additional visits by the office-bearers in order to assess these members in both their doctrine and life. Also, classis advice would need to be sought if there were exceptional reasons to invite their ministers on our pulpit or even extend a call to a minister in their churches.

The benefits of having Ecclesiastical Contact include:

1. Maintaining the catholicity of the church as much as possible. We may not be able to proceed to a full sister church relationship due to it not being sufficiently manageable (refer Section 5.3) but we may be able to maintain contact with churches that are true and faithful and thereby have some meaningful connections.
2. There are many churches who are sister churches of our sister churches; with some we may have some measure of interaction at the church or membership level. EC may provide a useful framework to acknowledge them as true and faithful churches and have some engagement in which to encourage and exhort each other, without having to progress the relationship to a full sister church level. An example that could fall in this category is the contact the FRCA had with the Reformed Churches of Brazil, sister church of our Canadian sisters. The Synod Baldivis 2015 decision (Art 129) recognised that there was some meaning to a potential relationship but that it was not manageable (refer to Section 5.2 above).

- 5
3. There are non-sister churches who have contact or some interaction, not at our synodical level, but with one or more local churches of the FRCA, possibly through mission, engaging with mutual (both theirs and ours) sister churches, requests for assistance, etc. (refer above for examples). Having Ecclesiastical Contact with these churches will inform our local churches in the bond who may have some contacts or cross paths with these churches, for example, on the mission field, at ecclesiastical meetings of our sister churches or when assistance is requested.
- 10
4. At present there is no guidance for our churches who receive requests from members of non-sister churches for attending the Lord's Supper or for church membership. Such requests are handled individually by FRCA churches and different churches may handle them in different ways. For churches with whom we have Ecclesiastical Contact, we can use the Rules put in place to give guidance to our churches when receiving requests from members of these churches; additionally, this also helps inform these churches how they can expect us to engage with them.
- 15

Our church relationships are guided by mutually agreed rules. The *Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations* are unchanged (refer to Section 3.2).

20

For exercising a relationship of Ecclesiastical Contact, we would need rules of engagement that take into account the lesser amount of direct contact, limited knowledge and the fact that we may rely on our sister churches and other sources for additional knowledge about these churches. Suggested rules are as follows:

Rules for Exercising Ecclesiastical Contact

- 25
1. Ecclesiastical contact shall be used, as much as opportunity for contact arises, to be informed about one another and grow in the understanding of each other, assisting, encouraging and exhorting one another to live as churches of God in this world.
- 30
2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible, by sending each other their Acts or their Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to their respective churches (if possible, in translation).
3. The churches shall acknowledge one another's attestations and additionally examine these members in their doctrine and conduct (CO Art 57); this also applies to admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments.
- 35
4. The churches shall only in exceptional circumstances open their pulpits to ministers with whom we have Ecclesiastical Contact where due diligence is undertaken and concurring advice has been requested and received from classis.¹⁵

¹⁵ The privilege of having another church's minister on the pulpit is normally only open within sister church relations. There may be exceptional circumstances in which this privilege may be warranted for ministers from churches with Ecclesiastical Contact. However, this would only be done with classical advice to safe guard the pulpit. An example of such an exception is where an Australian theology student studying at CRTS may do an internship in the URCNA and be called to the URCNA eventually. When he comes "home" to visit Australia, may he come on the pulpit, especially in an FRCA church that knows him well? Classis concurring advice would be necessary for this to happen. A further example is if a church, that is the result of mission work of the FRCA, is received under EC rules, there may be a reason to invite their minister to the pulpit.

5. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as observers according to the *Rules for Synods*.

Regarding Rule 5, the following could be added to the *Rules for Synod* to clarify the privileges of EC delegates at our synods:

5 Delegates from churches with whom we have Ecclesiastical Contact will be
allowed to: sit as observers. An observer may address synod in open session
for the purpose of passing on greetings and information concerning their
churches and the EC relationship, speak in synod's open session when they
10 request or are requested to do so on matters specifically pertaining to the
ecclesiastical contact and to sit as advisory members in the advisory
committee(s) that deal with the ecclesiastical contact, where they may give
advice when they request or are requested to do so.

15 Deputies also note that the existing Rule 6.2 of the *Rules for Synod* refers to
"delegates from churches with whom we have temporary ecclesiastical contact" is
now obsolete and should be deleted.

Because any proposals for changes to the *Rules for Synod* must come from the churches according to Rule 12, we highlight it here but leave it to the initiative of the churches to propose the removal of Rule 6.2 and the addition of a new rule in relation to EC delegates.

20 **Recommendations**

1. Adopt a contact relationship called "Ecclesiastical Contact" which:
 - 25 a. Is extended to a church whom the FRCA have recognised as true and faithful but for whom the relationship, although meaningful, is deemed not sufficiently manageable to establish a sister church relationship at this point of time (using the criteria/guidelines referred to in Section 5.3).
 - 30 b. Is maintained on an ongoing basis by the FRCA by having some contact directly with the church, meeting them at synods or meetings of our churches or sister churches, or using other opportunities for contact that are available to us. This level of interaction would be substantially less than that for churches who are in a sister church relationship with us.
 - c. Can be changed to a sister church relationship should the FRCA deem that the relationship is sufficiently meaningful and manageable.
2. Adopt the proposed "Rules for Exercising Ecclesiastical Contact" (see above).

Grounds

- 35 1. Although the relationship may not be manageable at this time, EC is a means to maintain a meaningful church relationship with a recognised true and faithful church.
2. The workload of maintaining such a relationship is less than that for a sister church relation.
- 40 3. The relationship should be developed into a sister church relation if and when opportunity arises.

4. The rules for exercising Ecclesiastical Contact are sufficiently distinct from that for Sister Church relations and outline the additional due care necessary given the lower level of interaction in maintaining this contact.

7. Relations with multiple churches in the same region

5 How do we handle relations with a church if there is a sister church of ours already in that region? Further, what do we do in cases where that church and our sister church are not sisters or even not in contact with each other? These questions have been raised and discussed many times by deputies for particular situations. Therefore, it is good for our synods to have a clear decision on this.

10 7.1. Dealing with multiple churches in the same region in the history of the FRCA

15 The first synod of the Australian churches in 1954 (Art 14 3a) mandated deputies to seek a sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia. However, it was not mentioned again in the acts of synods until 1980 when deputies reported on the churches in “East Sumba” (Synod 1980 Art 30). Synod 1983 (Art 71) decided to continue correspondence with the sister churches of Sumba-Savu; this is the first reference to the Indonesian churches as “sister churches”.

20 Deputies provided Synod 1990 with information on the GGRC (then known as the Musyafir Churches or GMMT) and this synod received a request from these churches to enter into sister relations with them. Synod 1990 decided to seek contact to see whether we can recognise them as true and faithful churches (Synod 1990 Art 114 Rec 2c). Synod 1992 (Art 59 Consid 2) considered that “the FRCA cannot recognise the GMMT until the RCSTS [Reformed Churches Sumba Timor Savu] and GMMT have themselves done so mutually”. So the point was that these two churches need to recognise each other first before we can progress a sister church relationship. With thankfulness to the Lord, these two bonds of churches did indeed recognise each other as of 1992.

25 Deputies to Synod 1998 indicated that it was their “opinion [that] the situation in the GGMM [previously GMMT] needs to be stabilised before deputies can make a recommendation further”. This became a decision by the following synod; Synod 2000 decided as a ground that “The GGMR [previously GGMM] needs to be stabilised before recommendations regarding sister church relationships can be considered” (Synod 2000 Art 49 Gr 2).

30 In their report to Synod 2003, deputies indicated that one of the reasons we don't yet have a sister relationship with the GGRM is that we already have a sister church relationship with the GGRI. Synod 2003 (Art 73 Decision 3e) instructed deputies to “To monitor and report developments on the unity of GGRI with the GGRC [previously GGMR]. Where possible, to encourage these churches to fully put into practice the unity which they already recognise”. The ground for this is “The Lord calls His churches to be joined together. Such unity in Indonesia of the GGRI and the GGRC would also grant the FRCA the blessing of being fully united with all the churches that now meet in two different bonds.” (Acts 2003 Art 73, Ground 3e). The understanding of deputies and this decision and ground imply that two churches in the same country, although already sister churches to each other, should be uniting because of the calling of the Lord, which would then allow the FRCA churches to have a sister church relationship with them.

45 Although the following synod in 2006 (Acts Art 58 B4) continued to encourage these two churches to be united, they also recognised that “Seeing that the GGRI and

5 GGRC are sister churches of each other, relations with the one makes contact with the other mandatory.” (Synod 2006 Acts Art 58 Ground b). Given that this decision was made specifically for the situation with the GGRI and GGRC, this ground cannot be used as a basis to conclude that we must have contact with both churches in the same region that recognise each other as sister churches.

10 Synod 2009 put into a decision what was previously in the grounds only, namely, to “encourage the GGRC to work towards federal unity with the GGRI, especially in view of the anticipated unification of the three federations of the GGRI” (Acts Art 57 III 3). We observe that this focus of the last two synods has overtaken the original focus of synod decisions to directly pursue a sister church relation between FRCA and GGRC. In fact, these aspects were tied together in the decision of Synod 2012 (Acts Art 87 II 3) namely “To encourage the GGRC to strongly work towards federal unity with the GGRI and thus a sister-church relationship with the FRC Australia”.

15 Synod 2018 in its decision (Art 105 II 2e) to continue contact with the GGRC used as ground that “Because of ongoing contacts between the GGRI and GGRC and GGRI-Timor, it serves the best interests of our ecclesiastical relations with the GGRI also to maintain contacts with these two other church groups in Indonesia” (Acts Art 105 Gr 3).

20 Although somewhat of a different situation, since the DGK left the RCN, Synod initially encouraged them to engage with each other towards reconciliation, not being able to recognise the DGK because of our ongoing recognition of the RCN (Synod 2006 Art 92 III 3-5). The following synod also decided it could not acknowledge the DGK (then RCNr) as a sister church because it already had a sister church in the RCN (Synod 2009 Acts Art 75 V 1).

25 The FRCA decision that comes closest to its view on two churches in one country is from Synod 1996 (Art 53) where reference is made in Decision 5.b, in the context of mandating deputies to provide an explanation to the RCNZ, to paragraph 5.3 of the deputies’ report. The deputies made a general statement that “The FRCA believes it is contrary to the confessions regarding the church to recognise two churches in one country, when those two churches are unable or unwilling to work towards unity”. This position is qualified in that it only refers to situations where these churches are unwilling or unable to work to unity.

30 A further example is from Synod 1983 which made a decision in Article 84 to propose an insertion to *Article 4 Membership* of the constitution of the ICRC which reads “(members which) show willingness to strive for unity with member churches of the Conference in their own country”. Through this decision, the FRCA believed it was important that churches within one country must show the willingness to strive for the unity in Christ of John 17.

7.2. Recommendation on relations with multiple churches in the same region

40 From these examples of past synod decisions, it is apparent that the FRCA has the practice not to enter into a sister church relationship with churches which are in close proximity of existing sister churches if they do not express unity with each other. However, there is no officially adopted statement by an FRCA synod and there are no synod decisions that further elaborate on the position of the FRCA in regards to acknowledging two sister churches in one region.

45 The position taken by the FRCA is in response to the calling for churches in close geographic proximity to seek unity with each other. What does that unity entail?

Ideally it should be the closest expression of unity which is being united within the same bond of churches. However, it is recognised that Christ's church gathering work is a dynamic work in progress and that full unity may not be possible due to cultural, historical or practical reasons or obstacles. In such a case, both churches could move forward in a sister church relationship or at least a recognition of each other as true and faithful. If that is not possible, how can we enter a sister church relationship with two churches living side by side who are unable or even unwilling to recognise each other?

The position outlined above makes the assumption that a judgement is able to be made regarding churches who may be unable or even unwilling to recognise another church in geographic proximity. The FRCA recognises that being able to judge such a situation may not be possible or may be unwise. Deciding on the way forward would then require the Lord's wisdom and blessing in prayer.

Recommendations

The FRCA cannot consider and pursue a relationship with a church that, though in geographic proximity of a recognised true and faithful church, is unwilling or shows no evidence of seeking and expressing unity with that church.

Grounds

1. The FRCA recognises that Christ's church gathering work is dynamic and a work in progress, and there may be instances where two churches in geographic proximity are not expressing complete unity because of such differences as cultural, historical or practical, without taking away from the unity of faith.
2. The faithfulness of a church includes the way in which it practices unity and relations with churches in geographic proximity.

8. FRCA and ICRC

FRCA is one of the founding members of the ICRC but decided to withdraw its membership 14 years later. The history and discussions of the FRCA surrounding that engagement with the ICRC are first outlined. Then some observations are made about that relationship and the pros and cons of membership. This is followed by a short synopsis of the two opposite viewpoints before providing recommendations that best serve the next synod.

8.1. History of FRCA and ICRC

The original idea for an ecumenical synod or conference came from the FRCA deputies in 1978. The intent was to discuss common issues among sister churches (Deputies Report to Synod 1987 4.2.1). In response to the report of deputies, Synod 1978 (Art 38) decided that "Synod agrees with the principle for an ecumenical Synod as mentioned in the report of deputies". However, the membership to the first constituent meeting changed as the Dutch deputies additionally invited churches who they had contact with meaning that the FRCA churches met churches whom they had not acknowledged as true and faithful.

The Constituent Assembly of the ICRC was held 26 Oct to 4 Nov 1982 in Groningen, The Netherlands, where two deputies represented the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). Although the original intent of the conference had changed, the FRCA decided in 1983 to officially become a member of the ICRC (Synod 1983 Art

87). This was not without concerns since synod grappled with a number of issues for which it tabled proposals to the ICRC which were subsequently rejected. These concerns primarily dealt with Article III of the Constitution about the purpose of the conference, namely:

5 ARTICLE III PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfilment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters; and
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

The concerns expressed in Synod 1983 included:

- i) Not all member churches in the ICRC have official correspondence with the FRCA (Art 80).
- ii) There is an impression that member churches already have accepted one another fully as sister churches (Art 80).
- iii) There is insufficient clarification to the meaning of (5) and the mission command has been given to the church, not to a conference (Art 81, 83).
- iv) Given the command to show unity and that member churches need to strive for unity, this should be limited to member churches in their own country (Art 84).
- v) Some churches invited to the ICRC are still members of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) (Art 82, 87).
- vi) The purpose of the conference cannot be implemented until there first is unity of faith established by recognition as sister churches (Art 87).

Although synod declined all amendments relating to the above concerns, it did mandate deputies to table (presumably at the ICRC) the decisions of Articles 80-86.

Synod 1983 also made a number of observations which include (Art 62 5-7):

- 5) The problem of double correspondence is indeed a major one. As a guideline the deputies suggest that it would be impossible to establish a sister church relationship with any church which has close ties to a church which is directly opposed to our churches.
- 6) At the conference the churches were in an equal position.

7) The I.C.R.C. will not have any authority over the local churches. It will be an advisory body only.

Synod 1985 Art 88 Gr 12 decided that “The decision to join the I.C.R.C. was based on our acceptance of the constitutional BASIS and PURPOSE, and not on any evaluation of potential member Churches.”. However, this synod also mandated deputies to pursue some constitutional amendments to address the concerns. By the 1987 synod, these amendments had not yet been considered by the ICRC, and hence this was left until 1990 synod. The 1990 synod renewed some of these concerns, in particular four of them, paraphrased as follows (Synod 1990 Art 145 Consid 14, 15, 18 19):

- i) Do we have unity of faith as per the constitution, when we haven’t recognised some member churches as true and faithful churches?
- ii) Because the conference purposes “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ”, what happens when evidence appears that member churches maintain practices which conflict with the standards and Scripture?
- iii) Given that our membership in the ICRC obliges us as per constitution to seek the “fullest ecclesiastical fellowship” with other member churches, what happens when a sister relationship proves impossible?
- iv) What are positive grounds and calling with regards to membership in the ICRC?

Not all of the deputies work in consulting with the sister churches was completed for Synod 1992 but it became clear that most of the concerns centred around the first two purposes of the ICRC, namely:

“1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Member Churches have in Christ;

2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches;” (ICRC Constitution III. Purpose)

Deputies were divided on their conclusions and expressed this in two different reports (A and B) to synod. The two positions are paraphrased and summarised as follows but well detailed in the Deputies Report to Synod 1992 (pp. 182-212):

Position A: The unity of faith that is expressed and promoted is on the basis of the confessional unity on which member churches are based. It doesn’t mean that a full sister church relationship is a prerequisite to joining the ICRC. It is an aim that can take some time, rather than a prerequisite. The ICRC is a conference, not an ecclesiastical assembly.

Position B: We can’t express unity of faith with other member churches with whom we do not have a sister church relationship. By virtue of ICRC membership, we already have a unity of faith with other member churches even though we have never acknowledged them as true and faithful churches. This is the wrong way around; we first need to acknowledge these as churches before joining the ICRC and expressing and promoting unity of faith with them.

Because deputies didn’t finish their work, Synod 1992 (Acts Art 124) decided to continue ICRC membership and asked deputies to complete their study and consult

with sister churches. Deputies did complete their study and presented to Synod 1994 a detailed report outlining the case for and against continued membership of the ICRC (refer to the detailed report and appendix on pp. 213 - 251 of deputies report to Synod 1994). Synod 1994 considered the study of concerns about ICRC membership completed and continued membership in the ICRC. A number of reasons made were (Synod 1994 Art 83 Grounds 3 i-iv):

- i) the ICRC is a conference, not an ecclesiastical assembly, and its conclusions are advisory.
- ii) admission of member churches to this conference may not be equated with the official recognition of a bond of churches which is made by our broadest ecclesiastical assembly, the synods.
- iii) the overall purpose of the ICRC is 'to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ'. This 'unity of faith' is an overall goal to aim for as the second purpose clarifies. In so far as we have sister churches in the ICRC we already practise this goal; concerning those churches who are not (yet) sister churches, this conference is a vehicle to pursue this goal.
- iv) Lord's Day 7 specifies what true faith, and thus what unity of faith, means. That member churches in their reformed standards confess and adhere to 'the sure knowledge' that everything from Genesis to Revelation is the truth, the Word of God; and that they have shown their 'firm confidence' in all the promises of the Gospel gives us confidence in meeting these churches at an international, reformed conference, and in fulfilling our obligations as outlined in 'Article III – Purpose' of its Constitution.

This same synod also decided to propose a constitutional amendment to the next ICRC regarding the first purpose (note: which never occurred because of the Synod 1996 decision). Synod 1996, in response to several appeals to the 1994 decision, decided to withdraw the FRCA membership in the ICRC essentially for the following reason "The membership of the FRCA in the ICRC has not promoted harmony and unity in the churches." (Synod 1996 Art 95). Since then, the FRCA have not participated in the ICRC. An overture proposing to send observers to the ICRC was denied by Synod 2021 (Art 113) to provide opportunity to address unresolved issues from past synods and obtain further input from the churches. The decision reads as follows:

III. Decision

Not to accede to the proposal of Classis North.

Grounds

1. Prior to re-engaging with the ICRC, there is merit in reflecting on what has been said by our synods in the past and, where appropriate, to address matters that were left unresolved.
2. Even though the proposal from Classis North is limited to involvement in the ICRC as observers rather than as members, one of the grounds provided by Classis North mentions the possibility of reconsidering membership. This is the aspect that some of the churches have expressed concerns about.

3. Further input from the churches would be valuable, prior to making a decision to re-engage with the ICRC.
4. Synod has mandated Deputies for Interchurch Relations to develop guidelines which may have implications for FRCA engagement with the ICRC. The consultation process around guidelines will give churches a further opportunity to provide input.

In order to facilitate Grounds 1, 3 and 4, this report contains this section on ICRC membership.

8.2. Analysis of the situation of the FRCA regarding the ICRC

Deputies make some considerations regarding the ICRC in relation to the FRCA and other churches as follows:

1. When non-sister churches joined the ICRC, membership became a divisive issue in the FRCA because of what it means to express and promote the unity of faith with them in the ICRC.
2. Given that membership of the ICRC was a divisive issue in the FRCA more than 25 years ago in 1996 when the FRCA withdrew, future synods must be considerate of what our churches say today on this matter.
3. When the FRCA was considering withdrawing from the ICRC, and also now, some two and a half decades since the Synod 1996 decision, it is noted that all our sister churches, apart from the FERC in Singapore, are still members of the ICRC and have not had the same issues regarding the overall purpose of the ICRC.
4. We can appreciate that the first purpose of the ICRC "to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ" is a means to ensure that only churches that adhere to the reformed faith are accepted as members. We would not want it otherwise and have an appreciation for this clause for this reason.
5. In discussing "unity of faith", we need to remember that churches do not create unity among themselves, but express and manifest their given unity, created by Christ (Wielenga p.224).
6. We appreciate that the ICRC has spelt out in its constitution Art V *Nature and Extent of Authority* that it is not a church assembly, nor may it "curtail, restrict, or intrude into the exercise of the jurisdiction or authority given to the governing assemblies of the Member Churches by Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church".
7. There are many ways in which we can have and maintain contact with non-sister churches; the ICRC is one, but not the only, such means.
8. Some other churches use the ICRC to maintain contact with churches outside of their sister relationships. The RCNZ recognises limitations in its resources for managing sister church relations and therefore encourages contacts with other churches to be maintained through the ICRC. The FRCSA, as a small federation managing a small number of sister church relationships, maintains contact with other churches especially in the African region, via the ICRC. The

OPC, on the other hand, includes all ICRC churches in their Ecumenical Contact relationship.

Some of the reasons for engaging with the ICRC include:

- 5 1. Participation in the ICRC could be beneficial for our churches. The ICRC provides a forum for faithful Reformed churches to encourage one another in our service to the LORD. As Reformed churches we face various challenges in remaining faithful and it could be helpful for us to participate in a conference with others who uphold God's Word as summarised in our confessions. As churches we would likely benefit from the insight and experiences of other faithful churches who have had to struggle in upholding the authority, sufficiency and clarity of Scripture. We could also learn from others how to remain faithful in times of persecution and benefit from developing a greater understanding of God's work in gathering his church from around the world. At the same time, we believe that we might also be able to be a blessing for other Reformed churches with the insights God has given to us. We note, for example, the CRTS has often reflected with thankfulness the presence of our students at the seminary, since they also bring a unique perspective to the seminary that would be missed if our students were not present.
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- 20 2. By being part of the ICRC, the FRCA would have a voice around the table influencing the discussions and directions of reformed churches worldwide.
- 25 3. As part of the ICRC, the FRCA would be able to stand together with our sister churches who are also in the ICRC and lend them support and encouragement. Our Canadian sister churches have communicated to us the value of the ICRC and encouraged us to consider membership (Art 169, Decision 3.4.3, Synod of Guelph 2022). Our South African sister churches, through several meetings with our deputies, have also encouraged the FRCA to participate in the ICRC to be of assistance and support to each other, especially in our regional areas.
- 30 4. This may be an efficient way for our Deputies for Interchurch Relations to meet with the delegates of our sister churches and churches with whom we have contact.
- 35 5. It could be good to have some insight into other churches so as to be able to offer guidance to those legitimately withdrawing membership from the FRCA, for the purpose of joining a non-sister church.

Some of the reasons for not engaging with the ICRC include:

- 35 1. We do not know about the doctrinal faithfulness of all the other churches in the ICRC. While we are grateful to read from our sister churches who are members of the ICRC about the faithfulness they witness and the blessings they receive from the ICRC, we do not know all the member churches well enough to make that judgment.
- 40 2. We are concerned about the membership of the Christian Reformed Church of Australia. We understand that these churches joined in part because they were seeking assistance from other faithful Reformed Churches in their effort to remain faithful. We applaud that goal. But at the same time, we wonder: what implication will this have for us at home? It seems that one of the primary ways the ICRC functions is that we learn about faithful churches in other places, and at times direct our membership to search out one of these churches if they live
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somewhere in the world where one of these churches is present. What message is it sending to our members if we are members of the ICRC alongside of the CRCA? Our concerns with the CRCA date back to 2003 when our discussions with them were discontinued on the grounds that “It has become clear the appeals are either unheard or rejected by the CRCA, further contact with the CRCA is not warranted.” (Ground of Acts Art 96). Since then, there have been no further interactions with them at the synodical level.

3. Being a member would mean that ministers and elders will have to attend the conference and make reports etc, taking them away from the preaching and supervision in their church which is their primary calling and task.

8.2.1 Brief synopsis of the case against ICRC membership

The first purpose of the ICRC “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ” states that there is an existing unity of faith that the member churches have. This unity of faith can only mean the unity as expressed in Eph 4:3-5: “...the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”.

This one unity is Scriptural and confessional. A church is united in Christ if it bears the three marks of the church as outlined in Art 29 of the Belgic Confession, namely, 1) practises the pure preaching of the gospel, 2) maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ has instituted them and 3) exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. If it bears the marks of the church then it is a true and faithful church and shares a unity of faith with other true and faithful churches.

These churches are able to express this unity of faith in sister church relations. However, in the ICRC, not all member churches are sister churches of each other, and therefore do not recognise each other as true and faithful churches; hence, the unity of faith is not present among all ICRC members and the FRCA cannot agree with the first purpose of the ICRC. Therefore, the FRCA cannot join the ICRC.

8.2.2 Brief synopsis of the case for ICRC membership

The first purpose of the ICRC “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ” states that there is an existing unity of faith that the member churches have. This unity of faith can only mean the unity as expressed in Eph 4:3-5: “...the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”.

This one unity is Scriptural and confessional. A church is united in Christ if it bears the three marks of the church as outlined in Art 29 of the Belgic Confession, namely, 1) practises the pure preaching of the gospel, 2) maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ has instituted them and 3) exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. Sister churches of the FRCA are true churches since we have recognised the three marks of the church in them. The FRCA also have contact with other churches with whom we are progressing to recognise as true and faithful. However, this recognition

5 does not mean that such a church becomes a true church upon our recognition, rather, the recognition is an expression of acknowledging that they were already and are still a true church. In fact, the FRCA would only engage with a church on the basis that it is a true church, evidenced by some initial information obtained through direct contact with that church and/or via information from our sister churches, where that church professes to be faithful in every aspect of Reformed doctrine and there is no evidence to the contrary.

10 The FRCA do not have contact with many (third-party) sister churches of our sister churches. However, on the basis of the trust we share with our sister churches, we believe these third-party churches to be faithful churches, otherwise, if we have evidence to the contrary, we would have to admonish our sister churches for having church relations with them.

15 For other churches who are not sister churches of us nor of our sister churches, we would need to rely on other information sources including the ICRC membership application itself, the two sponsoring churches, and at least two-thirds of ICRC member churches who voted in favour of their application for membership. We would therefore, after an initial investigation, express an informal judgement of charity acknowledging that this church also professes unity of faith. If we have evidence that a member church is, in its doctrine and practice, no longer in agreement with the Basis – Scripture and confessions – then we must submit a proposal to the ICRC to terminate the membership of that church, as per Article IV of the ICRC Constitution.

25 Unity of faith is not dependent on our official recognition but already exists due to Christ's work. The unity of faith that we have and share is also not perfect but is the dynamic work of the Spirit. That is something that Paul recognises in Ephesians 4 when he explains what that unity is, namely "one body and one Spirit...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (vs 4, 5). Because it is a dynamic work in progress, Paul also encourages the Ephesians to "maintain the unity of the Spirit" (vs 3) "...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (vs 13). Churches that have unity of faith are at different stages along the pathway to attaining the full measure of unity of faith, but the desire to attain that unity of faith according "to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" must be there in doctrine and practice.

35 On this basis, there exists a unity of faith with other churches in the ICRC, based on what we currently know about them, even if we have not fully investigated them and have not formally recognised that they are true and faithful. Therefore, the first purpose is not a stumbling block for the FRCA to join the ICRC.

40 In regards to the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) who are currently members of the ICRC, we would need to investigate them more fully to ascertain where they are currently faithful in Reformed doctrine and practice. However, this would require a proposal to synod from the FRCA churches. Note that our FRCA churches have not had official contact with the CRCA for more than 27 years since correspondence with them was discontinued by Synod 1996 (Acts Art 71) and Synod 2003 decided that further contact was not warranted (Acts Synod 2003 Art 96).

8.3. Recommendations regarding the ICRC

5 In order to best serve Synod 2024, deputies have agreed to put forward different options for recommendations in order to let the FRCA churches, through their next synod, decide the pathway forward regarding membership of the ICRC, rather than deputies recommending a particular direction to synod. Hence, we put forward four options with supporting grounds.

10 From the feedback received from the churches, there is broad support for option D and some support for either options A or C. Based on the feedback from the churches, the deputies would support either options C or D keeping in mind the intention of Synod 1996 to promote “harmony and unity in the churches” (Art 95). However, for the benefit of Synod 2024, all four options are put forward. May the Lord bless the deliberations and decisions of this next synod for the upbuilding of the churches.

Option A:

15 Recommendation A: FRCA does not join the ICRC.

Grounds A:

1. Regarding the first purpose of the ICRC “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ”, there is not an existing unity of faith with the FRCA since the FRCA do not have sister church relations with all ICRC member churches.
- 20 2. The first purpose of the ICRC incorrectly assumes a true oneness between member churches. However, the true unity of faith of Scripture and Confessions (e.g. Eph 4:1-6 and BC Art 29) does not necessarily exist among all ICRC member churches.
- 25 3. Regarding the second purpose of the ICRC “to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches”, this implies that we should be seeking sister church relations with all ICRC member churches. However, seeking sister church relations is a decision that the FRCA churches must make and should not be directed by the ICRC or be an obligation stemming from ICRC membership.
- 30 4. It would be duplicitous for the FRCA to join the ICRC to “express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ” for as long as there is known disunity between the FRCA and other member churches.
- 35 5. The FRCA terminated its membership of the ICRC in 1996 because it did not promote harmony and unity within the FRCA churches.

Option B:

Recommendation B: FRCA applies to join the ICRC.

Grounds B:

- 40 1. Regarding the first purpose of the ICRC “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ”, the FRCA believe that there is a Scriptural and confessional unity of faith based on the fact that

member churches profess to be faithful churches in Reformed doctrine and there is no evidence to the contrary. This observation is based on insights obtained through one or more of the following: i) direct contact with these churches, ii) the trusting relationship of our sister churches who may have more knowledge through church relations and contacts with them, and iii) other means available to us that reliably inform us regarding these churches.

2. We appreciate the first purpose of the ICRC and are thankful that it exists as it can be used to ensure that only churches that adhere to the reformed faith are accepted as members of the ICRC.
3. The second purpose of the ICRC “to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches” echoes the call to unity of faith of John 17 and Eph 4. It does not obligate the FRCA to seek relations with all ICRC member churches. Instead, the FRCA have a process adopted by synod for establishing church relations and with whom.
4. Given that there are two churches in our geographic region that are members of the ICRC, the CRCA (FRCA discontinued contact in 1996) and the PCEA (FRCA discontinued contact in 2006), the FRCA will need to investigate whether their doctrine and/or practice is in agreement with the Basis – Scripture and Confessions – of the ICRC. It is a biblical command to seek unity with all those in our own country who confess the same faith. Membership of the ICRC would oblige the FRCA to seek contact with the CRCA and the PCEA. However, the CRCA and PCEA being members of the ICRC does not need to be an impediment for the FRCA to join the ICRC.
5. The ICRC as a conference is a means to engage and interact with other reformed churches. It is not an ecclesiastical body and cannot place matters on the agendas of our synods; that is exclusively the privilege of the FRCA churches.

Option C:

Recommendation C: FRCA does not join the ICRC.

Grounds C:

1. Membership in the ICRC does not promote harmony and unity within the FRCA churches (refer Synod 1996 Art 95).
2. There’s no biblical command to join an international conference of any sort.
3. There are other options to meet with sister churches and maintain contact with other churches.

Option D:

Recommendation D: FRCA sends observers to the ICRC.

Grounds D:

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1. Regarding the first purpose of the ICRC “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ”, the FRCA believe that there is a Scriptural and confessional unity of faith based on the fact that member churches profess to be faithful churches in Reformed doctrine and there is no evidence to the contrary. This observation is based on insights obtained through one or more of the following: i) direct contact with these churches, ii) the trusting relationship of our sister churches who may have more knowledge through church relations and contacts with them, and iii) other means available to us that reliably inform us regarding these churches.

2. We appreciate the first purpose of the ICRC and are thankful that it exists as it can be used to ensure that only churches that adhere to the reformed faith are accepted as members of the ICRC.

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3. The second purpose of the ICRC “to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches” echoes the call to unity of faith of John 17 and Eph 4. It does not obligate the FRCA to seek relations with all ICRC member churches. Instead, the FRCA have a process adopted by synod for establishing church relations and with whom.

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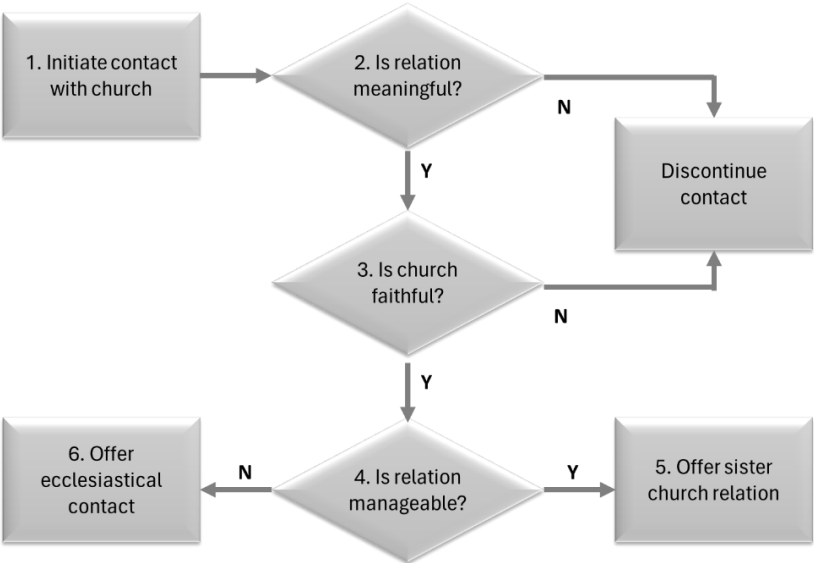
4. Given that there are two churches in our geographic region that are members of the ICRC - CRCA (FRCA discontinued contact in 1996) and PCEA (FRCA discontinued contact in 2006) – the FRCA will need to investigate whether their doctrine and/or practice is in agreement with the Basis – Scripture and Confessions – of the ICRC. For that reason, the FRCA cannot yet join the ICRC as a member.

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5. The ICRC as a conference is a means to engage and interact with other reformed churches. It is not an ecclesiastical body and cannot place matters on the agendas of our synods; that is exclusively the privilege of the FRCA churches.

9. Guidelines for Church Relations

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Based on discussions and recommendations in this report, the following is recommended as the Guidelines for Church Relations:

- 1) Initiate contact with a church or church bond (call it Church X).
 - a) The initial contact with Church X, whether or not it originates from Church X or one of the FRCA churches, must first be placed on the agenda of synod by our FRCA churches, in order to even be considered by synod.
 - b) A synod may then decide to obtain information about Church X from sources such as: directly from these churches, from our sister churches, from other available sources such as web sites, records of ecclesiastical assemblies, and from any other available sources.
 - c) From the information we can glean about them, Church X must profess to be faithful in Reformed doctrine and practice and there is no evidence to the contrary.
 - d) If the initial gleaned knowledge and discussions reveal that Church X appears to be faithful in Reformed doctrine and practice, then we can progress contact with them in mutual trust on the basis of unity in Christ (Eph 4:3-6, CoD Chpt 3&4 Art 15). Progress to Step 2.
 - e) Otherwise, if there is evidence to show that Church X is not faithful in Reformed doctrine and practice, then contact must be discontinued and these churches appropriately informed.
- 2) Is the relation with this church meaningful?
 - a) The answer to this question may be addressed through further communication, visiting these churches and coming to a better mutual understanding of joys, struggles and needs in faith.
 - b) The first and most important criteria (see list in Section 5.3) listed for *Meaningful* is *catholic* which is always a meaningful reason to pursue relations as it addresses Christ's call to us to seek unity (John 17).
 - c) Additionally, we need to address *one or more* other criteria to determine if the relation is meaningful. In addressing each criterion, the activities, churches and people involved or expected in the relation should be clearly stated and explained.
 - d) Note that the meaningfulness of a relation can be from the perspective of our church, that of Church X, or both.
 - e) If we find that a relation with Church X can indeed be meaningful, then progress to Step 3.
 - f) If there is little meaningfulness to pursuing a relationship, then contact can be discontinued and the churches appropriately informed.
- 3) Is the church faithful?
 - a) The faithfulness of this church needs to be investigated according to Scripture and the confessions. This needs to be done by having increased contact with

these churches, both written and face to face. This can take some time over the period of a number of synods.

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- b) This investigation of the faithfulness of a church will be the same, irrespective of whether the church is considered for a sister church or ecclesiastical contact relationship.
 - c) If at any stage in the discussions, there is evidence of unfaithfulness in doctrine and practice in relation to Scriptures and confessions, then the contact should be discontinued and the church notified appropriately.
 - d) Note that determining faithfulness is a very important and mandatory step in the process of church relations and must be established in humility and prayer, acknowledging that we too need to be encouraged by the Spirit to “maintain the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3).
 - e) If we recognise that Church X indeed is faithful in doctrine and practice, albeit in weakness and shortcomings, then we can officially recognise them as “true and faithful” churches. Progress to Step 4.
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- 4) Is a sister church relation manageable?
- a) If it is determined that Church X is indeed faithful, then we must consider if progressing to a sister church relationship is manageable. The *Manageable* criteria (see list in Section 5.3) are used to ascertain this.
 - b) If a sister church relationship with Church X is deemed to be manageable for the FRCA, then the FRCA can progress the relationship by offering a sister church relationship to Church X. Progress to Step 5.
 - c) If the relationship with Church X is not manageable for the FRCA at this time, then the FRCA can progress the relationship by offering Ecclesiastical Contact to Church X. Progress to Step 6.
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- 5) Offer a sister church relation to Church X.
- a) An offer of sister church relations is to be sent to Church X. Additionally our *Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations* needs to be sent with an explanation of how we use these in exercising sister church relations from our side.
 - b) Upon acceptance by Church X, we have entered into an official sister church relationship. We would have already considered, but also need to take note of, how they exercise sister church relations according to their rules or guidelines. We can write to our newest sister expressing our thankfulness to the Lord.
 - c) Note that according to the rules, synod and its deputies have responsibilities and tasks, especially in regards to Rules 1, 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8.
 - d) Note that according to the rules, the individual FRCA churches shall accept attestations for church membership or admittance to the sacraments, and in principle open up pulpits to their ministers (see especially Rules 5 and 6).
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6) Offer Ecclesiastical Contact to Church X.

a) An offer of Ecclesiastical Contact is to be sent to Church X. Additionally our *Rules for Exercising Ecclesiastical Contact* needs to be sent with an explanation of how we use these in exercising Ecclesiastical Contact from our side.

b) Upon acceptance by Church X, we have entered into official Ecclesiastical Contact. We need to take note of how they exercise their equivalent relationship according to their rules or guidelines. We can write to our newest ecclesiastical contact expressing our thankfulness to the Lord.

c) Note that according to the rules, synod and its deputies have responsibilities and tasks, especially in regards to Rules 1, 2, and 5.

d) Note that according to Rule 3, the individual FRCA churches have an additional responsibility upon receiving attestations for church membership or admittance to the sacrament. This would normally be done via visits and getting to know the individuals to confirm their commitment to Reformed doctrine and life according to Scriptures and confessions.

e) Note that according to Rule 4 the churches have the duty to involve classis for concurring advice.

7) Termination of church relationships.

a) If a relationship is no longer Scripturally and confessionally warranted, these relationships will be terminated.

b) If a sister church relationship becomes unmanageable, then it may be transitioned to a relationship of Ecclesiastical Contact.

c) If a church relationship dwindles to no longer being meaningful, then the relationship may be discontinued.

Recommendation

FRCA adopts the *Guidelines for Church Relations* (refer Sections 9 1-7 together with the diagram).

Grounds

This fulfills the mandate given by Synod Albany 2021 to develop and propose to synod guidelines with whom, how, and when to establish sister church relationships.

10. Conclusions

This report is the outcome of the mandate given to deputies by Synod Albany 2021. It attempts to integrate and bring together Scripture and Confessions, past synod decisions, experiences and practices of deputies, feedback and useful information from the churches in the federation, sister churches and churches in contact.

This report and the *Guidelines for Church Relations* are intended to be a useful and informative work that could provide benefits in the following way:

1) Give guidance and information to the churches and their consistories regarding the process and practice of church relations,

- 2) Provide a documented guide that will assist deputies in using past synod decisions in their mandate to establish and maintain church relations,
- 3) Be used as an educational resource to instruct and inform church members regarding the history, reasons and practice of church relations and why we engage in them.

5 Although dependent on what Synod Darling Downs 2024 will decide, these guidelines and report information are not a completed work in itself, but can be used by deputies to further outline and document their work in establishing and maintaining church relations. Using and testing the criteria in existing and new church relationships will help to refine how they are put into practice. This may include, for example, refining how we use the rules to evaluate
10 our exercise of church relations, how we measure or report the value of each relationship and how we would regularly review our church relationships.

May the Lord use our humble contribution and bless the deliberations of Synod 2024 for the glory of His Name and the preservation of the unity of His Church in Australia and worldwide.

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Appendix: List of Overall Recommendations

35 **Recommendation A: Criteria for Church Relations**

1. In our contact with another church, each of the three following criteria must be met to determine whether or not to proceed to a sister church relationship:
 - a) Faithful. The church must be a true church faithful to Scriptures and bearing the marks of the church (BC Art 27-29). This criterion is mandatory for all church relationships.

- b) Meaningful. A church relationship must have a purpose and substance to it. The following identifies such purposes (*in order of priority*):
- 5 i) Catholic. The first purpose is, of course, to maintain the unity of faith and recognise the catholicity of the church. It is an expression of putting into practice Christ's high priestly prayer of John 17, Eph 4:4 and Art 27 BC.
 - 10 ii) Historical. Historical church relations involve those that we have recognised from across the world with whom we share a common history or with whom we have had relations over a considerably long period of time. We have come to know these brothers and sisters and share in the struggle of faith to live before the Lord, show thankfulness for the grace and unity in Christ, and together fight the secularity in the world around us. As we have grown over many years and decades in getting to know and interact with our historic sister churches, we build up a responsibility and obligation to these brothers and sisters in mutual assistance in the struggle of faith. These are not contacts that are broken off lightly or easily.
 - 15 iii) Need for mutual assistance. There may be requests for assistance from other churches or we may require assistance from other churches. These are opportunities that need to be examined to decide if a church relationship provides an appropriate foundation to respond to and assist in such requests. Kamphuis (p. 204) comments that churches need to bear each other's burdens and assist each other, not just when asked to help.
 - 20 iv) Ability to communicate. Being able to communicate, and that on a regular basis, is important to be engage with each other and be mutually active in maintaining the rules for relations. Such interaction should preferably be face to face and include visits, meetings, sharing information with each other and informing our own churches. Are we able to maintain a reasonable level of communication? If there are differences in language and culture, is it possible to translate written material and have effective communication in meetings to engage and understand each other?
 - 25 v) Level of interaction. What is the current level of interaction of our churches and members with these churches? Is there regular contact between individual churches in either bond? Are there activities happening between the churches at the local level? Are there interactions among individual members including visiting, attending worship services, and sharing in common struggles and challenges of faith? Even if only one or a few local churches or a few individuals are engaged, this small level of interaction may be a reason to have a church relationship that is maintained by the FRCA bond.
 - 30 vi) Cooperation in mission. There may be churches with whom we may come into contact via mission work, conduct mission work in regions near our own mission fields, or are the result of mission work that we have been involved with in the past. Church relations with them may be beneficial in order to work together with them on the mission fields and/or help each other for mutual encouragement and exhortation.
 - 35 vii) Church polity. Although different churches have different histories that have led to differences in church polity and practice, the need to mutually struggle to maintain our reformed heritage and build on how the Lord has guided and led His church through church history is important. We need to stand on Scripture and what our church fathers have fought for to maintain a true and faithful
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church of Christ. Differences in church polity such as reformed and presbyterian, as long as they are based on the foundation of Scripture and reformed confessions, need not be an obstacle to unity. There may need to be patience and encouragement to acknowledge that there are differences in history and practice and we need to learn from each other and grow. With churches of similar polity and worship to our own, our relationship with them may be deeper and more meaningful as a result.

viii) Worldwide. It is worthwhile to have sister-churches in various regions e.g., Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, to better understand the needs of each part of the world, support missions and have a faithful church through whom aid can be sent in the event of a crisis. This criterion would be particularly used for churches in regions where we have no existing church relationships.

c) Manageable. When moving forward in a church relation, we must be able to manage the relationship and do justice to the rules for maintaining the relationship. This may involve the following aspects (*in order of priority*):

i) Geographical proximity. It is important to maintain a good and appropriate level of contact in a church relationship and this involves interaction and visits on a regular basis. Although there are very good virtual and online means for communicating, there is no substitute or better interaction than through direct face to face communication. Churches closer together geographically or in the same country are better able to manage contacts and communications than churches more distant or dispersed geographically. For example, note that our FRCA bond of churches is geographically located in one country, Australia, albeit some 1000s of kilometers apart from west to east. As another example, note how the contact of FRCA with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Tasmania lies essentially with the churches in Tasmania and not via the other churches located elsewhere in Australia. Our focus should start locally in our own country, before going further abroad in the Asia/Pacific region, and then in the rest of the world.

ii) Language and culture. Where there are differences in language and/or culture, there may be much work required in translating materials and speeches or researching history and culture to understand, be informed and build a better appreciation and awareness of each other within a church relationship. Are we able to put in sufficient time and effort with appropriate tools and persons to manage this relation?

iii) Ability to resource. Are we able, as a relatively small bond of churches, able to resource the time and effort needed to maintain our church relationships and even increase the number of church relations? We must be mindful that our ministers and elders need to, in the first place, spend sufficient time and energy in their own congregations and in our own bond of churches. Many relations mean many trips, visits, meetings, readings and writings for which we must ensure we have sufficient attention, time and energy in order to do justice to our relationship according to the rules.

Grounds

1. Well-developed and articulated criteria are important for the process of seeking and establishing a sister church relationship.

2. The three categories encapsulate all of the various criteria identified by the churches or used in past synods.

Recommendation B: Ecclesiastical Contact

1. Adopt a contact relationship called “Ecclesiastical Contact” which:
 - 5 a) Is extended to a church whom the FRCA have recognised as true and faithful but for whom the relationship, although meaningful, is deemed not sufficiently manageable to establish a sister church relationship at this point of time.
 - 10 b) Is maintained on an ongoing basis by the FRCA by having some contact directly with the church, meeting them at synods or meetings of our churches or sister churches, or using other opportunities for contact that are available to us. This level of interaction would be substantially less than that for churches who are in a sister church relationship with us.
 - c) Can be changed to a sister church relationship should the FRCA deem that the relationship is sufficiently meaningful and manageable.
- 15 2. Adopt the following Rules for Exercising Ecclesiastical Contact:

Rules for Exercising Ecclesiastical Contact

1. Ecclesiastical contact shall be used, as much as opportunity for contact arises, to be informed about one another and grow in the understanding of each other, assisting, encouraging and exhorting one another to live as churches of God in this world.
- 20 2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or their Minutes and, otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to their respective churches (if possible in translation).
- 25 3. The churches shall acknowledge one another's attestations and additionally examine these members in their doctrine and conduct (CO Art 57); this also applies to admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments.
4. The churches shall only in exceptional circumstances open their pulpits to ministers with whom we have Ecclesiastical Contact where due diligence is undertaken and concurring advice has been requested and received from classis.
- 30 5. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as observers according to the *Rules for Synods*.

Grounds

1. Although the relationship may not be manageable at this time, EC is a means to maintain a meaningful church relationship with a recognised true and faithful church.
- 35 2. The workload of maintaining such a relationship is less intensive than that for a sister church relation.
3. The relationship should be developed into a sister church relation if and when opportunity arises.

4. The rules for exercising Ecclesiastical Contact are sufficiently distinct from that for Sister Church relations and outline the additional due care necessary given the lower level of interaction in maintaining this contact.

Recommendation C: Multiple Churches in Geographic Proximity

- 5 The FRCA cannot consider and pursue a relationship with a church that, though in geographic proximity of a recognised true and faithful church, is unwilling or shows no evidence of seeking and expressing unity with that church.

Grounds

- 10 1. The FRCA recognises that Christ's church gathering work is dynamic and a work in progress, and there may be instances where two churches in geographic proximity are not expressing complete unity because of such differences as cultural, historical or practical, without taking away from the unity of faith.
2. The faithfulness of a church includes the way in which it practices unity and relations with churches in geographic proximity.

15 Recommendation D: ICRC Membership

Four options are provided for recommendations to synod.

Option A

Recommendation A: FRCA does not join the ICRC.

Grounds A:

- 20 1. Regarding the first purpose of the ICRC "to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ", there is not an existing unity of faith with the FRCA since the FRCA do not have sister church relations with all ICRC member churches.
- 25 2. The first purpose of the ICRC incorrectly assumes a true oneness between member churches. However, the true unity of faith of Scripture and Confessions (e.g. Eph 4:1-6 and BC Art 29) does not necessarily exist among all ICRC member churches.
- 30 3. Regarding the second purpose of the ICRC "to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches", this implies that we should be seeking sister church relations with all ICRC member churches. However, seeking sister church relations is a decision that the FRCA churches must make and should not be directed by the ICRC or be an obligation stemming from ICRC membership.
4. It would be duplicitous for the FRCA to join the ICRC to "express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ" for as long as there is known disunity between the FRCA and other member churches.
- 35 5. The FRCA terminated its membership of the ICRC in 1996 because it did not promote harmony and unity within the FRCA churches.

Option B

Recommendation B: FRCA applies to join the ICRC.

Grounds B:

1. Regarding the first purpose of the ICRC “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ”, the FRCA believe that there is a Scriptural and confessional unity of faith based on the fact that member churches profess to be faithful churches in Reformed doctrine and there is no evidence to the contrary. This observation is based on insights obtained through one or more of the following: i) direct contact with these churches, ii) the trusting relationship of our sister churches who may have more knowledge through church relations and contacts with them, and iii) other means available to us that reliably inform us regarding these churches.
2. We appreciate the first purpose of the ICRC and are thankful that it exists as it can be used to ensure that only churches that adhere to the reformed faith are accepted as members of the ICRC.
3. The second purpose of the ICRC “to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches” echoes the call to unity of faith of John 17 and Eph 4. It does not obligate the FRCA to seek relations with all ICRC member churches. Instead, the FRCA have a process adopted by synod for establishing church relations and with whom.
4. Given that there are two churches in our geographic region that are members of the ICRC, the CRCA (FRCA discontinued contact in 1996) and the PCEA (FRCA discontinued contact in 2006), the FRCA will need to investigate whether their doctrine and/or practice is in agreement with the Basis – Scripture and Confessions – of the ICRC. It is a biblical command to seek unity with all those in our own country who confess the same faith. Membership of the ICRC would oblige the FRCA to seek contact with the CRCA and the PCEA. However, the CRCA and PCEA being members of the ICRC does not need to be an impediment for the FRCA to join the ICRC.
5. The ICRC as a conference is a means to engage and interact with other reformed churches. It is not an ecclesiastical body and cannot place matters on the agendas of our synods; that is exclusively the privilege of the FRCA churches.

Option C

Recommendation C: FRCA does not join the ICRC.

Grounds C:

1. Membership in the ICRC does not promote harmony and unity within the FRCA churches (refer Synod 1996 Art 95).
2. There’s no biblical command to join an international conference of any sort.
3. There are other options to meet with sister churches and maintain contact with other churches.

Option D

Recommendation D: FRCA sends observers to the ICRC.

Grounds D:

1. Regarding the first purpose of the ICRC “to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ”, the FRCA believe that there is a Scriptural and confessional unity of faith based on the fact that member churches profess to be faithful churches in Reformed doctrine and there is no evidence to the contrary. This observation is based on insights obtained through one or more of the following: i) direct contact with these churches, ii) the trusting relationship of our sister churches who may have more knowledge through church relations and contacts with them, and iii) other means available to us that reliably inform us regarding these churches.
2. We appreciate the first purpose of the ICRC and are thankful that it exists as it can be used to ensure that only churches that adhere to the reformed faith are accepted as members of the ICRC.
3. The second purpose of the ICRC “to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches” echoes the call to unity of faith of John 17 and Eph 4. It does not obligate the FRCA to seek relations with all ICRC member churches. Instead, the FRCA have a process adopted by synod for establishing church relations and with whom.
4. Given that there are two churches in our geographic region that are members of the ICRC - CRCA (FRCA discontinued contact in 1996) and PCEA (FRCA discontinued contact in 2006) – the FRCA will need to investigate whether their doctrine and/or practice is in agreement with the Basis – Scripture and Confessions – of the ICRC. For that reason, the FRCA cannot yet join the ICRC as a member.
5. The ICRC as a conference is a means to engage and interact with other reformed churches. It is not an ecclesiastical body and cannot place matters on the agendas of our synods; that is exclusively the privilege of the FRCA churches.

Recommendation E: Guidelines for Church Relations

FRCA adopts the *Guidelines for Church Relations*.

(Sections 9 1-7 are inserted here together with the diagram)

Grounds

- 30 This fulfills the mandate given by Synod Albany 2021 to develop and propose to synod guidelines with whom, how, and when to establish sister church relationships.

Additional matters for the churches to consider

A number of matters have been raised within the report which the churches need to consider and potentially action by a submission to Synod 2024. These matters include:

- 35 1. The *Rules for Synods* need to be amended to delete Article 6.2 with reference to delegates from churches with Temporary Ecclesiastical Contact.
2. The *Rules for Synods* need to be amended to add an article in regards to delegates from churches in Ecclesiastical Contact. We suggest the rule could read as follows:

40 Delegates from churches with whom we have Ecclesiastical Contact will be allowed to sit as observers. An observer may address synod in open session for the purpose of passing on greetings and information concerning their churches and the EC

relationship, speak in synod's open session when they request or are requested to do so on matters specifically pertaining to the ecclesiastical contact and to sit as advisory members in the advisory committee(s) that deal with the ecclesiastical contact, where they may give advice when they request or are requested to do so.

**Deputies for Inter-church Relations.
REPORT TO FRCA SYNOD 2024
REGARDING
DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN (DGK)**

5

**AND
GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN NEDERLAND (GKN)**

1. Names

De Gereformeerde Kerken (abbreviated as DGK) and Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (abbreviated as GKN).

10 **2. Background**

The DGK and GKN church federations, both in the Netherlands, have their origin in secessions from our former sister churches (RCN, also known as GKv). Our contact with these churches stems from our former relationship to the RCN. DGK and the GKN are currently working to form one federation.

15 Since 2015 the FRCA has been monitoring the developments in both churches and encouraging their union. However, when this report was written, they are still two independent federations. Therefore this report will deal with each separately. As a result there is considerable overlap in this report.

Synod FRCA 2021 decision and Mandate re DGK and GKN (Art 68)

- 20
1. Express thankfulness to God for positive developments towards unity of the DGK and GKN.
 2. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. continue contact with these two federations of churches;
 - 25 b. encourage them to continue to work towards a united federation;
 - c. encourage the DGK to sever its sister church relationship with the LRCA [Liberated Reformed Church Abbotsford];
 - d. confirm that the DGK / GKN have the marks of the true church;
 - e. subject to the outcome of this contact, work towards entering a sister church relationship;
 - 30 f. keep the churches informed of developments;
 - g. send one or two delegates to their respective synods subject to available finances;
 - h. invite a delegate(s) from DGK / GKN to our next synod; and
 - 35 i. submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

Grounds

1. Past synods have noted that both the DGK and GKN profess to be faithful churches in every aspect of Reformed doctrine (Synod Bunbury Article 75) and there is no evidence to the contrary.

5 2. We recognise that the members of these two church federations have remained faithful by rejecting the unbiblical direction of the RCN.

3. Both the DGK and the GKN have requested sister church relations with us.

10 4. Although these churches are geographically distant, their historical backgrounds are similar to ours. Deputies for Inter-church Relations have been mandated to develop and propose guidelines concerning inter-church relations, and these guidelines could provide further direction for how to develop this relationship.

5. Our deputies now report that the DGK are reviewing their relationship with the LRCA (see Deputies' Report, page 30).

15

PART 1. REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ABOUT *DE GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN* (DGK)

1. Introduction

The DGK federation was formed in 2003-2004 after members seceded from the RCN due to the RCN's unfaithfulness.

FRCA Synod 2021 terminated sister relations with the RCN and subsequently mandated deputies, inter alia, to work towards entering a sister church relationship with the DGK.

2. Brief Description of DGK

(All details in this report are as of June 2023)

The official DGK website states that the foundation of the DGK is the entire Bible, as they confess in the creeds, namely the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, and Athanasian Creed, the Belgic Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dort. DGK federation maintains church government according to the Church Order of Dort. DGK seeks unity with all who subscribe to this foundation in word and deed.

Origin	DGK seceded from the RCN in 2003-2004 due to unfaithfulness in the latter. Most members are originally from the RCN.
Church federation	Classis North-East comprises five congregations. Classis South-West comprises four congregations. Total membership approx. 1,500.
Church services	The liturgy elements in church services are the same as those in the FRCA Book of praise. Two church services are conducted each Sunday.
Ministers	Eight ministers are in active office.
Theological training	DGK has its own college for theological training for the ministry. The college administers a 5 year curriculum. Lecturers are drawn from DGK membership. Further details available on DGK website. Opleiding – De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) (dgkh.nl)
Contact churches abroad	DGK has a sister church relationship with the LRCA . However, 2022 DGK synod has urged LRCA to return to the CanRC federation without conditions. The DGK 2022 synod decided to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intensify contact with the CanRC, FRCSA and ERE (Evangéliumi Református Egyház - Evangelical Reformed Church, Ukraine) Continue contact with FRCA to restore sister church relations, and advise FRCA of DGK synod decision re LRCA. Continue contact with EPC NI (Evangelical Presbyterian Church North-Ireland); EPC EW (Evangelical Presbyterian Church England and Wales); FCS(c) (Free Church of Scotland - Continuing) and RPCCEE (Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DGK had contact with the Reformed Churches of Korea and Jayoo Free Reformed Church in Korea. Contact with both has been terminated because a meaningful and practical relationship is very difficult, given the language, cultural and historical differences. • See whether contact with BERG Giessen (Bekennende Evangelisch-Reformierte Gemeinde in Giessen, Germany) can be continued.
Magazine	<i>De Bazuin</i> , a regular magazine for the churches
Websites	https://gereformeerde-kerken-hersteld.nl/

3. History of relationship

The DGK seceded from the RCN in 2003-2004. Synod West Kelmscott 2006 (art. 92) mandated deputies to investigate whether this secession was lawful. Synod 2009 Legana (art. 72) decided against acknowledging the DGK as the lawful continuation of the RCN given that FRCA still had a relationship with the RCN at that time.

FRCA synod Bunbury (Article 75) noted that DGK professes to be a faithful church in every aspect of Reformed doctrine and there is no evidence to the contrary. Since 2015 the FRCA has been monitoring the developments in the DGK churches and encouraging its union with GKN.

FRCA Synod 2021 mandated deputies to maintain contact with the DGK and, subject to the outcome of this contact, work towards a sister church relationship.

4. Execution of Mandate

FRCA deputies' contacts with DGK deputies

A letter dated 04 Apr 2022 was sent to DGK advising it of FRCA Synod 2021 decision regarding the DGK and GKN.

A video conference of FRCA deputies with DGK deputies was held 21 February 2023. During the conference DGK deputies mentioned that the FRCA / DGK relationship is highly valued. "It is important for us to grow together in this current time. We have had difficult years, our congregations and federation are small. We need help, especially to maintain the reformed faith. We would like to know more about your church life and struggles, and those of other faithful churches. We should aim to help each other regarding many common issues facing the churches, and how to present a Reformed testimony to the world".

Further details and analysis of DGK

(For sources of this information see end note)

DGK Synod discussions and decisions, sermons, articles, lectures and books published by DGK ministers and members are clearly in accordance with the DGK foundation mentioned above. Office bearers are well aware that since the DGK separated from the RCN much work was needed and continues to be done. Many church organisational issues had to be addressed. After years of confusion and unfaithfulness in the RCN, there is much effort to restore the reformed faith in the DGK in all aspects of church and daily life.

Furthermore, DGK office bearers and members are acutely aware of the spiritual warfare facing the true church in a post Christian culture. They work hard to remain faithful to the Lord of the church.

5 FRCA deputies are encouraged how these matters are addressed in this small bond of churches with limited resources. Much effort goes into training young men for the ministry. There is sound Reformed preaching, and significant efforts to teach and strengthen the congregations in the Reformed faith. Regular Bible study is done. Good leadership is given to the youth. In *De Bazuin* and at congregation study evenings there is solid interaction with contemporary issues that affect the churches. These include gender issues, homosexuality, climate, individualism, feelings. A constant message is: don't read into the Bible what you think, but listen carefully to what God teaches and requires. Similarly there are healthy discussions about what went wrong in the RCN and how to ensure faithfulness is restored. Warnings in the preaching and debates/warnings in publications illustrate this.

15 DGK reaches out to RCN members and former members, especially those who are concerned about the unfaithfulness of the latter. For example, DGK members conduct information / study evenings to clarify the issues that trouble the RCN and urge people to consider their church membership. In some locations some have separated from GKv and conduct their own church services. DGK ministers preach in some of these.

20 Some members within the (now former) RCN (GKv) have formed a group named "De Kerngroep Bezinning GKv". The group's website ([Profiel – Bezinning GKv](#)) states they have studied recent RCN synod decisions and concluded that by these decisions the RCN has changed the method of reformed Bible interpretation and its application by the church as done over many centuries. This changed way of interpretation does not do justice to the content of the Bible and does not accord with the confession of the church about the clarity and completeness of God's Word. The RCN has alienated itself from many reformed churches in the world and has therefore been expelled from the ICRC.

Church growth

30 The DGK federation continues to grow. New members and congregations continue to join. For example, former members of the RCN in Rijnsburg and Katwijk formed a new congregation of some 60 members which joined the DGK federation in 2022.

Marks of the true church

FRCA synod 2021 requested deputies to confirm that DGK has the marks of the true church. On the basis of the above information the deputies confirm this. In summary:

- 35 • Preaching: the preaching is faithful to Scriptures. Each Sunday two services are conducted, with Heidelberg Catechism preaching in the afternoon service.
- Sacraments: it is evident from information received (for example, DGK website) that the sacraments are faithfully administered.
- Church discipline: similarly it is evident that the churches maintain good church discipline.

40 Church visits are done faithfully and discussed at Classis meetings.

Furthermore, DGK members remained faithful to the head of the church in their struggle to separate from the RCN, repel the unbiblical teachings that were part of that struggle.

On this basis deputies thankfully confirm that DGK has the marks of the true church.

DGK and GKN: Towards one federation

5 The 2019 DGK Synod unanimously decided to recognize the GKN as a church of Christ. Grounds: discussion with GKN deputies clearly shows there is unity (between DKN and GKN) about the authority of Scriptures, faithfulness to the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order.

DGK Synod 2022 followed this up with a letter to GKN expressing its desire to work further to unite with the GKN. This work is now in progress.

10 DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their respective synods recommending the two church bonds unite into one federation. Differences that remain are to be discussed after the merger. DGK and GKN deputies have concluded that there are no issues to the union into one federation DGK and GKN synods in 2023 and 2024 respectively will, DV, consider this proposal.

15 The DGK and GKN are growing closer together in their relationship. There are joint study evenings / days, activities and office bearer conferences. DGK and GKN together also reach out to RCN members and former members.

Addressing the FRCA Synod 2021 mandate re DGK

Against the background given above, deputies summarise their response to the mandate as follows:

20 *Continue contact with these two federations of churches.*

Letters dated 04 Apr and 25 Feb 2022 respectively were sent to DGK and GKN advising them of Synod FRCA 2021 decision. On 21 Feb 2023 a Zoom meeting was held with DGK deputies. Informal contact has been maintained by deputies.

Encourage DGK and the GKN to continue to work towards a united federation.

25 Deputies have encouraged the DGK and the GKN to do this.

Encourage the DGK to sever its sister church relationship with the LRCA.

DGK has urged LRCA to return to the CanRC federation without conditions. The DGK general synod 2012, at its meeting on 5 March 2022, decided to:

1. Maintain for now the sister church relationship with LRCA;
- 30 2. Call the LRCA to return to maintain the reformed confessions in relation to the catholicity of the church;
3. Call LRCA to accept the reformed church order as it applies in the CanRC; and
4. Call the LRCA to return to the CanRC without conditions.

Confirm that the DGK/GKN have the marks of the true church.

35 This is confirmed in the above.

Subject to the outcome of this contact, work towards entering a sister church relationship.

The recommendations in this report address this matter.

Keep the churches informed of developments.

This has been done via *Una Sancta* (9 December 2023 issue).

5 *Send one or two delegates to their respective synods subject to available finances.*

Delegates did not attend the DGK 2022 synod. However, it is intended that one delegate will DV attend the 2024 synod.

Invite a delegate(s) from DGK/GKN to our next synod.

Invitations will be sent.

10 *Submit a report six months prior to the next synod.*

Done.

5. Conclusion

15 Deputies recommend that the FRCA continues to work towards sister church relations with DGK. Even though the DGK is geographically distant from FRCA, there are definite benefits in a sister church relationship. There are historical ties; both DGK and FRCA have their roots in the RCN. The Rules for Sister Church relations will provide mutual benefit to the FRCA and DGK. We face the same spiritual struggles and through our contacts we can support and encourage each other. Furthermore there are mutual family and friendship connections. FRCA and DGK church members travel back and forth between Australia and
20 Netherlands. We have similar needs for theological training.

Apart from one significant issue, deputies consider sister church relationship could be offered to the DGK and the GKN. As mentioned earlier, DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their synods (scheduled for late 2023 and mid 2024 respectively) recommending the two church bonds unite into one federation. It will be prudent to await the DGK and GKN final decisions about federating before the FRCA makes a decision about offering a sister church relationship. Furthermore, FRCA synod 2024 is due to consider whether it is appropriate to offer sister church relations to more than one church federation in one country. The FRCA 2027 synod should then have the appropriate information to make a decision about offering a sister church relationship to the DGK and
30 GKN.

6. Recommendation to synod

Decision

1. The FRCA synod expresses joy and thankfulness that:

- a. the DGK shows itself to be a true and faithful church of Jesus Christ; and
- 35 b. DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their forthcoming synods recommending the two church bonds unite into one federation.

2. Advises De Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (DGK) that the FRCA will continue to work toward offering sister church relations.
3. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - 5 a. advise DGK of the Synod's decision;
 - b. maintain contact with the DGK and monitor developments;
 - c. encourage DGK to continue to work towards a united federation with the GKN;
 - d. thank the DGK for urging the LRCA to return to the CanRC bond, and encourages DGK to sever its sister church relationship with the LRCA if there is no change;
 - 10 e. keep the FRCA churches informed of developments;
 - f. send one or two delegates to DGK synods subject to available finances and invite a DGK delegate(s) to the FRCA synod; and
 - g. submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

15 **Grounds**

1. The DGK shows the marks of the true church. They are true to Scripture and are faithful in their adherence to the Three Forms of Unity and Church Order.
2. The DGK seeks a sister church relationship with the FRCA.
- 20 3. FRCA synod 2021 mandated deputies to work towards entering a sister church relationship with the DGK. Past FRCA synods have noted that the DGK professes to be a faithful church in every aspect of Reformed doctrine (Synod Bunbury Article 75) and there is no evidence to the contrary. This is now confirmed. Furthermore members of DGK have remained faithful to the reformed faith by rejecting the unbiblical direction of the RCN.
- 25 4. DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their synods (scheduled for late 2023 and mid 2024 respectively) recommending the two church bonds unite into one federation. It will be prudent to await the DGK and GKN final decisions about federating before the FRCA makes a decision about offering a sister church relationship. Furthermore, FRCA synod 2024 is due to consider whether it is appropriate to offer sister church relations to more than one church federation in one country. The FRCA 2027 synod should then have the appropriate information to make a decision about offering a sister church relationship to the DGK and GKN.
- 30

PART 2. REPORT ABOUT DE *GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN NEDERLAND (GKN)*

1. Brief description of the GKN

(all details in this report are as of June 2023)

Confessional Documents	Three Ecumenical Creeds and Three Forms of Unity
Church federation	Classis North comprises six congregations. Classis South comprises five congregations. Church services are also conducted in six other locations. Total membership approx. 1,600.
Church services	The liturgy elements in church services are the same as those in the FRCA Book of praise. Two church services are conducted each Sunday.
Ministers	Seven ministers are in active office and seven are emeriti.
Theological training	GKN administers its own <i>Academie voor Gereformeerde Theologie</i> which provides some courses. Students study at the Theologische Universiteit, Apeldoorn for the balance of the required studies. There are one ministerial candidate and four students of theology.
Contact churches abroad	GKN has a sister-church relationship with the Selbständige Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche, Germany with congregations in Hannover and Heidelberg. The GKN seeks sister-church relationships with the FRCA, Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika and CanRC. GKN joined the ICRC in 2022.
Magazine	Members of GKN publish <i>Weerklank</i> , a magazine for the churches
Website	www.gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl

2. History of relationship

5 The GKN federation was initiated in 2009. Most members were originally members of the RCN. They separated from the RCN fundamentally due to its increasing criticism of God Word and denying its complete authority. The GKN first came to the attention of FRCA synods in 2015. Since then the FRCA has been monitoring the developments in the GKN churches and encouraging its union with DGK.

10 FRCA synod Bunbury (Article 75) noted that the GKN professes to be a faithful church in every aspect of Reformed doctrine and there is no evidence to the contrary.

FRCA Synod 2021 mandated deputies to maintain contact with the GKN and, subject to the outcome of this contact, work towards entering a sister church relationship.

3. Execution of Mandate

15 FRCA deputies' contacts with GKN deputies

A letter dated 25 Feb 2022 was sent to GKN advising them of Synod FRCA 2021 decision. A video conference of FRCA deputies with GKN deputies was held 1 March 2023. At this

conference there was discussion regarding the benefit of relations between GKN and FRCA. GKN deputies mention that definite benefits are envisaged. There are historical ties; both GKN and FRCA have their roots in the GKv. There are mutual family connections; FRCA and GKN church members travel back and forth between Australia and Netherlands. We have similar needs for theological training. GKN has requested to become sister churches with FRCA. GKN deputies: please help us, we need sisters! (Minutes of this conference are available from deputies - contact: J Bruning).

Further details and analysis of GKN

Deputies provide the following information about the GKN.

(For sources of this information see end note)

The GKN desires to live according to the word of God as the following extracts from its website states:

“These churches acknowledge Holy Scripture as God’s Word, and desire to live according to it. Therefore, they accept the Three Forms of Unity, namely the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. They adhere to the Reformed Church Order as compiled by the General Synod, Groningen-South, 1978. In doing so, they uphold the confessions of the Reformed Churches as they were maintained via the Secession in 1834 from the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk, (Dutch State Church), the ‘Doleantie’ in 1886, the Union in 1892, and the Liberation in 1944.

The preaching is Scriptural, redemptive-historical, and Christocentric, and it requires a response of faith and repentance. Exegesis takes the highest priority in preparation of sermons. The congregation is addressed as the covenantal community of the Lord Jesus Christ, but without covenant automatism. The promises of the Gospel as well as the requirements of the covenant are preached. Moreover, the congregation is called and encouraged to believe the promises with true faith, and to accept the warnings against forsaking God’s Word. In the preaching, the life of a covenant congregation in today’s world is addressed in a normative manner, without allowing personal experience and concrete situations of the moment to determine how the Scriptures should be understood and interpreted.

The churches use the Gereformeerd Kerkboek, (1984/1985). It contains 150 versified Psalms and 41 hymns.”

The GKN desires to seek ecumenical fellowship with all who want to live in accordance with God’s Word, the Reformed Confessions and Reformed church polity. In the Netherlands developments are closely followed in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken, the Gereformeerde Gemeente, and the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk. The GKN churches pray that the LORD may give ecclesiastical unity among all of His children, in accordance to His Word, and for wisdom and mercy to this end.

GKN deputies advise (undated letter received 3 June 2022) that the GKN synod 2018 decided to maintain contact with the FRCA (as well as CanRC and RC South Africa) and work towards sister church relations.

Further details about the GKN are available at [Short English presentation – Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland](#)

GKN office bearers and members are acutely aware of the spiritual warfare facing the true church in a post Christian culture. They work hard to remain faithful to the Lord of the church.

Strengthening the church

5 GKN office bearers are well aware that much work needed to be done and continues to be
needed in this young church bond. Since the separation from the RCN many church
organisational issues had to be addressed. As a result of years of confusion and
unfaithfulness in the RCN, there is much effort to restore the reformed faith in the GKN in
10 all aspects of church and daily life. There is also acute awareness of the spiritual struggle
facing the church in a post Christian culture.

Synod discussions and decisions, sermons, articles, lectures and books published by GKN
ministers and members, faithfully and clearly show that the GKN practices what it has
published on its website. Central to this is that the churches acknowledge Holy Scripture as
God's Word, and desire to live according to it.

15 FRCA deputies are encouraged how these matters are being addressed. Even though the
GKN is a small bond of churches, there is much effort in the training of young men for the
ministry. There is sound Reformed preaching, and significant efforts to teach and
strengthen the congregations in the Reformed faith. Much work is done to strengthen the
church members in the Reformed faith. Regular Bible study is done. Good leadership is
20 given to the youth, for example, by providing regular, practical Bible study guides in the
periodical *Weerklank*. Furthermore, books are published addressing contemporary issues.
For example, a booklet "Woord Houden", published by five GKN ministers sets out the
theological position of the GKN on several important issues. The booklet contains five
essays showing where the GKN "comes from and where we stand in relation to other
25 Reformed churches". One of its themes emphasizes the calling not just to confess the
doctrine of the covenant but also to live consciously according to the covenant demands.

Covenantal preaching emphasizes the importance of maintaining the correct understanding
of God's promises and demands. "The emphasis on God's grace may not take away
anything of the call to really live according to God's will"... God's Word shows us "that living
30 by grace means that we must live according the truth...Believing means that you will live
according to the truth with your entire person and body" ("Woord Houden" pg 17 and 21).

A book titled "Als je ja hebt gezegd" (*When You Have Said Yes*) gives Scriptural guidance
about how to live according to promises made at public profession of faith.

35 There are healthy discussions about what went wrong in the RCN and how this should be
addressed in the GKN to ensure faithfulness is restored and maintained. Warnings in the
preaching and debates/warnings in publications illustrate this.

Church growth

40 The GKN federation continues to grow. New members and congregations continue to join.
For example, former members of the RCN, who had formed a new congregation of 40
members in Groningen province, joined the GKN bond in February 2022.

Marks of the true church

FRCA synod 2021 requested deputies to confirm that GKN has the marks of the true
church. On the basis of the above information the deputies confirm this. In summary:

- Preaching: the preaching is faithful to Scriptures. Each Sunday two services are conducted, with Heidelberg Catechism preaching in the afternoon service.
- Sacraments: it is evident from information received (for example, the official GKN website) that the sacraments are faithfully administered.
- Church discipline: similarly it is evident that the churches maintain good church discipline.

Church visits are done faithfully and discussed at Classis meetings.

Furthermore, GKN members remained faithful to the head of the church in their struggle to separate from the RCN, repel the unbiblical teachings that were part of that struggle.

On this basis deputies thankfully confirm that GKN has the marks of the true church.

DGK and GKN: Towards one federation

DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their respective synods recommending the two church bonds unite into one federation. Differences that remain are to be discussed after the merger. Deputies have concluded that there are no issues to the union into one federation. GKN and DGK synods in 2023 and 2024 respectively will, DV, consider this proposal.

The DGK and GKN are growing closer together in their relationship. There are joint study evenings / days, activities and office bearer conferences. DGK and GKN together also reach out to RCN members and former members.

Late News

In a press release on 4 December 2023 the GKN synod announced that at its meeting on Saturday 1 December 2023 the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) decided to recognize De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) as “true churches of Christ that stand and build on the foundation of prophets and apostles.” (Source GKN official website)

This GKN decision opens the way to the formation of one church federation with the DGK. DGK synod now needs to consider this historic decision at its forthcoming synod, commencing early 2024, the Lord willing.

Addressing the FRCA Synod 2021 mandate re GKN

Against the background given above, deputies summarise their response to the mandate as follows:

Continue contact with GKN.

Letter dated 25 Feb 2022 sent to GKN advising of Synod FRCA 2021 decision.

Zoom meeting held 1 March with GKN deputies.

Encourage DGK and the GKN to continue to work towards a united federation.

Deputies have encouraged the DGK and the GKN to do this.

Confirm that the DGK/GKN have the marks of the true church.

Confirmed in the above.

Subject to the outcome of this contact, work towards entering a sister church relationship.

See recommendations in this report.

Keep the churches informed of developments.

This has been done via Una Sancta.

5 *Send one or two delegates to their respective synods subject to available finances.*

It is intended that one delegate, Br P Witten, will DV attend the GKN synod in late 2023.

Invite a delegate(s) from DGK/GKN to our next synod.

Invitations will be sent.

Submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

10 Done.

4. Conclusion

15 Deputies recommend that the FRCA continues to work towards sister church relations with GKN. Even though the GKN is geographically distant from the FRCA, there are definite benefits in a sister church relationship. There are historical ties; both GKN and FRCA have their roots in the RCN. Under the Rules for Sister Church relations will provide mutual benefit to the FRCA and GKN. We face the same spiritual struggles and through our contacts we can support and encourage each other. There are mutual family and friendship connections; FRCA and GKN church members travel back and forth between Australia and Netherlands. We have similar needs for theological training.

20 Apart from one significant issue, deputies consider sister church relationship could be offered to the DGK and the GKN. As mentioned earlier, DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their synods (scheduled for late 2023 and mid 2024 respectively) recommending the two church bonds unite into one federation. It will be prudent to await the DGK and GKN final decisions about federating before the FRCA makes a decision about offering a sister church relationship. Furthermore, FRCA synod 2024 is due to consider whether it is appropriate to offer sister church relations to more than one church federation in one country. The FRCA 2027 synod should then have the appropriate information to make a decision about offering a sister church relationship to the DGK and GKN.

30 5. Recommendation to synod

Decision

1. The FRCA synod expresses joy and thankfulness that:
 - a. the GKN shows itself to be a true and faithful church of Jesus Christ; and
 - b. DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their forthcoming synods recommending the two church bonds unite into one federation.
 2. Advises the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) that the FRCA will continue to work toward offering sister church relations.
- 35

3. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. advise the GKN of the synod's decision;
 - b. maintain contact with the GKN and monitor developments;
 - 5 c. encourage the GKN to continue to work towards a united federation with the DGK;
 - d. keep the FRCA churches informed of developments;
 - e. send one or two delegates to the GKN synods subject to available finances and invite a GKN delegate(s) to the FRCA synod; and
 - 10 f. submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

Grounds

1. The GKN shows the marks of the true church. They are true to Scripture and are faithful in their adherence to the Three Forms of Unity and Church Order.
2. The GKN seeks a sister church relationship with the FRCA.
- 15 3. FRCA synod 2021 mandated deputies to work towards entering a sister church relationship with the GKN. Past FRCA synods have noted that the GKN professes to be a faithful church in every aspect of Reformed doctrine (Synod Bunbury Article 75) and there is no evidence to the contrary. This is now confirmed. Furthermore that the members of the GKN have remained faithful to the reformed faith by rejecting the
20 unbiblical direction of the RCN.
4. DGK and GKN deputies have formulated a common proposal to their synods (scheduled for late 2023 and mid 2024 respectively) recommending the two church
25 bonds unite into one federation. It will be prudent to await the DGK and GKN final decisions about federating before the FRCA makes a decision about offering a sister church relationship. Furthermore, FRCA synod 2024 is due to consider whether it is appropriate to offer sister church relations to more than one church federation in one country. The FRCA 2027 synod should then have the appropriate information to make a decision about offering a sister church relationship to the DGK and GKN.

End note

30 Sources of information

DGK and GKN sermons, live stream church services, books and publications, video conference, DGK and GKN website, classes and synod proceedings.

De Bazuin and *Weerklank* church magazines.

Zoom meetings with DGK and GKN deputies.

35

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

1. Introduction

The relationship between the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) goes back to the early start of the churches in Australia in the late 1950's.

2. Brief description

Location	<i>South Africa</i>		
Origin(s)	<i>Established in 1950 by Dutch immigrants to South Africa</i>		
Confessional Documents	<i>Three Forms of Unity</i>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>8 churches: Belhar, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Mamelodi, Pretoria, Pretoria-Maranata, Soshanguve-North, Wesbank. 6 mission church plants</i>		
Membership numbers	<i>Approximately 1500 members</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency	<i>Classis</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>
	<i>Synod</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Every 3 years</i>
Training of Theological Students	<i>See Section 3 below</i>		
Website	<i>https://www.vgk.org.za/, https://www.frc.org.za/</i>		

3. History and context to the relationship

The FRCSA originated with three congregations in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town. This later expanded through the institution of a second church in Pretoria, namely Pretoria-Maranata. In 1995 the church at Bethal joined the bond but this small congregation was dissolved in the mid-2000s. Since the 2000's further expansion occurred through mission churches being instituted, namely, Mamelodi and Soshanguve-North near Pretoria, and Belhar and Wesbank near Cape Town.

The church at Pretoria-Maranata is sending church for mission work in the Pretoria region. Currently there are church planting projects in Soshanguve-F4, Soshanguve UU/WW, Soshanguve XX and Nellmapius. The church at Cape Town is busy with church plants in Leiden and Fisantekraal and a preaching point opened recently in Robertson which is about 150 km inland from Cape Town.

For theological training, the FRCSA provide two optional pathways: 1) a BA degree with some dedicated language training followed by 4 years at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), and 2) a BTh degree at either Mukhanyo Theological College in KwaMhlanga (Mpumalanga) or George Whitefield College in Muizenberg (Western Cape) with additional dedicated language training, followed by facilitated content

of CRTS. They have curators appointed by synod and a coordinator to organise and coach theological students.

4. Decision and mandate

Synod Albany 2021 made the following decision regarding the FRCSA and the mandate to deputies:

Article 70 - Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

...

III. Decision

1. Continue sister relations with the FRCSA according to the established rules.
2. Appoint the Deputies' Auditor for Synod Treasurer to audit the financial records of the support provided and report to the next synod.
3. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. send two delegates to the next FRCSA synod when it is convened, subject to available finances;
 - c. coordinate responses to any requests for support from Deputies Curators of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate; and
 - d. keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta.

Grounds

1. The FRCSA give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Visits to South Africa have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.
3. Our South African churches, in addition to their own contributions, request ongoing financial support for theological training. Such support should be coordinated, the churches kept informed and financial accountability maintained.

5. Execution of Mandate

a. Activities and actions undertaken

i. Synod Belhar 2021

5 The FRCA received an invitation to the FRCSA synod held in Belhar (within the Cape Town metropole) on 12-16 April 2021; this was rescheduled due to the coronavirus pandemic from the originally planned dates in September 2020. Because of the pandemic, FRCA deputies were unable to travel and attend. However, br B Veenendaal was able to virtually attend, via Zoom, the synod session discussion on the FRCA churches and had the opportunity to address their synod with greetings from the Australian churches.

10 The FRCSA synod expressed their thankfulness to the Lord for the prayerful and financial support and contributions for the needy churches, mission and theological training. They also asked us to reconsider membership of the ICRC, to be able to stand alongside them as sister churches. With thankfulness to the Lord, their synod decided to maintain the sister church relation with the FRCA.

15 Regarding the relationship with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (RCN), the FRCSA decided in Synod Belhar that the decisions of Synod Meppel 2017 and upheld in Synod Goes 2020 regarding women in office and the intended unification with the NGK show that the RCN has deviated from the Word of God and undermined its authority. Although these were sufficient reasons to terminate the relationship, the FRCSA decided to continue the restricted sister church relationship in order to reach out to RCN local churches and members who have objections. This was communicated to us by letter on 20 30 August 2021. When the RCN united with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) on 1st May 2023 to form the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK-NL), the FRCSA subsequently informed us in a letter of 6th May 2023 that they have terminated the sister church relationship with RCN.

ii. Meeting of deputies FRCA and SA in August 2023

25 On 10 August 2023 Section 1a deputies had an online meeting with the South African Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad. Deputies shared updates on developments in the respective churches. The FRCSA have a new preaching point in Robertson about 1.5 hours drive away from Cape Town; this was started by some church members studying the Bible together and it grew from there. Although exciting, there are challenges with bringing together a multi ethnic group and in focussing on psalm singing. Some of the church plants in the Soshanguve area hope to institute soon.

30 There are now 4 theological students studying at CRTS in Canada, namely, Jonatan Boon, Jakob Mars, Marco VanRenssen and Arjan VanDerMeer, and 3 more preparing to go. This is quite a blessing and maybe a future challenge in working out where all may be called. Br Rofhiwa Ramphabana was examined by classis on 22 Aug 2022 and is awaiting a call. Meanwhile, he is working in the mission church of Soshanguve-F4 which is hoping to institute soon (sometime 2024) and have intentions to call him there. It is noted that the mission has financial constraints (because of Holland pulling out of the funding) and hence it is not possible to call him as a full-time missionary at this point.

Two other students, after theological training at South African seminaries, have obtained preaching consent, namely Br Jaco de Beer from Classis South and Br Kidane Habtemariam from Classis North. Br de Beer has been willing to serve the vacant congregation at Wesbank for a year. Br Habtemariam is leading a new English-language preaching point in Innesdal, Pretoria, designated as the “Covenant Church of Tshwane”, which operates under supervision of the Free Reformed Church Pretoria.

With the Dutch funds drying up for the mission work, there are challenges with seeking funding. While some mission churches are being instituted, additional mission possibilities and plants are opening up. The Canadian, South African and Australian churches have already had some discussion on how best to support and fund both mission and theological training. We as FRCA deputies will await the request from SA deputies as how best to direct our support in the future.

The SA deputies have been busy with the churches in The Netherlands. Since terminating relations with the RCNL in May of this year, they are supporting a group called “Kerngroep Bezinning” involving those churches and members disenchanted with or within the RCNL and looking to regroup as church federation. Apparently, this group is in discussion with the DGK and GKN. SA deputies are looking to a merger of DGK and GKN before considering a sister church relationship.

iii. Financial support for theological training

The deputies coordinated the financial support received from the Australian churches for the training of theology students in South Africa. The *Deputies Curators of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa* have requested support and given targeted amounts for each year. The targets for the following years were as follows:

2021	\$68,500
2022	\$75,000 to \$85,000
2023	\$80,000 to \$90,000

In the last two years we adopted a target *range* in order to give opportunity for additional funds for the churches to contribute. This gives us as FRCA churches a bit of flexibility in the amounts we give and it also gives the SA deputies some indication of what to expect so that they can at least budget for the minimum amount. Any further funds received by FRCSA is very welcome and goes towards paying off debts (which were incurred for supporting the theological training coordinator) and towards support of theological students and their training. The FRCSA churches themselves also contribute according to their ability.

In order to achieve the target, deputies have corresponded annually with all FRCA consistories advising them of the targets and updating them on the work of theological student training. We have stressed in the letter to consistories that this is voluntary support and not a mandatory fee or levy. However, deputies advise the churches of an indicative \$/per member amount to give an indication of possible contributions should all churches join in the support. For

2021-22 this was determined as \$24.58 to \$27.86 per communicant member and for 2023 this was increased to \$25.06 to \$28.20 per communicant member.

Given that we, functioning only as coordinators of this financial support, are dependent on the voluntary contributions from our churches, we cannot guarantee that the target amount will be met. The South African deputies are aware of this and thankful for the support they do get. They have expressed their thankfulness a number of times through emails and online meetings.

We are thankful that the Lord has given our FRCA churches willing and generous hearts so that the targets could be exceeded each year! The financial summary is as follows:

Balance 1 January 2021	\$149.05	
Target 2021	\$68,500.00	
Contributions received from churches 2021	\$77,418.85	
Fees 2021	-\$30.00	
Interest 2021	\$0.00	
Sent to South Africa 2021	-\$71,000.00	
Balance 1 January 2022	\$6,537.90	
Target 2022	\$75,000.00	to \$85,000
Contributions received from churches 2022	\$91,758.29	
Fees 2022	-\$10.00	
Interest 2022	\$0.00	
Sent to South Africa 2022	-\$90,000.00	
Balance 1 January 2023	\$8,286.19	
Target 2023	\$80,000.00	to \$90,000
Contributions received from churches 2023	\$102,248.37	to 30 Jul 2023
Fees 2023	\$0.00	
Interest 2023	\$0.00	
Sent to South Africa 2023	-\$100,000.00	
Balance 1 January 2024	\$10,534.56	interim...

Rev H Breytenbach has been the coordinator for theological training in South Africa for quite some years. He officially retired towards the end of 2021. On behalf of the FRCA churches, we sent a letter of congratulations to him. A quote from this letter: "The Lord has been pleased to use you in His service in the

5 churches in South Africa. It is God's Word through Christ that brings life and light to His church and to our lives. *How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!* Rom 10:15 Indeed, you have been called by God and privileged to proclaim the good news, and the Lord has used that Word in the lives of many of His children. Many of us in Australia have also heard His Word proclaimed from you when you visited... May you continue to rejoice in what God enables you to do in this life, and may you continue to be a blessing to the churches in South Africa and abroad.”

10 **iv. Financial support for what cause?**

The FRCSA churches contribute what they can to theological training and mission (among other things) and then request assistance for further funding from Canada and Australia. The current situation in South Africa is:

- 15 a) phasing out of support for mission from the Dutch churches as they are no longer sister churches to FRCSA,
- 15 b) currently an increasing number of theological students in South Africa being trained,
- 20 c) an increasing number of needy (mission) churches who would like to call a minister of the Word, but are financially unable to do so, and
- 20 d) increased difficulty in transferring funds from Canada to South Africa due to Canadian taxation laws.

25 In view of these challenges, a meeting was held on 20 October 2021 between deputies of FRCSA, deputies for Theological Training and for Needy Students from Canada, CRTS representatives and FRCA deputies. The outcome was a two-phase approach in which, in the first phase, the FRCA will continue contributing towards theological training as per our Synod 2021 decision, and in the second phase will consider, at our next synod in 2024, a request from FRCSA deputies as to where best to channel FRCA support, namely, towards theological training or towards mission. This latter support from FRCA for mission would give Canada more opportunity to support theological training directly in Canada, given that they can fund student living costs from their Foreign Student Bursary Fund while the students are studying at CRTS in Canada.

30 **b. Discussion and concluding remarks**

35 The FRCSA have been our sister churches since the beginning of our churches in Australia with whom we have strong historical and current ties. Many of our church members have emigrated from and to South Africa and our churches face many common joys and challenges. Not having face to face visits over the past years due to Covid has definitely been felt and noticed. We are thankful for the online means to meet and join in each other's meetings which is certainly beneficial, but not a replacement for face-to-face contact.

40 Because of the pandemic, we were unable to visit and meet with our South African sister churches and obtain an update. However, through the *Deputies Curators of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa* we were able to have regular contact and support their work of theological training. On several occasions they have expressed

their thankfulness for the prayerful and financial support we are able to provide for their theological training.

We are thankful that the FRCSA have made the move to terminate their sister church relations with the RCNL. While it is a sad event because of the continuing unfaithfulness of the RCNL (now the NGK-NL), it is a faithful action for the sake of Christ and His church-gathering work.

Deputies are thankful to the Lord for the abundant financial gifts and prayerful support that the FRCA churches have so generously provided for the theological training in South Africa. In a country where there is a huge hunger for the gospel and a need for ministers and missionaries to be sent to proclaim the good news, as FRCA churches we are thankful to be able to humbly support this work in a small way. *“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”* (Rom 10:15) May the Lord bless the results and bring in the harvest as He works towards the completion of the church and the great day of Christ’s return.

Our churches have been able, in the past, to support our FRCSA sister churches by contributing towards the needy church at Bethal when it was instituted and became part of the FRCSA bond. Thereafter, our churches supported needy churches and now theological training. Given the continuing needs in South Africa, we will seek advice from the FRCSA deputies as to which cause to support.

6. Publications and other documents

Br G Hagg is one of the FRCSA deputies for Theological Training and wrote an update on the seminary students of South Africa and those currently studying in Hamilton at CRTS. This was published in *Una Sancta* on 25 February 2023.

We received an update on theological training from the FRCSA deputies on 2 June 2023. We were informed of 8 students in theological training. Three are currently studying at an undergraduate level, four are at CRTS and one has completed his training (and subsequently successfully passed his classis examination). Each student is allocated a local mentor which is usually a minister (in South Africa) or professor (in Canada). The study program is supported by two academic mentors, namely, Rev Jopie van der Linden and Dr Hannes Breytenbach who have monthly discussion sessions on Calvin’s Institutes to the undergraduate students and provide classes on South African church history, polity and cultural context to the MDiv students who return to South Africa during the CRTS summer recess.

Three letters were sent to FRCA consistories updating them on the financial targets, funds collected and other related details of support for theological training. These were sent on 3 Dec 2021, 21st Jun 2022 and 3rd Jun 2023.

The next synod of the FRCSA is planned for September 2024.

7. Recommendation

1. To continue sister relations with the FRCSA according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a) maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;

- b) send two delegates to the next FRCSA synod when it is convened;
- c) coordinate responses to requests for support from FRCSA deputies regarding needs in areas such as mission, theological training or needy churches and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate; and
- 5 d) keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the FRCSA churches and their activities, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta.

Grounds

- 10 1. The FRCSA give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
- 2. Visits to South Africa and personal contacts with them are effective in terms of mutual support and encouragement in maintaining good sister church relations.
- 15 3. Our South African churches, in addition to their own contributions, request ongoing financial support. Such support should be co-ordinated, and the churches kept informed.

Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea

1. Introduction

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia entered into a sister church relation with the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCK) by a decision of Synod Albany 1975 (Article 82).

2. Brief description

Location	<i>South Korea</i>		
Origin(s)	<i>Established in 1952, separating from the Presbyterian Church of Korea</i>		
Confessional Documents	<i>Westminster Standards</i>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>Approximately 2500</i>		
Membership numbers	<i>Just over 400,000 members</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency	<i>Sessions</i>	<i>Unknown</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
	<i>Presbyteries</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>Unknown</i>
	<i>General Assembly</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Annually</i>
Training of Theological Students	<i>Kosin Theological Seminary, Cheonan</i>		
Other organisations managed by the churches	<i>Kosin Global University, Busan</i> <i>Kosin University Gospel Hospital, Busan</i>		
Website	<i>http://www.kosin.org/</i>		

3. History and context to the relationship

At the 6th synod of the FRCA, namely Synod Armadale 1966, there was a proposal from the church at Armadale to enter into correspondence with the KPCK. After a period of 9 years of correspondence and getting to know each other, the FRCA offered the KPCK a sister church relationship. Rev SG Hur of the KPCK and also a professor at their theological seminary, served as Minister of the Word in Armadale from 1978-1980 and in Kelmscott from 1981 to 1987. He then returned to Korea and became President of the seminary for 10 years before being declared emeritus-professor.

3.1. Church relations

The KPCK has three daughter church federations in other countries, namely: North America, Europe and Oceania. These three federations form the first group with whom they have church relations. The Korean Presbyterian Churches Oceania have churches in Australia including 3 churches in Perth with similar numbers in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane.

The second group of church relations are other bonds of churches with whom they have theological unity and relatively close contact. These include: The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, The Canadian and American Reformed Churches, The Free Reformed Churches of Australia and The Presbyterian Church in America.

The third group of church relations are those not as close but they may have some contact and may cooperate in mission. These include: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The Reformed Church in Japan, The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa, Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Union nationale des Églises protestantes réformées évangéliques de France, The Korean Church in Japan, The Reformed Presbyterian Church – North East India, Japan Alliance, Taiwan Reformation Presbyterian Association and Chinese Philadelphia Church.

In September 2021, the GA decided to terminate sister church relations with The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands – liberated (RCN).

3.2. Korea Theological Seminary

The *Korea Theological Seminary* (KTS) in Cheonan, South Korea, is the seminary of the Kosin churches established in 1946. This is where Rev SG Hur taught as a professor and strongly influenced its commitment to the Reformed faith. This influence and desire to remain and grow in reformed Scriptural directions continues and is evident among many of its graduates and ministers within the bond. The KTS is run by a Board which also oversees the Kosin Global University (<https://center.kosin.ac.kr/english/>) although both institutions are managed separately. Student numbers at the seminary have declined over the past years, down from approximately 400 to just over 300. The seminary has 16 fulltime professors, many of whom have excellent communication skills in English. Should the FRCA establish its own Theological College in the future, there can be great benefit in developing ties with this seminary. It was also suggested to us that our churches could consider welcoming a Korean intern so that he might gain from his experience among us and we in turn could benefit from his knowledge and experiences.

3.3. Evangelisation and mission

The Kosin churches have a very strong focus on evangelisation and mission. Many of the ministers have been involved in a church plant and establishing a new church in a particular suburb or locality in Korea. Many have grown to over 50 or 100 members in 10 years' time and are reasonably well established in the local communities.

The Kosin churches support the Korea Presbyterian Mission (KPM) located in Daejeon, South Korea. The KPM was established in 1955 to organise and train missionaries; currently there are approximately 480 missionaries active in over 50 countries internationally, primarily in Asia but also in the Middle East and Africa. Within Australia there is currently one mission church in Perth and one in Brisbane. One of our deputies has had ongoing contact with the missionary in Perth and has provided assistance when requested. Whereas this missionary had previously been working with indigenous Australians, he is currently reaching out to Koreans who have newly come to Perth.

3.4. Kosin Global University

5 The Kosin churches own and oversee the Kosin Global University whose main campus is located in Busan, but with regional campuses in Yeongdo (right on the harbour on the Pacific Ocean near the main campus), Songdo (the medical school) and Cheonan (theological graduate school). The latter is located alongside the Kosin Theological Seminary which is managed separately from the university (although run by the same Board and sharing some administrative functions). Students graduating from the Masters of Theology at the university are eligible to enter the seminary.

10 The university offers a range of programs including theology, Christian education, business, information technology, advertising and public relations, visual design, music, health, medicine, rehabilitation, child welfare, food and nutrition, life sciences and chemistry, nursing, etc. All students are required to attend chapel twice per week (chapel commences 11 am every morning).

3.5. Kosin University Gospel Hospital

15 The Kosin University Gospel Hospital (KUGH) is one of the oldest medical institutions in Busan. It operates approximately 1000 patient beds, 26 medical departments and 1600 staff. The hospital was an initiative of Dr. Seongsan Gi-ryeo Jang who began the provision of free medical treatment at a military tent hospital in Yeongdo, Busan in 1951. It now is a high-technology modern hospital with a specialised focus on cancer. The hospital chaplains, of the Kosin churches, visit each patient twice per day and manage the visits and notes on each patient via an integrated digital phone app. We were advised that through this ministry about 200 patients are converted to Christianity per year.

4. Decision and mandate

25 Synod Albany 2021 made the following decision regarding the KPCK and the mandate to deputies:

Article 71 - Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea

III. Decision

- 30 1. Continue sister-church relations with the KPCK according to the established rules.
2. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - 35 b. send two delegates to the KPCK General Assembly in 2022, subject to available finances;
 - c. continue contact with the KPCK mission undertaken locally in Australia, offering support where feasible and appropriate;
 - d. discuss with the KPCK deputies our desire to coordinate with them as they engage in mission activities in Australia; and
 - 40 e. submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

Grounds

1. The Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea shows faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions.
2. Contact with mission work of the KPCK in our locality is a meaningful way to mutually assist and encourage one another in keeping with the Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations.
3. It is brotherly for sister-churches to inform us when they are doing mission work in our nation, also so we can support and encourage them prayerfully and perhaps otherwise.

5. Execution of Mandate

Deputies were able to carry out their mandate despite the effects of Covid and restrictions lingering somewhat longer in South Korea than in Australia. However, deputies were able to attend the General Assembly in 2022 as well as meet with Korean deputies while at the CanRC synod.

5.1. Meeting with Korean delegates

While attending the synod of our sister churches in Canada in May 2022, Reverends SA 't Hart and A Hagg met with a number of Korean delegates, namely Rev. Hyung Tae Kim, chairman of the Kosin Fraternal Relations Committee, Rev. Bongsik Sim and Rev. Park Kwang-Young (a Kosin pastor currently serving in the CanRC and who served as translator). This meeting served to provide an update on the challenges and activities of the two church bonds and an encouragement to continue in faith to remain church of Christ in our respective countries. We were also advised that 2022 marked the 70th anniversary of the Kosin churches. The KPCK celebrated by having 70 days of dawn prayers which took place from February through to Easter of 2022. After the 70 days, the Covid restrictions were lifted, in the Lord's providence!

5.2. General Assembly 2022

Upon receiving an invite, two delegates, Rev SA 't Hart and elder B Veenendaal attended the 72nd KPCK General Assembly 2022 held on 20-22 September 2022. There were 512 Korean delegates in addition to visitors that assembled in the auditorium of the Podowon Presbyterian Church in Busan. We were assisted with translation during the GA via the services of Rev Haeshin Yoo, who spoke into a phone and we listened by wireless earplugs. This was particularly helpful in understanding the material presented to the GA and in following some of the discussions.

The GA commenced with a worship service on Tuesday 19th September where they also celebrate Lord's Supper with the delegates and sister church visitors. We were invited and privileged to join in the sacrament of Holy Supper with them.

The 1063-page book of recommendations to the GA was covered and decided upon in less than 2.5 days. This time period also included a beautiful performance by the Kosin University Choir, a video commemorating the 70th anniversary of the GA which was celebrated two years ago, a video on the mission work in foreign countries, etc.

The Kosin churches comprise 53 presbyteries and much of their GA agenda has to do with the running of presbyteries and receiving proposals and appeals from

presbyteries. Much of the agenda dealt with their constitution, rules and regulations managing the operation of presbyteries, committees, general assembly function and operation, appointments to boards, committees and tasks, etc.

5 To give an indication of the types and diversity of committees appointed by and accountable to the GA, here is a sample: disaster emergency relief, social relations, Bible commentary publishing, Kosin history and martyrs organisation promotion, discover and recruit pastor candidates, Reformed church construction research institute, Korea Christian military mission association, Korean Bible Society, Hymn society, Christian broadcasting, Christian TV, education resources, education 10 guidance, national student faith movement guidance, heresy countermeasure, etc. Besides these, there are also many committees for administration, finances, recruitment, audit, constitution revision, legislative, future policy research, etc.

15 Their agenda also dealt with the governance and management of the Kosin Global University, Kosin University Gospel Hospital, Kosin Theological Seminary, Korean Presbyterian Mission. Some of these included discussions on appointments to Boards, meeting the legal articles and requirements in relation to government stipulations, constitution and regulations, etc.

A number of matters and discussions at GA included the following aspects:

- 20 a) There is an overall decline in membership in the Kosin churches, partly due to Korea having the world's lowest birth rate (0.7%) but also due to the increase of secularisation, especially among younger members. We noted that this is of considerable concern to the churches there.
- 25 b) One of the consequences of declining membership is also a declining number of theological students at the seminary, now being closer to 300 students down from about 400 some years ago. This leads to fewer ministers in the future to replace those who retire. One proposal being discussed to ensure there are sufficient ministers moving forward is to raise the age of retirement beyond 70 years. As there were differing views on this, a decision will be made next year.
- 30 c) The Kosin churches have a much bigger emphasis on church planting than us, and the Lord has blessed this. At the same time, questions are being asked about the effectiveness of much of the work that is being done. While new church plants are celebrated, there is little reporting about how these churches develop. It was also noted that some of them have had to close their doors. It was suggested that these new churches receive greater oversight from the local 35 presbytery and that they focus less on numbers and more on spiritual maturity.
- d) The Kosin Church is alert to false teaching and heresy and decided that a local "Daniel Prayer Movement" required careful scrutiny.
- 40 e) The GA dealt with who are to be appointed to boards, such as for the hospital, and committees such as Bible translation. There was a strong focus on ensuring positions were filled with solid reformed men (eg. theology professors from their seminary) rather than focusing only on scholarly and academic criteria.
- 45 f) In a discussion about a proposal to set up a committee to examine the role of women in church, one delegate suggested that they should consider women as pastors because of the shortage of men. The chairman was quick to point out that the Bible is clear on the matter and he dismissed the comment.

g) Revisions were proposed with respect to their church order and governance. This included matters such as the position of pastors within a presbytery when those pastors are ministering to a small group that does not have ordained elders. A matter that generated more discussion was the proposal to remove chapters 34 and 35 of their version of the Westminster Confession of Faith. These chapters were not an original part of the WCF but added in 1903 by the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America. Chapter 34 deals with the Holy Spirit, and Chapter 35 with "The Gospel of the Love of God and Missions." Although the KPCK has these chapters as a part of their confessional standards, other conservative Presbyterian churches such as the PCA and OPC do not, and the proposal was for the KPCK to delete them since: a) these articles provide nothing of substance that isn't found elsewhere in the WCF, b) these articles open the door to Arminianism, c) these articles open the door to a false ecumenicity. The Kosin General Assembly debated this at some length but it was felt that more discussion was needed before altering their confessional document as it now stands. The matter was sent back for the committee to do more work in explaining the rationale for deleting them, before a final decision can be made.

5.3. Rotational attendance of general assemblies

The KPCK have a general assembly once each year the FRCA have, as decided by our synods, sent delegates once every three years. In the past we rotated attendance in each 3-year period with the Canadian and Dutch sister churches. Given that the latter relationship was terminated, only the Canadians and ourselves were attending once in the 3-year period.

Our CanRC sister church deputies have been in correspondence with the OPC deputies and suggested that the OPC, who also have church relations with the KPCK, join in the rotational attendance at Korean general assemblies. We received correspondence from OPC deputies indicating that the OPC is prepared to do this. The arrangement is that each church that attends will share its report with the other two church committees. For the general assembly held in September 2023, the CanRC attended.

The KPCK doesn't seem to deal with everything at each General Assembly, and the matter of sister-church relations wasn't on the agenda in 2022. This highlights the importance of sharing and receiving reports with the CanRC and OPC so that we can keep abreast of all developments in the KPCK.

5.4. KPCK mission activities in Australia

In response to Synod Albany's mandate to "continue contact with the KPCK mission undertaken locally in Australia, offering support where feasible and appropriate", we have maintained contact with a small Korean church in Perth, Western Australia. After the lifting of Covid restrictions some support has been provided, including pulpit supply on an occasional basis. In regards to Kosin missionaries working in Australia, we were encouraged to liaise with the Kosin Presbyterian Mission (KPM). The Kosin deputies also alerted us to a missionary pastor in Sydney, with whom we have had some contact. Although we have endeavoured to complete this aspect of our mandate, we acknowledge that there is more to be done. Although we recommend this remain a part of the mandate for deputies, we will be able to do this best with the cooperation of FRCA churches where those churches are in the same region as the KPCK mission work.

6. Discussion and concluding remarks

5 The KPCK is a very large bond of churches with a strong history through several reformations. There are many challenges that they face, both in standing united with many churches in faithfulness to our Heavenly Father, and also, in standing united to face the secular culture of this world. Their history and culture play a large role in where they are at today. Many people expressed thankfulness that the foundations of the (now-existing) Kosin church were planted by Australian missionaries sent by the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the mid to late 1800's.

10 Some interesting and noteworthy observations of the Kosin churches as well as some concluding remarks concerning their bond and the General Assembly 2022 include:

- 15 a) There is a strong desire throughout GA discussions to remain reformed and focused on what Scripture teaches. This appears to be a distinguishing mark relative to the many other presbyterian churches in Korea.
- 20 b) The Kosin churches maintain a strong focus on their history and the desire to remain Scriptural and faithful to the Lord. The faithful and God-honouring struggle to be free from Shinto shrine worship under the rule of Japan from 1910 to 1945 was a major reason behind the separation from the mainstream presbyterian church and the formation of the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea.
- 25 c) In view of rising secularity and its effect on the Kosin churches (eg. declining membership), there appears to be a renewed focus on maintaining the truth, supporting existing churches and church plants, and ensuring that solidly reformed persons are appointed to key influential positions with their church government.
- 30 d) The concerns related to an increasing secularised world aren't unique to the KPCK and it is a matter that is regularly raised among churches with whom we have contact, and this also something we experience at home. One area in which this secularism is experienced is with respect to the hallowing of the Lord's Day. What is the role of cultural and secular influences in maintaining a day of rest that is free from regular work and activities, according to Scripture and the confessions? As deputies we do raise and discuss these and other matters.
- 35 e) There continues to be a strong desire to be a witness to the world. This is evident in the resources put into, not only international mission activities, but also national church planting and encouraging the members to reach out to those around them. This came out in a meditation at the start of the 2nd day of the GA which focused on Gal 3:6-9. Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness; he was to be a blessing to the nations. Today also, we, the church of Christ, are called to be busy with the gospel and be a blessing to the world as the Lord works in us and through us.
- 40 f) There is an interesting view on church sizes and the desire to split into smaller churches. Approximately two thirds of their churches are relatively small with less than 100 members, where a church growing to 150 members is deemed too large and it is time to split. Of the remaining churches there are quite a number around the 300–400-member mark which usually have one main pastor and 3 or 4 assistant pastors. Then there are a handful of mega churches. The Podowon church in which the GA 2022 was held, has a membership of over 10,000 members (yes twice the entire FRCA membership in one church!!) with more than 10 pastors ministering to it.
- 45

7. Publications and other documents

Hur, S.G. 2006. *The Church Preserved Through Fires: A history of the Presbyterian Church in Korea*. Inheritance Publications, Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada. A very good overview of the history of the Kosin churches which also helps to understand the cultures and traditions.

5 Veenendaal, B. and H. Terpstra. 2020. A Snapshot of Korean Life. Part 1: Una Sancta 67:2 22 February 2020, Part 2: Una Sancta 67:3 7 March 2020. An overview of the visit to the General Assembly 2019 of the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea.

'tHart, S.A. and B. Veenendaal. 2022. Visit to Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea - Parts 1 and 2. Una Sancta, Vol 69: No 22 and 23, 3 and 17 December.

10 8. Recommendations

Deputies recommend the following to Synod Darling Downs 2024:

1. Continue sister-church relations with the KPCK according to the established rules.
2. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - 15 a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. send two delegates to the KPCK General Assembly in 2025, subject to available finances;
 - c. continue contact with the KPCK mission undertaken locally in Australia, offering support where feasible and appropriate; and
 - 20 d. submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

Grounds

1. The Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea shows faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions.
- 25 2. Personal contact and attending their General Assembly is very beneficial in mutually understanding, encouraging and supporting each other.
3. Contact with mission work of the KPCK in our locality is a meaningful way to mutually assist and encourage one another in keeping with the Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations.
- 30 4. It is brotherly for sister-churches to inform us when they are doing mission work in our nation, also so we can support and encourage them prayerfully and perhaps otherwise.

First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC)

1. Introduction

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia have enjoyed a sister church relationship with the FERC since 2015. Since that time our relationship has deepened and proven to be a blessing to them and to us.

2. Brief Description

Location	<i>Singapore</i>		
Origin(s)	<i>Started as a youth group in 1962 as a small group of students learning about the Christian faith. Instituted in January 1982.</i>		
Confessional Documents	<i>Three Ecumenical Creeds Three Forms of Unity</i>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>1</i>		
Membership numbers	<i>434 as at 31 May 2023</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency	<i>Consistory</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>monthly</i>
Sister churches etc.	<i>Covenant Grace Church, Penang. Contact with Heritage Reformed Congregations (North America), United Reformed Churches of Myanmar.</i>		
Training of Theological Students	<i>No affiliation with any Theological Seminaries. A student has recently graduated from the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary.</i>		
Website	<i>https://ferc.org.sg/</i>		

3. History and context of the relationship

The FERC had its beginnings in the 1960s and was instituted as a Reformed Church in 1982. They received much help and guidance from the Protestant Reformed Churches of North America. Contact was made between the FERC and FRCA in the 1980's but this was discontinued in 1996. Contact was re-established after 2007 through the efforts of the FRC Bunbury and Busselton. The offer of a sister church relationship was extended to the FERC by Synod Baldivis 2015 and accepted by them in the same year.

4. Decision and mandate

Synod Albany 2021 (article 94) decided the following with respect to the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC).

Decision

1. Continue the sister church relationship with the FERC of Singapore according to the established rules.
- 5 2. Continue to accept the agreement made which addresses the unique way that a sister church relationship with a single church can function:
 - a. It is not always feasible, nor is it always necessary to attend each other's regular meetings;
 - 10 b. When the FERC is deliberating important matters such as (1) external relationships with other churches, (2) doctrinal and (3) liturgical issues, the FERC will inform FRCA;
 - c. The FERC will send a copy of its annual reports;
 - d. The FERC will update FRCA on any important issues every 6 months if needed; and
 - e. The FERC will invite delegates when there is a special event in the Church.
- 15 3. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. Visit the FERC of Singapore two times in the next inter-synodical period to continue to strengthen our relationship, subject to finances;
 - 20 b. Give timely reports concerning the FERC of Singapore to members of the FRCA;
 - c. Promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the FRCA and the FERC by way of exchange of speakers where the opportunity arises, and good communication concerning events that might be of interest for one another's members to attend and participate in;
 - 25 d. Offer assistance to the FERC of Singapore where requested and feasible; and
 - e. Invite delegates of the FERC of Singapore to our next Synod.

Grounds

1. The FERC of Singapore gives evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God.
- 30 2. The existing rules for exercising sister relations do not prohibit a sister church relationship with a single church, but there are elements in the exercise of this relationship that need to reflect its unique aspects.
3. The FERC of Singapore is a single congregation, has an official bond with only one other church, and may be able to benefit from assistance from time to time, and from the resources the Lord has given us.
- 35 4. Visits to Singapore and their visits to us have proven beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

5. Developments in FERC

Under the blessing of the LORD, the FERC continues to be a vibrant and growing congregation. The church has grown by 77 members in the past three years, with many of these being new converts and/or joining the church through public profession of faith. There is a strong focus on outreach, including weekly outreach events, an outreach Sunday school (in addition to covenant education for the children of the congregation), ongoing instruction for adults new to the faith and the occasional evangelistic service. Chinese language services held each Sunday morning with about 60-80 people in attendance. They have also recently begun to offer translation for the evening services.

There has also been an increase in the work of mission in the Asia region and FERC is seeking new opportunities in their region. In June 2023, church leaders from the Philippines, India and Myanmar were invited to Singapore to join in with the Reformation conference being held there. Support is provided to the United Reformed Churches of Myanmar, and two theological students from there are being supported to study at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in India. The FERC has shown keen interest in partnering with the FRCA in mission work in the Asia Pacific Region where feasible.

The FERC maintains a strong sister relationship with Covenant Grace Church in Penang, assisting with preaching there at least once a month. In addition to the United Reformed Churches of Myanmar, they also have contact with the Heritage Reformed Congregations of North America. This has progressed through their use of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary and also the visits of Dr. Joel Beeke to Singapore. The Heritage Reformed Churches are members of NAPARC and are known by both the CanRC and FRCSA. They have particularly close ties with the Free Reformed Churches of North America.

6. Execution of Mandate

Following the Covid pandemic and with the opening of the borders to international travel, we were able to enjoy a significant level of engagement with the FERC, to the benefit of both churches. Our relationship was promoted through Australian pastors being invited to Singapore to teach, preach and provide support where needed, and the two pastors from Singapore visiting and ministering in Australia.

a. Visit the FERC of Singapore two times in the next inter-synodical period to continue to strengthen our relationship, subject to finances.

A total of five visits were made by deputies in the inter-synodical period.

- September 28, 2022. Stop-over from Korea to Perth by deputies S. 't Hart & B. Veenendaal. Acquaintance meeting where we could update one another on recent events.
- December 2022. Deputy S. 't Hart visited at the request of FERC in order to preach and give a number of talks at their Church Camp. A visit was also made to their sister church, Covenant Grace, in Penang.
- April 2023. Month-long Pastor Exchange between K. Dekker (West Albany) and Nam Tuck Chong (FERC) in April 2023. Rev. Dekker also visited the church in Penang.
- Visit by S. 't Hart & D. Poppe to Singapore from Sept. 31 - Oct. 2, 2023 to assist with the examination of a candidate for the ministry.

- Deputy H. Terpstra visited Singapore in September 2022, but on a personal basis.

We were also blessed to receive the two FERC pastors in Western Australia. Between them, they preached in six Free Reformed churches as well as in a Chinese ministry context.

b. Give timely reports concerning the FERC of Singapore to members of the FRCA.

In addition to some reporting done through local church bulletins, an article was published in *Una Sancta* in February 2023 which gave an update on the FERC as well as the church in Penang. Ministers from FERC also introduced their church in Albany and the Perth Metro area.

c. Promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the FRCA and the FERC by way of exchange of speakers where the opportunity arises, and good communication concerning events that might be of interest for one another's members to attend and participate in.

i. The FERC invited members of the FRCA to the various conferences and church camps they hosted; the deputies passed these invitations on, chiefly by way of local church bulletins or requesting the invitations be emailed.

ii. The deputies are unaware of any events in Australia in which formal invitations were extended to members of FERC, although some were passed on by word of mouth. Their ministers were invited once again to the FRCA ministers & wives conference in 2023, but they were unable to attend. Other than the cost of travel and accommodation, a clear challenge we have between the two countries is that holiday times don't line up, making it hard for Singaporeans to attend most events in Australia and vice versa.

iii. We've had more success in exchanging speakers between our two countries. Not only were we able to provide a speaker for the FERC annual church camp in 2022, but the deputies were able to organise a public lecture in the FRC Darling Downs on May 11 by Rev. Mark Chen. This lecture was very much appreciated by all those in attendance and the online recording received strong interest. To hold similar events in the future would be an excellent way for the members of our churches to experience the blessings of this sister-church relationship.

d. Offer assistance to the FERC of Singapore where requested and feasible.

In September 2023 the FERC Church Council requested the assistance of Rev. D. Poppe and S. 't Hart to assist with the examination of Candidate Johnathan Yap. Br. Yap, a member of FERC, was supported by them to study at the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. He did a significant portion of his studies while remaining in Singapore before travelling to the United States to complete his degree. Br. Yap sustained the examination and has now begun a 12-month internship with FERC. FERC has expressed their appreciation for the help that was given with the examination.

A letter was received from FERC's sister, Covenant Grace Church in Penang, asking for assistance with the preaching as they prayerfully wait for their own pastor. This was shared in *Una Sancta* and also forwarded to the consistories of our churches.

We haven't yet received word from a church in the FRCA where meaningful support can be offered.

e. Invite delegates of the FERC of Singapore to our next Synod.

An invitation to attend Synod 2024 has been extended.

5 **7. Present agreement re: maintaining sister church relations**

Synod Bunbury 2018 received a report from deputies where, in consultation with the FERC, an agreement was made regarding how the sister church relationship would function given that the FERC is a single congregation. It was agreed:

- 10
- a. It is not always feasible, nor is it always necessary to attend each other's regular meetings;
 - b. When the FERC is deliberating important matters such as (1) external relationships with other churches, (2) doctrinal and (3) liturgical issues, the FERC will inform FRCA;
 - c. The FERC will send a copy of its annual reports;
 - d. The FERC will update FRCA on any important issues every 6 months if needed; and
 - 15 e. The FERC will invite delegates when there is a special event in the Church.

20 From our perspective, this agreement has functioned sufficiently well. We feel, however, that the agreement is one-sided with the FERC making special commitments to us but the FRCA not making special commitments to them. Although the FERC hasn't expressed unhappiness with the current arrangements, we feel it would be appropriate if Synod Darling Downs mandates Deputies for Inter-church Relations to review this agreement and present proposed changes (if any) to the next Synod.

Concluding remarks

25 Through meetings and conversations, it is evident that the FERC highly values their relationship with the FRCA and we in turn value our relationship with them. There has been good contact on a personal level between FRCA deputies and the pastors of FERC. FRCA members regularly visit FERC Singapore and vice versa. There are growing connections with respect to the work of mission, particularly in the Philippines. Our sister relationship is both cherished and meaningful, and has experienced the blessing of the Lord.

30 Deputies conclude that The FERC of Singapore is faithful to the Lord of the Church, submits to His Word as the rule for all of life, and is zealous to carry out the church's calling to bring the gospel to a fallen world.

8. Recommendation

- 35
- 1. Continue the sister church relationship with the FERC of Singapore according to the established rules.
 - 2. Continue to accept the agreement made which addresses the unique way that a sister church relationship with a single church can function:
 - a. It is not always feasible, nor is it always necessary to attend each other's meetings;

- b. When the FERC is deliberating important matters such as (1) external relationships with other churches, (2) doctrinal and (3) liturgical issues, the FERC will inform the FRCA;
- c. The FERC will send a copy of its annual reports;
- 5 d. The FERC will update the FRCA on any important issues every 6 months if needed;
- e. The FERC will invite delegates when there is a special event in the Church; and
- 10 f. Review the current agreement made which addresses the unique way that a sister church relationship with a single church can function, presenting proposed changes (if any) to the next Synod.
3. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
- a. Visit the FERC of Singapore two times in the next three years to continue to strengthen our relationship;
- 15 b. Review the agreement made with the FERC regarding how our sister relationship with them might function, presenting proposed changes (if any) to the next Synod;
- c. Give timely reports concerning the FERC of Singapore to members of the FRCA;
- 20 d. Promote increased familiarisation of the memberships of the FRCA and the FERC by way of exchange speakers where the opportunity arises, and good communication concerning events that might be of interest for one another's members to attend and participate in;
- e. Offer assistance to the FERC of Singapore where requested and feasible; and
- 25 f. Invite delegates of the FERC of Singapore to our next Synod.

Grounds

1. The FERC gives evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God.
2. Although the agreed-upon ways to maintain our relationship with the FERC are working sufficiently well, it be good to review this with the FERC for their benefit and
- 30 ours.
3. There is value for both Singapore and Australia to cultivate our relationship further. Visits to Singapore and their visits to us have proven beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

1. Introduction

Synod Albany 2021 mandated deputies for Interchurch relationships to report at Synod Darling Downs 2024 on the development within the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC).

2. Brief Description of Church Details

<i>Location</i>	Mostly in Canada, with three churches in the U.S.
<i>Origin(s)</i>	Mostly RCN immigrants after World War II
<i>Confessional Documents</i>	Three Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity
<i>The number of churches and church plants</i>	71 churches and four formal church plants (<i>The Emmanuel American Reformed Church of Denver, Colorado, announces that effective July 10, 2023, it will no longer remain an instituted church of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.</i>)
<i>Membership number</i>	19,866 members, of whom 11,919 are communicant members.
<i>Assemblies, number, frequency</i>	Consistory/Council 71 Monthly; Classis 8 Quarterly; Regional Synod 2 Annually; General Synod 1 Triennially
<i>Training of Theological Students</i>	Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)
<i>Website</i>	www.canrc.org

3. History of the Relationship

Correspondence with the CanRC was officially initiated at Synod Armadale 1954, while a sister church relationship with the CanRC was established at Synod Albany 1959. Given the decision taken at Synod Bunbury 2018 to terminate our sister relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN), the relationship with the CanRC is now the oldest sister church relationship held by the FRCA. Our bond with the CanRC has historically been very close, involving significant interaction between our churches in an official capacity and informally between our members.

The FRCA has long used the Canadian Book of Praise for worship services over the years, also having been allowed to advise the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise. The FRCA now has their own Australian Book of Praise.

With the institution of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in 1969, FRCA involvement has included contributing financially and sending students to study in Hamilton. Both churches have been active in calling each other's ministers, while travel between members of the two federations has been extensive. Members of the FRCA have also benefited over time from the printed resources produced in the CanRC, as well as the

services of retired ministers. The continued coordination and cooperation between our respective federations have been mutually beneficial, and our relationship with the Canadian sister churches has been and continues to be a great blessing.

4. Decision and Mandate

5 Synod Albany 2021 (Art. 95) decided the following regarding the CanRC:

1. Continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - 10 a. monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
 - b. monitor and report to the synod on developments within the CanRC about areas of discussion about *church polity and liturgy* as mentioned in the deputies' report;
 - 15 c. stay informed on the developments regarding the discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA; and
 - d. send two delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled for May 2022 in Guelph-Emmanuel CanRC (Ontario), subject to finances.

Grounds

- 20 1. The CanRC show continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Deputies have identified areas of ongoing discussion within the CanRC that relate to church polity and liturgy, and rule #2 for sister church relations requires mutual care for each other in these areas.
- 25 3. We need to foster mutual understanding and support regarding matters our respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America.
4. We value our bond with the CanRC and the personal contact at the synodical level, reinforcing our contact with them.

5. Execution of Mandate

Regarding mandate (a)

30 Synod Guelph 2022 decided concerning the CCCNA and CRCA:

1. To discharge all members of the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA) and Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) from their present tasks.
- 35 2. To appoint one committee to be mandated to oversee all aspects of ecumenical relations and to name this committee the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER).
3. To appoint twelve members to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) from across the federation, one of whom should be the convenor.

4. To set the length of time on the committee to be three years, renewable three times.

5. To give the CER the following general mandate:

5.1 To continue contact with churches with whom we have ecumenical relations;

5.2 To send an appropriate number of delegates to represent the CanRC churches at the meetings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) and North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC);

5.3 To work in consultation with individual CanRC churches and classes that maintain contact with churches for which the CER also has a mandate;

5.4 Upon request, to advise CanRC churches regarding the identity of other churches and our relationship with them;

5.5 To report on any contact with a church with whom we are not in an ecumenical relationship;

5.6 To facilitate hospitality support for fraternal delegates and observers in consultation with the convening church;

5.7 The CER may also send invitations to any other church when they deem it beneficial to our ecumenical relations. The CER shall inform the convening church of these invitations;

5.8 To grant Fraternal Delegates (delegates from churches with whom we have EF) at each general synod:

5.8.1 access to all internal synod documents;

5.8.2 invited to participate in deliberations in meetings of advisory committees;

5.8.3 be allowed to address the synod;

5.8.4 be given the privilege of the floor (entitled to deliberate and advise, but not vote);

5.9 To grant Fraternal Observers (delegates from other churches) at each general synod:

5.9.1 an opportunity to address the synod;

5.9.2 be invited to be present at meetings of advisory committees;

5.9.3 be given the privilege of the floor when they bring greetings to the synod on behalf of the churches that sent them;

5.9.4 be given other privileges if the synod executive deems that beneficial.

Synod Guelph 2022 decided to maintain the status quo concerning the current rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship for the time being. Deputies had proposed new rules, modelled after that of the OPC, but Synod Guelph wasn't ready to accept that yet.

Synod Guelph 2022 decided concerning the ecclesiastical fellowship between the CanRC and the FRCA:

1. To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) under the adopted rules;
2. To express thankfulness and appreciation for the FRCA's ongoing support for and interest in the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), including financial support;
3. To encourage the Board of Governors and Senate of the CRTS to continue contact with the deputyship for theological education in the FRCA to explore the feasibility and benefits of delivering theological education in Australia;
4. To mandate the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER):
 - 4.1 To maintain close contact with the deputyship of the FRCA in matters of relations with sister churches abroad and informing the FRCA of changes or developments in third-party relationships;
 - 4.2 To invite the various deputyships of the FRCA to seek direct contact with the corresponding CanRC committees (e.g., our Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise, Committee on Bible Translations) in areas of mutual interest where the CER's mandate does not reach;
 - 4.3 To communicate to the FRCA the value of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) and encourage them to consider membership; and
 - 4.4 To send a delegation to the next FRCA synod in 2024.

Synod Guelph 2022 decided concerning the CRCA-CCCNA reports on the Execution of CO Art. 50:

1. Regarding the revision of Church Order Article 50 (CanRC) - to consider if a change to CO Art. 50 is deemed necessary, whether a local church should initiate this.
2. To ensure that rule 6 of our (CanRC) Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship is honoured, namely, to demonstrate the consistency of its proposals with Scripture, Confession, and Church Order in its report.

During the Skype meeting between the FRCA deputies (section 1b – North America, Europe) and the CER on the 2nd of November 2023, the CER provided the following update:

1. Officially, the CanRC acknowledges one level of church relations but functions at various levels in real terms.
2. The CER will pursue discussions on inter-church relations with the GKN and DGK.
3. The CER has completed a first draft report dealing with the text of Art. 50 (CanRC CO) and the rules of church fellowship. Zoom and plenary meetings have occurred with deputies from all over Canada participating. A united report is being worked on and may become available in March 2024.
4. Regarding the current policy on fencing the Lord's Supper Table, the CER shared that this is primarily a local church matter and that the churches hold each other accountable according to Art 61 CO.

Regarding mandate (b)

The developments referred to in the deputies' report to Synod Albany 2021 include:

- whether the Book of Praise is to be the only approved book of worship for the CanRC;
- confessional membership;
- guests at the Lord's Supper; and
- 5 - whether or not only ministers of sister churches may be permitted to preach on CanRC pulpits.

These matters were referenced in our official greetings to Synod Guelph 2022 and will continue to need our attention as nothing officially has come up. In those greetings, however, we included the sentence:

10 *"We are aware of the decisions of Classis Ontario North to enter into a relationship with other federations and have the freedom to use the URCNA Psalter without consent from the General Synod."*

Following Synod Guelph, the accuracy of this statement was questioned by a deputy of the CanRC. Upon reflection, we recognise that the statement is incorrect. We made a mistake, apologized, and the apology was accepted.

15 A letter of apology was sent to the CER to pass on to the churches in Classis Northern Ontario. When the FRCA deputies inquired about this 'letter of apology' during the Skype meeting with the CER on the 2nd of November 2023, the CER assured us that this letter had been received and the matter was now considered closed. The FRCA deputies welcomed this news and will seek to clarify concerns with the CER before publicly commenting or expressing concerns.

20 Regarding the practice of allowing ministers of non-sister churches to preach on their pulpits, one congregation received advice from its Classis Central Ontario meeting in June 2019, and another congregation received advice from Church visitors in 2017. This practice was appealed to Regional Synod East (2019), which judged against it. That, in turn, was appealed to Synod Guelph 2022 by three churches of Classis Central Ontario.

25 In one appeal, considerable attention was given to interpreting the CanRC Church Order. The appellant stated that there is no explicit mention in the (CanRC) Church Order and no clear principles that would prevent a consistory from inviting a non-sister church preacher to the local pulpit. The appellant warned against the dangerous tendency of tradition or current practice to gain authority over the Church Order. The appellant also considered the RSE 2019's decision to be based on the weight of tradition and their interpretation of how various principles are implicitly understood. The appellant also saw this as an attempt to bind churches to something they have not agreed upon together and stated that the decision to invite preachers of non-sister churches to their pulpit did not arise out of a desire to express ecclesiastical fellowship. It was seen as a practical decision that arose from their geographically isolated context.

30 Ultimately, Synod Guelph decided against the appeals of the churches of Classis Central Ontario. (cf. Acts, Synod Guelph 2022, art. 155).

40 ***Regarding mandate (c)***

A sister church relationship between the CanRC and URCNA has existed since Synod Neerlandia 2001. The early years of this relationship were characterised by concerted

5 efforts by both federations to work towards federative unity, with both the CanRC and URCNA appointing committees to work through several joint issues (songbook, liturgical forms and confessions, church order, and theological education). Despite the initial enthusiasm, efforts at working towards federative unity on the part of the URCNA eased significantly, with hesitation regarding federative unity coming primarily from the American churches within the federation due to their lack of knowledge and familiarity with the CanRC.

Despite this, Synod Dunnville 2016 mandated the CCU-C (Coordinators for the Committee of Church Unity) of the CanRC:

- 10 “a) *To seek ways to facilitate the work of building unity on the local levels, as well as visiting churches and classes of the URCNA, particularly in the United States;*
- b) *To discuss with CERCU [Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URCNA] how to make progress towards federative unity should URCNA Synod Wyoming [2016] mandate their CERCU to pursue this.”*

15 Progress was made in the inter-synodical period in several ways. For example, various meetings were held to promote unity, concurrent classes meetings were organised in different parts of the country, and cooperation between churches continued at a local level. Yet in their report to Synod Edmonton, the CCU-C noted the following: “Since Synod London 2010, every successive URCNA Synod has taken the steam out of merger efforts: all committees were gradually dismissed, it was decided to work with the OPC on a common songbook rather than the CanRC, a decision was made to ‘table indefinitely’ any encouragement for CERCU to move toward proposing to enter Phase 3A, and it was decided to have a pause of at least six years before CERCU makes a Phase 3A recommendation. It further notes that it is hard not to be discouraged by all these developments. And yet the coordinators are thankful that the less formal aspects of the unity pursuit continued to take steps forward” (Acts of Synod Edmonton, p.129, 2.4).

20 It appears that from the point of view of the URCNA, federative unity can only take place when the churches within their federation are enthusiastic about moving forward, with a recommendation coming from the churches themselves. Likely, this suggests that the process of moving towards church unity will require much patience. Synod Edmonton, therefore, decided to consider the mandate of the CCU-C to have been completed and to not re-appoint the coordinators, the sub-committees, and related committees. Responsibility for contact with the URCNA was moved to the broader committee of the CCCNA (Committee for Contact with Churches in North America). The present situation from the point of view of the CanRC is best expressed in Consideration 3.3 of the Acts of Synod Edmonton: “Synod wishes to express that the CanRC remain committed to the pursuit of unity with the United Reformed Churches and are looking forward to re-engaging in this discussion when the URCNA is ready” (Acts of Synod Edmonton, p.132).

30 Since then, URCNA Synod Niagra 2022 adopted CERCU’s Recommendation 7 to note that the Canadian Reformed Committee (Committee for Ecumenical Relations) is willing to answer questions, speak at classes, and promote the unity of our churches. Synod encourages the classes to use them to that end.

35 The CERCU report did not mention the work completed in 2016, e.g., the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO), although the CER indicated a past reconsideration of the PJCO. However, the six-year moratorium on unity discussions did not result in any changes to their unity or church relationship. The prospect of complete (i.e., organic, organisational, integrated federative) unity appears remote at this stage.

5 The address delivered by the URCNA at Synod Guelph 2022 articulated their careful approach regarding ecclesiastical unity with the CanRC. The Synod concluded that geographical and cultural challenges continue to be a hindrance, as many URCNA churches (especially in the USA) have little contact or familiarity with the CanRC. The CERCU deputies, however, reiterated their commitment to working towards greater unity and expressing that unity in concrete ways. Given the phase 2 relationship between the URCNA and the CanRC, the CERCU continues to follow its mandate despite the “hold” adopted by Synod Wyoming 2016 of the URCNA. The latter is not the end of moving forward in federative unity. There remains the opportunity for one or more of the URCNA churches to suggest ways to move forward in our relationship. The CERCU is sending a survey to their churches seeking a response to concerns (theological, church-political, historical-cultural) they may have regarding unity. At the grassroots level, unity is frequently expressed by marriage among each other’s members and students’ attendance at each other’s schools. The CanRC and URCNA in Canada are functionally one federation locally, and members move between congregations via normal attestations. A complete merger between the CanRC and URCNA is unlikely in the foreseeable future.

Regarding mandate (d)

20 The reverends S t Hart and A Hagg could attend Synod Guelph-Emmanuel (May 10-23, 2022). As deputies from a sister church, we were allowed to sit in on various advisory committee meetings, deliver an official address to the Synod, and have the privilege of the floor. Our comments in our address have been included in their Synod Acts. As deputies, we also set aside time to organise informal meetings with delegates from the FRCSA and KPCK, addressing several issues relating to the functioning of that sister church relationship. Informal discussions were also held with the delegates from the URCNA and OPC.

6. Other decisions

30 Several further decisions taken by Synod Guelph are worth noting. First, regarding the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), Synod approved the retirement of Dr A J De Visser, expressing gratitude for his fruitful years of service as the professor of Ministry and Mission. Synod Guelph appointed Dr R Bredenhof of the FRC of Mount Nasura to replace Dr A J De Visser as professor of Ministry and Mission at the CRTS.

35 Secondly, Synod Guelph made several recommendations regarding the Book of Praise. In connection with the Psalms, Synod decided to provisionally approve the songs as updated and recommended by the SCBP in Supplements 1 and 2 of the Report for testing in the churches (optional use in the worship services) for final consideration and decision by their next General Synod, Aldergrove, 2025.

40 Synod Guelph also decided to review the suitability of individual hymns, which the CanRC already have in their Book of Praise, for possible change, deletion, or improvement. The grounds for these decisions regarding the BoP are that many churches express concerns about the lack of time for giving feedback. This was made more challenging by the restrictions on public worship due to COVID-19. Waiting for a final decision from the CanRC General Synod Aldergrove 2025 will provide the churches ample time to give additional feedback and for the committee to consider further its recommendations. Concerns regarding verification, language, and melody can be regarded as through the testing process. So far, none of the churches that interacted with specific songs flagged any for Scriptural error.

Synod Guelph mandated the SCBP to develop shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper and to review forms in use by sister churches, or to draft new forms, and to

present General Synod Aldergrove 2025 with one or more shorter forms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper which are: (a) of Reformed character; (b) comparable in content to the current forms; (c) shorter than the current Abbreviated Form.

7. Recommendation

5 The deputies for sister relationship with the CanRC recommend Synod Darling Downs 2024:

1. To continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work, and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - 10 a. monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed;
 - b. monitor and report to the synod on developments within the CanRC on areas of discussion about church polity, liturgy, and other areas that deputies might identify;
 - 15 c. stay informed on the developments regarding the discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA; and
 - d. send two delegates to the next CanRC General Synod scheduled for May 2025 in Aldergrove, CanRC.

Grounds

- 20 1. The CanRC show continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Deputies have identified areas of ongoing discussion within the CanRC that relate to church polity and liturgy, and regulations for sister church relations require mutual care for each other in these areas.
- 25 3. We need to foster mutual understanding and support regarding matters our respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America.
4. We value our bond with the CanRC and the personal contact at the synodical level, reinforcing our contact with them.

Publications & information

- 30 1. S 't Hart & A Hagg - Hold the Line! Synod Guelph 2022, in Una Sancta, Vol 69, No 11, 2 July 2022.
2. www.canrc.org

United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)

1. Introduction

Dating back to the 31st of January 2014, the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) of the United Reformed Churches in North America, expressed an interest in exploring the possibility of entering into a relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). The letter explained that the URCNA has two types of ecumenical relations: one, *ecclesiastical contact* and, two, *ecclesiastical fellowship*. The former is meant to lead to the latter. Further, the letter sought to receive information about the FRCA, listing a number of topics to consider; e.g. the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

2. Church Details

Location	<i>Mostly (2/3) in the United States of America, 1/3 in Canada</i>		
Origin(s)	<i>Formed in 1996, mostly former members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America – including many Dutch immigrants after World War II</i>		
Confessional Documents	<i>Three Ecumenical Creeds Three Forms of Unity</i>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>130 churches & 14 church plants</i>		
Membership numbers	<i>25,296 members of whom 16,700 communicant</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency	<i>Consistory/ Council</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>Monthly</i>
	<i>Classis</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>Quarterly</i>
	<i>General Synod</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Triennially</i>
Training of Theological Students	<i>Various Seminaries; e.g. MARS & WTS</i>		
Website	https://www.urchna.org		

3. History of the Relationship

On March 3rd 2014, the Deputies for Relations with Sister Churches (FRCA) informed the CECCA that their request would be forwarded to, and considered by, the local FRCA churches.

During Synod Baldivis 2015, the decision was taken to proceed with contacting the URCNA. The deputies were requested to exchange information and recommend on how to proceed with this situation.

In 2016, Br. P Witten attended the URCNA Synod Wyoming 2016 as a non-delegated synod observer. He met with the CECCA and church details were exchanged.

During Synod Bunbury 2018 the decision was taken to renew the mandate for deputies to continue to liaise with the URCNA and to recommend to Synod 2021 whether to proceed in establishing a sister church relationship.

5 Synod Albany 2021 was requested to renew the mandate for deputies and issued the following mandate:

Decision

1. Acknowledge the report submitted by the Deputies and thank them for their work.
2. Continue to liaise with the URCNA with a view to determining whether to establish a sister church relationship.
- 10 4. Take note that synod has mandated Deputies for Interchurch Relations to develop guidelines which may have implications for any future decisions about a relationship with the URCNA.
5. Refer grounds submitted by Classis Central to Deputies for Interchurch Relations for consideration when developing these guidelines.
- 15 6. Discharge the deputies and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. stay informed and monitor the discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA;
 - b. continue discussions with the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) of the URCNA;
 - 20 c. if invited, send one delegate to URCNA Synod Wellandport (Redeemer) Ontario in 2022, subject to finances;
 - b. submit a report six months prior to the next synod; and
 - a. extend an invitation to the URCNA to send an observer to the next synod.

Grounds

- 25 1. Due to circumstances beyond the control of deputies, the mandate issued by Synod Bunbury 2018 could not be completed.
2. Discussion between the CanRC and URCNA will resume in 2022, following a six-year moratorium issued by Synod Wyoming 2016.
- 30 3. Deputies for Interchurch Relations have been mandated to develop and propose guidelines concerning interchurch relations, and these guidelines could provide further direction for how to progress our relationship with the URCNA.
4. Deputies were unable to attend the URCNA Synod Wellandport (Redeemer) 2020.
5. The grounds cited by Synod Bunbury 2018 (Acts, Art 63, Grounds 1, 2 and 3) remain valid.

4. Execution of Mandate

Report of Actions Undertaken

Deputies have gathered information via the regular reading of two magazines: Clarion and Christian Renewal Magazine.

5 Deputy Br. P. Witten attended URCNA Synod Niagara 2022. A report on this synod was shared via the Una Sancta Magazine.

The Acts of URCNA Synod Wheaton 2018 and URCNA Synod Niagara 2022 were reviewed.

10 Finally, the information available via the URCNA church website has been most helpful. <https://www.urchna.org>

Mandate & Answers

2. Continue to liaise with the URCNA with a view to determining whether to establish a sister church relationship.

15 Since the letter of introduction, sent by Relations for Sister Churches to the CECCA in 2015, an unofficial visit was made to Synod Wyoming in 2016, Br. G. Swets (URCNA CECCA member) attended Synod Bunbury 2018, and Br. P. Witten attended Synod Niagara 2022, as mandated by Synod Albany 2021. Our deputies also met with URCNA deputies at the CanRC Synod Guelph 2022. Whilst these were helpful discussions, the agenda for Synod 2024 includes a deputies' report and recommendations regarding Inter Church Relations (ICR). The synod's decision could impact on how the FRCA will conduct ICR in the future. Hence, deputies consider it prudent not to advance further with (potential) relationships with the URCNA churches until synod 2024 has made a decision. The synod 2024 decision can then be used by newly appointed deputies as a basis to serve the next synod regarding relationships with other churches.

3. Take note that synod 2021 has mandated Deputies for Interchurch Relations to develop guidelines which may have implications for any future decisions about a relationship with the URCNA.

(See Recommendation)

4. Refer grounds submitted by Classis Central to Deputies for Interchurch Relations for consideration when developing these guidelines.

(See Recommendation)

5. Discharge the deputies and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:

35 a. stay informed and monitor the discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA;

Deputies note that the merger discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA have stalled. The six-year moratorium of unity discussions has been extend indefinitely. During the past six years the URCNA canvassed their churches on the unity discussion. The responses received from the churches entailed

differences in theological / church orderly/ judgements on federal vision / history. There is also a fear amongst URCNA congregations to “Political – synodocracy” tendency, for example synod determining songs to be used in church services etc. It appears unlikely that these two federations will merge into one church federation.

5

b. continue discussions with the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) of the URCNA;

These discussions have continued.

Synod Niagara 2022 has decided to invite the FRCA into an Ecclesiastical Contact relationship (Phase 1).

10

Deputies have also discussed Synod Wheaton 2018 (Part D Appeal 1 pg.216).

c. if invited, send one delegate to URCNA Synod Wellandport (Redeemer) Ontario in 2022, subject to finances;

Br. P. Witten attended Synod Niagara 2022.

15

d. submit a report six months prior to the next synod; and

(as submitted)

e. extend an invitation to the URCNA to send an observer to the next synod.

(has been completed)

5. Recommendation

20

1. To acknowledge the report submitted by the Deputies and thank them for their work, to discharge them and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:

a. continue discussions with the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) of the URCNA;

b. stay informed and monitor the relationship between the CanRC and the URCNA;

25

c. send one delegate to the URCNA Synod in 2026 subject to finances, and share the Acts of Synod Darling Downs 2024;

d. extend an invitation to the URCNA to send an observer to the next FRCA Synod in 2027; and

30

e. submit a report of work completed, six months prior to the next FRCA Synod in 2027.

Grounds

1. The URCNA shows itself to be a faithful church.

2. Although official unity talks have stalled between the CanRC and URCNA, they remain sister churches.

35

3. Synod Baldivis 2015, Article 39 gave grounds for establishing contact with the URCNA, and Synod Albany 2021 maintained these grounds.
4. Personal contact at a synodical level will enable the deputies to fulfil their mandate better and help the URCNA be better informed about the FRCA.
5. Give the churches the time to consider the report.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church

1. Introduction

Synod Bunbury 2018 accepted the proposal of Classis North on 9 February 2018 to investigate the possibility of entering into fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). Deputies were mandated to report with more information and make a recommendation about the feasibility of further ecumenical contact.

2. Brief description

Location:	United States and Canada
Origin(s):	Established in 1936, after separation from the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.
Confessional Documents:	Westminster Standards (Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism)
The number of churches & church plants:	301 churches & 31 mission works.
Membership figures as of December 31, 2022:	32,720 members (24,073 communicant)
Assemblies, number, frequency Sessions:	Presbyteries; 17; 2-4 times/year
General Assembly:	1 Annually
Training of Theological Students:	No denominational seminary; approved list of seminaries, and a denominational training institute (Ministerial Training Institute of the OPC)
Website:	http://www.opc.org

3. History of the relationship

a. Visit to FRCA by CEIR members

In 2011, Rev Jack Sawyer and Mr Mark Bube visited the FRCA as members of the OPC's Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR). They delivered a presentation to the FRC of Southern River on Home Missions and met with Deputies for Contact with Churches Abroad. Rev Sawyer had previously attended the FRCA's Synod Armadale 1990 in the capacity of a fraternal delegate of the RCNZ, where he was serving as a minister at that time.

b. 79th OPC General Assembly (2012)

Upon a positive recommendation from the CEIR following this visit, the 79th General Assembly of the OPC (2012) authorised the invitation of an FRCA observer to a future General Assembly. This decision was communicated by a letter from the CEIR dated 21 September 2012 and included the following grounds:

1. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia were charter members of the ICRC, though they have since withdrawn.
2. The FRCA are in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN). They have been negotiating Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand since 1990.
3. The FRCA subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and maintains a Reformed polity through the Church Order of Dort. They use the Canadian Reformed Anglo-Genevan book of praise and a Genevan order of worship.
4. They support mission work in Papua New Guinea, together with the RCNZ and the CanRC.
5. Their ministers are trained at the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario, and there is a significant calling of ministers back and forth between Australia and Canada.
6. In September 2011, CEIR members Mark T. Bube and Jack W. Sawyer met with the FRCA deputies for contact with churches abroad in Western Australia, and a very good initial colloquium was held, which indicated a shared commitment to the Reformed Faith. The trip included several contacts with brethren with ties to the RCNZ, OPC, CanRC, and Westminster Theological Seminary, and an opportunity for Mr. Sawyer to lecture on OPC Home Missions and present the CHMCHE 75th Commemorative DVD to a large, appreciative audience.

c. Overture from FRC Southern River

FRC of Southern River overtured Classis North on 9th February 2018 to mandate deputies “to explore in greater detail whether there is sufficient unity and shared Scriptural confession, belief and practice between the OPC and the FRCA to establish Ecclesiastical Contact.”

d. Classis North of 9 February 2018

Classis adopted the proposal from the FRC Southern River “to investigate the possibility of entering fellowship with the OPC.”

e. Synod Bunbury 2018

A letter from the FRC Launceston expressed full support for the proposal to establish Ecclesiastical contact, making mention in particular of the OPC’s vocal stance on the matter of women in office against the CRCNA at NAPARC and against the RCN at the ICRC and the OPC’s long history of standing valiantly for the inerrant truth of God’s Word. The CEIR delegated Rev. Jack Sawyer to attend Synod Bunbury 2018 and was present as a fraternal delegate.

f. Synod Albany 2021

Br Mark Bube presented a video address on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. (Acts of Synod Albany 2021, Art 23)

g. 89th OPC General Assembly (2023)

An FRCA deputy attended and addressed the 89th General Assembly of the OPC in Palos Heights, Illinois, US, and met with the CEIR (c.f. appendix).

4. Decision and mandate

5 Synod Albany 2021 (Art. 67) decided the following concerning the OPC:

Decision

- 10 1. Express thanks to God for the Reformed witness in the OPC throughout its history, its constant repudiation of theological liberalism, its commitment to being confessionally Reformed, and its commitment to the authority and truth of the holy Scriptures.
2. Acknowledge the concerns mentioned by the deputies and of some churches, particularly in regard to the differences in church polity and practice of the OPC.
3. Acknowledge the desire of some of the churches to pursue further ecumenical relations with the OPC.
- 15 4. Take note that the synod has mandated that Deputies for Interchurch Relations to develop guidelines for interchurch relations, which will have implications for any future decisions about a relationship with the OPC.
5. Discharge deputies, thank them for their work, and appoint new deputies to maintain ecclesiastical contact with the following mandate to:
 - 20 a. maintain contact with the OPC via its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR);
 - b. further investigate the differences in church polity and practice of the OPC;
 - c. send one delegate to a General Assembly of the OPC during the next intersynodical period, subject to available finances;
 - 25 d. invite the OPC to send a fraternal delegate to our next synod in 2024 DV; and
 - e. submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

Grounds

- 30 1. The OPC is a confessionally Reformed federation that lives up to its commitment to the Reformed faith and has a history of standing valiantly for the inerrant truth of God's Word.
2. Prior to developing any ecclesiastical relationship, the churches require further information about the OPC, including differences in church polity and practice.
3. Deputies for Interchurch Relations have been mandated to develop and propose guidelines concerning interchurch relations, and these guidelines could provide further direction for how to develop this relationship.
- 35 4. The OPC has invited the FRCA to send a fraternal observer to a future General Assembly. The previous mandate to attend a General Assembly of the OPC in the

past three years could not be completed due to unforeseen restrictions as a result of a global pandemic. There is still value in sending a delegate, in order to become better acquainted with the OPC, and to have opportunity to personally introduce them to the FRCA.

- 5 5. The OPC has already shown evidence of a desire to establish contact with the FRCA by authorising the invitation of an FRCA observer to a future General Assembly and by the attendance of a member of the CEIR at Synod Bunbury 2018. Inviting an observer to our next synod confirms our desire for contact, and gives the OPC opportunity to become better acquainted with us.

10 **5. Execution of Mandate**

The following actions were undertaken to complete the mandate:

a. Maintain contact with the OPC via its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR).

15 Email contact was maintained with Br Mark Bube from the OPC's CEIR. The deputy who attended the CanRC Synod in Guelph 2022 met with Br Mark Bube to discuss further cooperation.

b. Further investigate the differences in church polity and practice of the OPC.

Differences in Church Polity

Offices and Supervision of Doctrine (Articles 2-28)

20 There are several differences between the OPC and FRCA concerning offices.

25 First, the terminology of the offices. The ordinary and perpetual offices are the "ministry of the Word", "of rule", and "of mercy" (FG V.3) to which the Lord calls as evangelist, pastor, teacher, bishop, elder and deacon (FG V.2). Elders are distinguished into "ruling elders" and "teaching elders". The minister of the word is a teaching elder (FG V.3).

Second, term of office. The FRCA church polity stipulates the length of term of office, after which time the elders and deacons retire (CO 23). In the OPC, serving in office implies serving either for a limited time or holding the office permanently (FG XXV.2).

30 Third, supervision of candidates and ministers of the word. In the FRCA, the consistory exercises supervision of candidates and ministers. It could request advice from classis when needed. (CO 3,5,6). In the OPC, the presbytery exercises oversight for candidates (FG XXI:2; XXIII.3) and ministers (FG XII.10-13). This oversight extends to the calling process (FG XII.10-12), examinations (FG XXIII.3), ordination, dissolving ministerial relationships (FG XXIV) and disciplinary action (FG XXVI).

35 Fourth, the office of evangelist. The FRCA church order does not specify the call of an evangelist. OPC church polity allows brothers to preach the Word free of pastoral charge in a particular flock so they may labour to bring in other sheep. This ministry, they believe, is permanent and not confined to the apostolic period (FG VII.1). The evangelist is ordained to perform all the functions that belong to the sacred office of the minister. This office is distinct from (a) missionary, (b) stated supply or particular preacher, (c) chaplain, (d) administrator of an agency for preaching the gospel, (e)

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editor or similar ministry through the press and other means of communication (FG VII.2).

The Assemblies (Articles 29-51)

Assemblies

5 OPC church polity recognises three assemblies: the local session, the presbytery, and the general assembly (FG XII.1). The local session and presbyteries continue to exist, whereas the general assembly does not. This differs from the FRCA practice, where the only continuing assembly is the local consistory.

10 A significant difference between the OPC and the FRCA is the relationship between the assemblies. The Presbyterian form of government means all governing assemblies have the same rights and powers (FG XII.1). The difference between the assemblies lies in their authority. In the OPC, jurisdiction is exercised in a manner where “every act of jurisdiction is the act of the whole church performed by it through the appropriate body” (FG XII.2). This is in contrast to the FRCA, where the local
15 consistory is viewed as an independent body of Christ with direct authority from him.

Mission

In the FRCA, local congregations endeavour to fulfil their missionary task (CO 50). The OPC, the session, presbyteries, and the general assembly are responsible for the work of missions. However, the organisation of mission work is by the general
20 assembly (FG XXVII.1). In the OPC, each congregation, presbytery and general assembly “is obliged to pursue the task of evangelism within its respective bounds” (FX XXVII.1). The FRCA church order does not oblige churches to the work of evangelism.

Worship Services, Sacraments, and Ceremonies (Articles 52-65)

25 *Lord Supper*

The practice of fencing the Lord's Supper table in the OPC varies from congregation to congregation. According to the Directory of Worship, the minister shall read the institution, followed by a summary of the teaching of God's Word on the sacrament. It is declared to the congregation who may come and who is excluded from the table.
30 Those who abide in Christ by faith are invited to come and partake of the supper. Still, those who are “not trusting in Jesus Christ as your Saviour, if you are not a member of a faithful Christian church, if you are not living penitently and seeking to walk in godliness before the Lord, then I warn you in the name of Christ not to approach the Holy Table of the Lord” (III, C.2 Directory for Worship, p. 153). The administration of the Lord's Supper ordinarily takes place in the congregation's gathering for the public
35 worship of God. However, a session may judge that in unusual circumstances, the sacrament may be administered elsewhere, but, in any event, the church must be represented in the service (DPW IV.A.3-4).

Admitting members

40 Only those may be admitted to full communion in the OPC who have been baptised and have made public profession of faith in Jesus Christ (BCO., 156). The session exercises oversight of those who receive admittance to local church membership by examining them “in doctrinal knowledge, relies on the merits of Christ alone and

determined to lead a Christian life” (BCO., 156). The congregation can also acquaint the session with facts concerning their credible profession of faith.

5 Where the OPC differ in respects to the FRCA is their requirement of the profession of faith to “the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine of salvation...” In contrast, the FRCA require a profession of faith to “the doctrine of the Word of God, summarised in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church”.

10 Another point of difference is the OPC practice of exhorting the congregation at one’s profession of faith. When someone makes public profession of faith in the OPC, the congregation is exhorted to love and receive them as a church member and reminded of their obligation to assist them in Christian nurture (BCO, p. 158,59).

Catechism Preaching

15 The FRCA CO stipulates that “the consistory shall ensure that as a rule every Sunday the doctrine of God’s Word as summarised in the Heidelberg Catechism is proclaimed, preferably in the afternoon service.” The OPC does not mandate preaching God’s Word from the doctrinal summaries in their confessions.

Use of Liturgical Forms

20 The FRCA CO stipulates sacraments (CO 51), public profession of faith (CO 54), excommunication of communicant (CO 74) and non-communicant members (CO 79) and re-admission (CO 75) are to be done using the “adopted Forms”.

25 The BCO in use by the OPC provides liturgical forms that are “Suggested Forms that are suitable and convenient aids in the conduct of the particular services” (BCO. p. vii). The OPC Directory for Public Worship of God states, “Where practices are understood by the Church to be required by the Word of God, either expressly or by good and necessary consequence, they are mandated. In matters of circumstance and form in worship not specifically provided in Scripture, the Directory guides their ordering according to the light of nature and Christian prudence, consonant with the general rules of the Word.” For example, practices mandated by God’s Word are denoted by “shall”, “will”, “is to be,” “must,” and “are to be.” Three categories denoting practices not mandated are:

- 30 (1) practices strongly recommended denoted by “should,” “ought to”, “is desirable,” and “is advisable”.
- (2) practices suitable denoted by “is appropriate,” “is well”, “is fitting”.
- (3) practices permissible denoted by “may”.

35 Ministers of the Word in the OPC can use these forms at their discretion.

Christian Discipline (Articles 66-76)

The OPC Book of Discipline (<https://www.opc.org/BCO/BD.html>) provides elaborate and detailed regulations for practising church discipline by individual members and at the various assemblies.

Differences in Practice

5 Committee on Chaplains and Military Personnel represents OPC chaplains in the United States Armed Forces. The OPC currently has fifteen chaplains: six serving on active duty, seven serving in the Reserves or National Guard, two serving as civilian chaplains, and two serving as chaplain candidates.

10 Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE) oversees church plants that are Presbyterian in practice and Reformed in preaching and teaching. This follows a mother-daughter church planting model. The Seed and Sowers Fund currently supports six church plants in the OPC. The committee is working on a revitalisation program to help struggling OPC congregations.

15 Committee on Foreign Missions (CFM). The OPC has developed a Mobile Theological Mentoring Goals (MTMG) where seasoned pastors visit specific locations every 2-3 years to mentor young ministers/sessions. “Rookie” ministers are encouraged to reach out to an appointed mentor.

20 Christian Education Committee (CEC). The committee has several tasks that involve raising financial support for churches that have interns, arranging the OPC Timothy conference for prospective theological students, maintaining the OPC Elders Podcast that is meant to teach and encourage ruling elders, and formulating a modern English Study version of the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the OPC.

25 Committee on Coordination. The purpose of this committee is to recommend a combined budget for the CHMCE, CFM, and CEC to the General Assembly. It seeks to help the OPC maximise the use of its resources for the fulfilment of its tasks, to support the ministry of the pastors and sessions in their responsibility to teach and encourage the practice of Biblical stewardship in the Church, and to help coordinate the promotion of the work of the three committees in the development of support for their work.

30 Committee for the Historian. A committee that keeps the GA assembly informed of OPC milestones, e.g., the 100th anniversary of Machen’s book, *Christianity and Liberalism*; Fathers and Brothers of the OPC who have gone to be with the Lord in the past year.

35 Committee on Diaconal Ministries: A committee that offers ministries, *training and resources* for OPC Diaconal Ministry, e.g., training churches on how to run a diaconal neighbourhood team; organising the OPC National Diaconal Summit; maintaining the podcast *The Reformed Deacon*. The committee also arranges ministries for *domestic and international needs*, e.g., financial aid and relief work following disasters. The committee publishes an e-newsletter, *Minute Mercy*, designed to keep OPC deacons informed and encouraged in their work.

40 Committee on Ministerial Care. A committee for pastoral well-being that involves oversight of the OPC pension plan; managing the Obadiah Fund that sends gifts to retired ministers and their widows; selecting one presbytery per month to call all the pastors in the presbytery to ask how they are doing and to pray with them; appoints a care coordinator for ministers’ wives; works to provide a counsellor for ministers and their wives and children when needed; provide financial planning for ministers to ensure ministers are sufficiently cared for by their church (for example, the committee conducted a survey that revealed OPC ministers are underpaid by a significant amount. Ruling elders can determine if their minister is being paid sufficiently using the Compensation Survey on their website); provide other resources for financial

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care, soul care, sabbaticals and retreats through webinars, interviews, videos, and articles. This committee is supported by contributions from the denomination's communicant membership and gifts.

Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations. Provides a website with resources for those outside the OPC. Are members of the ICRC and NAPARC.

The Committee on Appeals and Complaints. This committee reports to the General Assembly on appeals and complaints brought by an officer or another member of the church against the session or the presbytery to which he is subject, by one session against another session in the same presbytery, by a session against the presbytery which has jurisdiction over it, or by one presbytery against another presbytery.

Committee to Examine Presbyterial Records. Reviews the minutes of the presbyteries.

Committee to Examine Standing Committee Records. Reviews the minutes of Standing Committee Records.

Special Committees. Temporary committees established by the GA to aid the churches include the Committee on Updating the Language of the Doctrinal Standards and the Committee to Help Equip Church Officers to collect, study, and develop resources to equip officers of the church to protect her members from sexual predators and domestic violence. Another special committee was established to help the presbyteries govern the local congregations.

- c. Send one delegate to a General Assembly of the OPC during the next intersynodical period, subject to available finances.**

Rev. A. Hagg attended the 89th General Assembly of the OPC (c.f. mandate 2c) in May 2023, held in Palos Heights, Illinois, US and delivered a verbal address to the meeting. The address recognised our prior contact with the OPC, an introduction to the FRCA, including strengths, challenges and shortcomings; appreciation was expressed for the OPC providing information that helped fulfil the deputies' mandate to develop guidelines for Interchurch relationships; the deputies' mandate regarding the OPC appointed by Synod Albany 2021 and finally, the FRCA joy in the work of the Lord in the OPC and future contact with them.

- d. Invite the OPC to send a fraternal delegate to our next synod in 2024 DV.**

Work in progress.

- e. Submit a report six months before the next synod.**

Work in progress.

6. Recommendation

Deputies come with the following recommendations:

1. To express thanks to God for the Reformed witness evident in the OPC throughout its history, its constant repudiation of theological liberalism, its commitment to being confessionally Reformed, and its commitment to the authority and truth of the holy Scriptures.

2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work, and to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a. To maintain contact with the OPC via its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) using the guidelines given by Synod Darling Downs 2024 to give direction to the next to Synod 2027 regarding this relationship;
 - b. To send one delegate to a General Assembly of the OPC during the next three years; and
 - c. To invite the OPC to send two fraternal delegates to our next Synod in 2027.

Grounds

1. The OPC is an English-speaking confessionally Reformed federation that lives up to its commitment to the Reformed faith and has a history of standing valiantly for the inerrant truth of God's Word, as evidenced by its stance concerning the RCN.
2. The OPC enjoy long-standing sister-church relations with several of our sister churches, including the CanRC, the RCNZ and the KPCK.
3. Australian students at CRTS benefit from OPC internships, and in addition, the OPC has been active in Asia missions.
4. The OPC has already shown evidence of a desire to establish contact with the FRCA by authorising the invitation of an FRCA observer to a future General Assembly and by a video address presented by Br M Bube on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Inviting observers to our next synod confirms our desire for contact and allows the OPC to become better acquainted with the FRCA.
5. Deputies for Interchurch Relations have been mandated to develop and propose guidelines concerning interchurch relations, which could provide further direction for developing this relationship.
6. Whilst Synod 1990 Art 58 decided to concentrate on relations and contact with churches that are geographically closer to us, the above grounds are compelling reasons to keep ecclesiastical contact.

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

1. Introduction

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia entered into a sister church relationship with the Reformed Churches in New Zealand by a decision of Synod Baldivis 2015 (Article 38).

5 2. Brief Description of the RCNZ

Location	<i>North & South islands of New Zealand</i>		
Origin(s)	<i>New Zealanders and Post World War 2 European immigrants from various Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian federations.</i>		
Confessional Documents	<i>Three Ecumenical Creeds Three Forms of Unity Westminster Confession</i>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>21 churches</i>		
Membership numbers	<i>3,530 members</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency (Dort polity with some Westminster terminology)	<i>Sessions</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>monthly</i>
	<i>Presbyteries</i>	<i>3</i>	
	<i>General Assembly</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Triennially</i>
Training of Theological Students	<i>The RCNZ presently makes use of the Reformed Theological Seminary in Melbourne Australia, and Mid America Reformed Theological Seminary, and Greenville Theological Seminary.</i>		
Website	<i>www.rcnz.org.nz</i>		

3. History of the relationship

1985 Synod Launceston initiated correspondence with the RCNZ.

1996 It was reported to Synod Kelmscott that the RCNZ had acknowledged the FRCA as true churches.

2000 Synod West Albany agreed in principle to recognise the RCNZ as true and faithful churches, however the RCNZ sister relationship with CRCA remained an issue.

2011 RCNZ Synod Bucklands Beach discontinued sister church relations with the CRCA and entered a new relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship with the CRCA.

2015 Synod Baldivis decided to offer sister church relationship to the RCNZ.

2017 RCNZ Synod Palmerstone-North confirmed this new sister church relationship.

4. Decision and mandate

Synod Albany 2021 (article 61) decided the following with respect to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Decision

- 5 1. Continue the sister church relationship with the RCNZ, under the established rules.
2. Thank deputies and reappoint them with the following mandate:
 - 10 a. monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established “Rules for Sister Church Relations”, and maintain the contact necessary in exercising the relationship according to these rules;
 - 15 b. continue to monitor and report on the efforts being undertaken by the Emeritus Fund of the Free Reformed Churches to address the discrepancies between the emeritus funds of our two church federations with a view to removing obstacles faced in calling each other’s ministers;
 - c. meet with the RCNZ’s Interchurch Relations Committee during the inter-synodical period, subject to finances;
 - d. send two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ, subject to invitation and finances;
 - e. invite up to two delegates from the RCNZ to attend our next Synod; and
 - f. report to the next Synod with recommendations.

20 Grounds

- 25 1. As the RCNZ were unable to hold their planned Synod in 2020 due to the Covid 19 virus, there was no visit by deputies. However, deputies were able to have some contact via other means and report that the RCNZ gives evidence of a love for the gospel, ongoing faithfulness to God’s Word, and commitment to the Reformed faith; no evidence has been presented of any deviation or unfaithfulness in this respect.
2. Part of a sister church relationship includes the privilege of calling one another’s ministers, and if there are practical difficulties that prohibit this due to different models being used for the support of retired ministers, real efforts should be made to remove these obstacles in the proper way.
- 30 3. There is no need to repeat the specific mandates to continue to monitor the RCNZ’s relationship of ecumenical fellowship with CRCA and to continue to encourage the RCNZ to be diligent in their approach to theological education since:
 - 35 a. the RCNZ have demonstrated evidence of faithfulness in these areas over the last nine years which is attested by deputies reports to Synod 2021 and to previous synods; and
 - b. the rules for sister church relations provide an adequate mechanism for assisting, encouraging and exhorting all sister churches in any areas of concern.

5. Execution of Mandate

- a. ***monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established “Rules for Sister Church Relations”, and maintain the contact necessary in exercising the relationship according to these rules;***

5 The Sister Church relationship with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) has continued to flourish and develop despite the practical difficulties due to travel restrictions during the Covid Pandemic. Unfortunately, deputies were unable to attend in person at the RCNZ Synod held in September 2021 and March 2022. However, various other means were used to still get to know one another better and grow in our understanding of each other. They included the following.

- 10 • FRCA deputy Colin Mulder was able to attend the RCNZ Synod in Hukanui 2021 via electronic means (see report below).
- 15 • FRCA deputies were able to take up the opportunity to attend the South Island Presbytery meeting held in Christchurch in October 2022 and at the same time were able to meet with the RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee. (see report below).
- 20 • From March 2023 through to July 2023 Rev Keith Kleyn was requested by the RCNZ Church of Silverstream to lead their worship services whilst they were a vacant church. Rev Kelvin Dekker and Rev Wes Bredenhof were both able to lead worship services in Bishopdale and Silverstream respectively. Australian theological student candidate Mattias Schat has accepted the call extended to him from the RCNZ Bishopdale.
- 25 • There is evidence of mutual encouragement, assistance and exhortation via the respective church magazines of both the RCNZ and the FRCA.
- 30 • The FRCA requested input and assistance from the RCNZ regarding the development of guidelines for establishing and maintaining relationships with other churches. Deputies received a comprehensive response from the RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee.
- 35 • Rev Wes Bredenhof was invited speak at Silverstream in July 2023. His talk was focussed on the five evangelistic lessons learnt during his time as a missionary.
- Rev David Waldron and his wife made a visit to Tasmania in response to an invitation to address a Grace and Truth Conference held in October 2023. Rev Waldron also used this opportunity to lead the worship services for both Tasmanian Free Reformed Churches.
- 40 • The Acts of the 31st Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand held at Hukanui in Sept 2021 were duly received and the Acts of the 28th Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia held at Albany in June 2021 were accordingly forwarded to the RCNZ.

- b. ***continue to monitor and report on the efforts being undertaken by the Emeritus Fund of the Free Reformed Churches to address the discrepancies between the***

emeritus funds of our two church federations with a view to removing obstacles faced in calling each other's ministers;

5 In October 2022 the deputies received a letter from the FRCA Emeritus Fund informing deputies of steps they have taken in relation to this issue. Upon the recommendation of the FRCA Emeritus Fund, the FRCA churches are now paying their serving ministers an increased personal superannuation based on a grossed-up salary package. This increased superannuation will enable ministers to build up their personal super balance and contribute to their retirement provision. Such personal superannuation balances will be portable and will be able to be taken by any minister moving from the FRCA to the RCNZ. Over time the retirement funding obstacle for ministers moving from the FRCA to the RCNZ will be reduced. A copy of this letter was forwarded to the RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee for their information.

15 The FRCA Emeritus Fund has also informed deputies that they will continue to consider whether any other solution could apply in the interim to entirely remove this obstacle, although at present they are not aware of any such solution that could operate within the current Emeritus Fund rules.

Although this matter is not yet fully resolved, deputies remain confident that over time the discrepancies between the two emeritus funds will be ameliorated.

20 ***c. meet with the RCNZ's Interchurch Relations Committee during the inter-synodical period, subject to finances;***

25 In June 2022 the RCNZ Interchurch Relations Committee extended an invitation to the FRCA deputies to meet with their committee and at the same time attend the South Island Presbytery meeting to be held at Christchurch in August 2022. The RCNZ delegates at this meeting were Rev Reinier Noppers, Rev David Waldron, Rev Paul Archbald and Rev David Stares. The FRCA delegates were Rev Kelvin Dekker and Br Colin Mulder.

Meeting with Interchurch Relations Committee

30 The interchurch relations meeting was used to discuss the differences in our respective federations' provision for Emeritus ministers. The FRCA brothers were also able to update the RCNZ brothers on the decision adopted by Synod Albany 2021 with regard to exploring the possibility of a CRTS Affiliate model for theological training. We could express our thankfulness for the cooperation between the two church federations in the provision of ongoing support for the mission work carried out at the Reformed Churches Bible College in Port Moresby.

35 Rev Kelvin Dekker was able to preach at the Reformed Church of Bishopdale and Br Colin Mulder could join in worship and fellowship with the congregation at Dovedale, participating in their Lords Supper Celebration. It was tangible expression of the oneness that we have as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Attendance at South Island Presbytery Meeting

40 It was a special experience to be able to join the brothers in NZ at their South Island Presbytery meeting, the FRCA deputies were received as delegates to the Presbytery meeting and invited to sit as advisors.

The particular highlight of this meeting was the examination of a Minister-elect for the ministry Br Josh Meinsma. The RCNZ follow a similar examination to the FRCA. The

5 first part involved the homiletics section and once that had been sustained the remaining sections were examined, this included dogmatics, ethics, symbolics, knowledge of holy scripture, church history and church polity. With thankfulness Presbytery together with advice from the synodical examiners could also sustain this part of Josh's examination. FRCA deputies were impressed by the thoroughness of the examination and the subsequent deliberations, the desire of our New Zealand brothers to ensure that their students are suitable for the important task of a shepherd of the flock became very evident.

10 The remainder of the meeting was used to receive the reports from the various committees and to run through the regular presbytery agenda items. One of these regular agenda items involved an evaluation of each of the churches, with churches providing feedback on; meetings held, office bearer service in the congregation, church discipline, Christian education, mission activity and any advice required of the presbytery. This evaluation allowed FRCA deputies to listen to the joys and challenges that exist in the churches and in this way we could also get to know one another better, developing closer bonds with our New Zealand brethren.

15 **d. *send two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ, subject to invitation and finances;***

20 Due to travel restrictions a deputy could attend the RCNZ Synod held in September 2021 via video conferencing only.

Synod Hukanui 2021 - 31st Synod of the Reformed Church of New Zealand

25 The original date proposed for Synod Hukanui 2020 was postponed due to travel and meeting restrictions. After a 12-month delay Synod began in September 2021 via a video conference. It was hoped that an in-person stage could be held at a later date. Unfortunately, restrictions also prevented this.

30 The RCNZ have several sister church relationships and fraternal greetings were extended from a number of them. Rev A Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) expressed appreciation for the cooperation that exists with the RCNZ in the mission work undertaken in PNG, he also made mention of a number of areas that both church federations could cooperate in to make the relationship more meaningful. These areas included the short-term exchange of retired ministers, sharing of excellent reading material, calling of each other's ministers and an alignment of emeritus provisions. These areas are also the areas that the FRCA are interested in developing further with our sister in New Zealand.

35 The FRCA delegate br C Mulder was given an opportunity via video conference to address the Synod. The RCNZ value the relationship that it has with the FRCA and br Mulder was received warmly.

40 The RCNZ have sister relationships with two other Australian Church Federations, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) and the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA). Synod decided in both instances to continue the sister church relationships with these Church Federations. They also have an "ecumenical fellowship" relationship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA), Synod also agreed to continue with this relationship.

45 In its previous Synod held in 2017 the RCNZ had communicated to their sister church at that time, the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN), that they were concerned about the direction that the RCN had taken and consequently suspended

their relationship with the RCN. At Synod 2021 the RCNZ took the decision that since there had been no repentance or change of heart the RCNZ would terminate its sister church relationship with the RCN.

5 The RCNZ also have a relationship with the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA). The RCNZ have expressed concern to the GKSA concerning its ongoing practice to allow women to be ordained as deacons, if this practice continues the RCNZ have indicated that they would change the relationship that they have with the GKSA to “ecumenical fellowship” at their next Synod.

10 Due to their membership of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), the RCNZ are able to meet with their counterparts from other denominations at these conferences. This they find very helpful and consequently they have decided to continue their membership in the ICRC.

15 The Overseas Mission Board (OMB) committee provided an extensive report on the work that is currently underway in PNG, in Vanuatu and a radio ministry in SouthEast Asia. When considering how we could provide assistance to each other as sister churches, the area of overseas mission work is an area that provides real opportunities for mutual support, the work being carried out in PNG being a case in point. The RCNZ also have a valuable Missions Policy Handbook which provides clear policy direction for the OMB dealing with all the aspects of mission work. This is a document that could also provide tangible benefits to the FRCA.

20 Another substantive report considered by Synod was the Report from the Deputies for Students for the ministry. RCNZ do not have their own seminary and send their students to either the Reformed Theological College (RTC) in Melbourne or to Mid-America Seminary (MARS) in the USA. It was reported to Synod that in the last inter-synodical period there were 3 fulltime students on campus at the RTC and another 2 fulltime students on campus at MARS. There are also several students who have begun their studies via distance education. The RCNZ require their students to undergo a vicariate prior to accepting a call to a church and in the last inter-synodical period four men had completed their vicariates and accepted calls to the RCNZ churches.

25 The National Publishing Committee gave account of their work. Noteworthy to us here in Australia is the RCNZ magazine “Faith in Focus” distributed monthly, it provides excellent reformed reading material on a wide range of subjects.

30 The Auckland Presbytery submitted an overture to Synod requesting Synod to appoint a committee to review the current system of annual church visitation and propose ways in which the system can be improved. It was noted that the current questionnaire had been in use for many years and many questions could be answered with a Yes/No answer. One of the struggles with the current system was the level of disclosure and it was found that on a few occasions the churches had not revealed a struggle until it was too late.

35 Synod not only dealt with reports and overtures but also had the difficult and taxing task of dealing with two appeals. These appeals were dealt with at length and ultimately decisions were made, with the hope and prayer that these matters could be put to rest and healing could begin.

40 **e. *invite up to two delegates from the RCNZ to attend our next Synod;***

An invitation to attend Synod 2024 will be extended in due time.

Concluding remarks

5 The relationship that the FRCA has with the RCNZ has developed to a stage which would best be described as one of *consolidation*. Interactions at a committee level have been very encouraging and personal relationships have intensified. The rapport gained by the visits and pulpit exchange of ministers from both church federations has been of great benefit to our growing relationship. The FRCA, CanRC and the RCNZ continue to cooperate in the mission work being carried out in PNG. It is noted that there is good collaboration between the committees responsible for the execution of this work.

10 It is envisioned that over time the discrepancies in the emeritus provisions for retired ministers will be minimised, which in turn will facilitate the calling of each other's ministers in the future. Practically, the New Zealand – Australia immigration laws are far less onerous than Australia has with other overseas countries and calling each other's ministers should be a reality for the foreseeable future.

15 The relationship that we enjoy as church sisters is based on the truth of the Word of God as summarised in our confessions. However, further to this, the RCNZ remain one of our closest geographical sisters, we share with them a reformed heritage and of course the English language. And it is therefore important that we should continue to make every effort to build this relationship.

20 It remains evident that the RCNZ is faithful to the Lord of the Church, submits to His Word as the rule for all of life, and is zealous to carry out the church's calling to bring the gospel to a fallen world.

6. Recommendations

We propose the following recommendations for Synods consideration:

1. Continue the sister church relationship with the RCNZ, under the established rules.
- 25 2. Thank deputies and reappoint them with the following mandate:
 - 30 i. monitor developments within the RCNZ for mutual benefit according to the established "Rules for Sister Church Relations", and maintain the contact necessary in exercising the relationship according to these rules;
 - ii. foster opportunities for further interaction between the RCNZ and the FRCA, by means of pulpit exchanges, conference/workshop presentations and mutual assistance with vacant churches;
 - iii. send two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ, subject to invitation and finances;
 - iv. invite up to two delegates from the RCNZ to attend our next Synod; and
 - 35 v. report to the next Synod with recommendations.

Grounds

1. The RCNZ show faithfulness to the Word of God Maintaining the Reformed confessions.

2. The value of our relationship with the RCNZ can be significantly enhanced if we seek to share the wisdom, expertise, and experience of ministers (both currently serving and retired) and other gifted individuals from both church federations to provide instruction and assistance to each other in practical ways.
- 5 3. The rules for sister church relations stipulate that as much as possible we receive each other at our broadest assemblies and invite them to sit as advisors.

Report of Deputies for the Indonesian Churches

Introduction

In accordance with the mandate of Synod Albany 2021, the deputies maintained the sister church relationship with the GGRI, but also maintained contact with two other federations in Indonesia, the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor. This report first deals with the sister relations with the GGRI, which is followed by the recommendations to the synod in Darling Downs 2024. Thereafter two reports will follow about the contacts with the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor.

There is a separate report about the support of the Theological Training in the GGRI.

I. The Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI)

1. Name of Church

Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia (GGRI).

2. Introduction

GGRI is a Sister Federation, which was formed in 2012 out of three provincial federations: GGRI-Papua, GGRI-Kalimantan Barat, and GGRI-NTT. The FRCA have had an established relationship with the GGRI-NTT since the 1970s. In 2012 synod Armadale decided to extend this relationship to the entire federation of which the GGRI-NTT had become part.

3. Brief description of Church

Location (description of political & geographical context)	<i>Spread over three provinces: Papua, Kalimantan Barat and NTT (on the islands Sumba, Timor, Sabu).</i>		
Origin(s)	<i>Dutch mission work in Indonesia resulted in the establishment of churches in all three provinces, the first ones in the fifties.</i>		
Confessional Documents	<i>Three Ecumenical Creeds Three Forms of Unity</i>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>Papua: 20 congregations, 102 "preparatory congregations", and 4 mission posts. Kalimantan Barat: 32 churches and 9 mission posts. The 2021 numbers were incorrect. Since then, some mission posts were closed due to lack of manpower and funding. NTT: 18 churches, approx. 56 Mission posts</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency	<i>Consistory/ Council</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>Monthly</i>
	<i>Classis</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>6 Monthly /Annually</i>

	<i>Regional Synod</i>	3	<i>Triennially</i>
	<i>General Synod</i>	1	<i>Quadrennially</i>
Training of Theological Students	<i>Theological College in Waingapu, Sumba. Reformed Theological College in Sentagi, KalBar</i>		
Sister Churches	<i>The Free Churches of East Sumba (GBST) The Calvinist Reformed Churches (GGRC) The Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) The United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) (only for the churches in Kalimantan Barat and Papua.</i>		

4. History of the relationship

- 5 a. Relationships were first established with the GGRI-NTT in 1970s. In 2001 contact was broadened when FRC Rockingham received requests to financially assist the GGRI-NTT churches in providing mission support for their evangelists & mission workers in Sumba. The FRC Mundijong, soon after its institution began doing mission work in this area and recently took over work of LITINDO, which has been busy working in Sumba and other districts including West Papua and Kalimantan.

10 Since 2012, when the three provincial federations merged into the national federation (GGRI), the FRCA have contact with all the churches in the three provincial parts of the federation.

- b. No significant changes have been noted within the GGRI-NTT churches since the last synod.

- 15 c. The relationship between the GGRI and FRCA is significant in that the Indonesian churches are one of our closest sister churches geographically. This closeness, especially of the GGRI-NTT, has in the past benefitted the churches greatly in the ease of travel and limited cost involved in meeting regularly, particularly for their ecclesiastical assemblies. It is also the main area of focus for mission work undertaken by a number of Perth Metro churches.

20 The GGRI in Papua is harder to reach, due to the geographical circumstances. It is not only more remote, but also has a much less developed infrastructure, which makes traveling to the churches much more cumbersome and expensive. Nevertheless, also for these churches the FRCA are the closest sister church.

5. Decision and Mandate

Synod Albany 2021 (Art. 97) decided the following with respect to the GGRI:

Article 97 - The Reformed Churches Indonesia

I. Decision

- 5 1. Continue sister relations with the GGRI according to the established rules.
2. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - 10 a. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - b. send two delegates to the next GGRI Regional and National synods subject to available finance;
 - c. continue to offer assistance in improving the Reformed character of the GGRI and addressing existing concerns by the current means of theological training support and seminars, subject to available resources;
 - 15 d. encourage the GGRI in their efforts to work towards federative unity with the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor;
 - e. continue contact with the GGRC, to visit their Synods subject to available finance, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches;
 - 20 f. continue contact with the GGRI-Timor; and
 - g. as yet report to the churches with a clearer picture of the GGRI-Kalimantan Barat and GGRI-Papua, focusing on and confirming their Reformed character.

Grounds

- 25 1. The GGRI churches give evidence of continual striving for faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
- 30 2. Our rules for sister church relations indicate that the churches need to mutually care for each other so that they do not depart from the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy. Troubling aspects of the church polity and liturgy in the GGRI have been identified and discussed with the leaders in the GGRI. The deputies indicate that there is a desire to address these concerns and it is important that we continue to encourage them in these matters and offer them help wherever possible.
- 35 3. The seminars as organised over the past few years in cooperation with the deputies of the GGRI have been well received and are a valuable means which deputies can offer to assist the GGRI in improving the Reformed character of these churches.

4. Our visits to Indonesia and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.
- 5 5. The Indonesian churches request ongoing financial support for their theological seminary as they continue on a road to self-sustainability. Until such time that this support is no longer required, such support should be coordinated, the churches kept informed, and financial accountability maintained.
- 10 6. Because of ongoing contacts between the GGRI, the GGRC and GGRI-Timor, it serves the best interests of our ecclesiastical relations with the GGRI also to maintain contacts with these two other church groups in Indonesia.
7. Some information has been received about the GGRI-Kalimantan Barat and GGRI-Papua but this is not sufficient to come with a good report and create a clearer picture.

15 6. Execution of mandate

a. Official Correspondence:

- 20 i. 20 January 2022: Invitation from the deputies of the GGRI inviting two delegates to attend the General Synod of the GGRI in Sentagi, Benkayang (West Kalimantan). A response was sent, accepting the invitation.
- 25 ii. 21 March 2022: A letter to the GGRI-Papua responding to the invitation to attend their National Synod. As this invitation was sent too late, deputies were not able to attend this synod. However, we promised to meet with them at the GGRI Synod in Sentagi.
- iii. 01 July 2022: Invitation from the GGRI-NTT inviting deputies to attend the Regional Synod of the GGRI-NTT in Tanarara (Sumba). A response was sent on 11 July 2022, accepting this invitation.
- iv. August 2022: report by Rev. A van Delden on the seminar tour in Timor, Sabu, and Sumba.
- 30 v. 13 September 2022: Invitation for Rev. Marianus Tuaty Waang and his wife to visit the Australian churches during the month of November 2022.
- vi. 13 September 2022: Invitation for Rev. Windi Kurung to visit the Australian churches during the month of November 2022.
- vii. August 2023: report by Rev. A van Delden on the seminar tour in the GGRI-Papua.

35 b. maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules:

- 40 i. In order to further strengthen the bonds between the FRCA and the GGRI, the FRCA delegates invited Rev. Marianus Tuaty Waang and his wife to as well as Rev. Windi Kurung to visit the Australian churches during the month of November 2022. They were hosted and shown around by various congregation members. Both of the ministers were invited to lead FRCA worship services. Rev. Waang teaches at the GGRI-KalBar seminary in West Kalimantan, while

Rev. Kurung lives in Sumba and will teach at the GGRI-NTT seminary in Sumba. They spent much time discussing Indonesian seminary education together on an informal basis.

5 c. send two delegates to the next GGRI Regional and National synods subject to available finance:

10 i. Two delegates attended the Regional Synod of the GGRI-NTT in Tanarara, Sumba in August 2022. Because this synod was held at around the same time as the synod of the GGRC and just before the GGRI National synod, which were attended by two of the deputies, the deputies could only send one deputy as delegate. Rev. van Delden was asked and found willing to attend as the second delegate and was authorised by the deputies to do so.

Some of the matters that were discussed at this synod are:

15 • It was decided that the move of the seminary, which had taken place in the past three years and was seen as temporary, was to become permanent.

• The members of YASTRI, the board of governors of the seminary which was not functioning anymore, were replaced with new members and is responsible for the oversight of the seminary and the appointment of lecturers and principal.

20 • The second service and the catechism preaching were discussed. Not all delegates were convinced of the need for these. The FRCA delegates strongly emphasised the importance of both and encouraged the churches to reinstate the second service and the catechism preaching and teaching where this is no longer practiced.

25 • In the past, the GGRI had offered a sister church relationship to the Bebas ('Free') churches of East Sumba (GBST). These churches were the result of the mission work of the Dutch Reformed Churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken), but the Bebas churches have no longer a meaningful relationship with these churches. Recently the Bebas Churches accepted this offer. With that, we are now aware of four reformed churches in the province NTT: the GGRI-NTT, the GGRC, the GGRI-Timor and now also the Bebas Church (Gereja Bebas Sumba Timur, GBST). As deputies we did not have the mandate to get into contact with these churches, but in line with the decisions regarding the GGRC and GGRI-T (see article 97, decision 2 e&f and ground 6) this is something that could be considered. Deputies need direction from Synod for this.

30 ii. Two delegates attended the GGRI National Synod in Sentagi, Bengkayang in September 2022. The following key topics were covered at Synod:

40 • **Relationship with the GKv.** One important item on the agenda of Synod was the relationship between the GGRI and the Dutch. All foreign delegates had been requested to leave during these deliberations. On the last day the chairman announced the results of the discussions. Here the synod split along provincial lines. The NTT had voted to sever ties with the Dutch completely on the grounds of unfaithfulness to the teachings of Scripture regarding women in office. Papua and Kal-Bar had voted to

bring the matter back to their respective regional synods before making a final decision at the next national synod. It seemed that in these discussions synod had functioned less as a national synod, and more as a convention of provincial representatives.

- 5 • **Relationship with the GGRI-Timor.** Although the GGRI has a sister church relationship with the CanRC, they do not have a sister church relationship with the GGRI-Timor which was established through the mission work of the Canadian Reformed church of Smithville. The GGRI-Timor was invited to synod but did not come. The GGRI is willing to consider accepting them into their federation if they requested this.
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- 15 • **Relationship with the URCNA.** The GGRI and URCNA have been moving closer together since 2013 when the GGRI invited the URCNA to have a relationship. The URCNA expressed a desire for a sister church relationship with the GGRI, which was accepted with thankfulness. Dr. Moes (URCNA delegate) expressed the hope that a GGRI delegation could attend the URCNA synod in two years' time.
- 20 • **Book of Praise.** One of the obstacles to consistency in worship in the GGRI in the past has been the use of different psalms and hymns in worship. There are two different psalm translations in use. One was by the late Rev. Kijne, which was an older translation with only 100 psalms in it. A more recent one was completed by YAMUGER ("Yayasan Musik Gerejawi"), a Christian organization which translated all 150 psalms into more modern Indonesian. The melodies are the same Genevan melodies used in the *Australian Book of Praise*. Under the oversight of LITINDO ("Literature For Indonesia", a program currently run by the Mundijong Mission Board), br. Ferdinand Paratu requested and received permission from YAMUGER to digitally distribute this material. He incorporated this into an electronic Indonesian Book of Praise, which is called *Mazmur dan Buku Gereja GGRI* and is available as a PDF. The layout strongly resembles the PDF of the Canadian Reformed *Book of Praise*. This *Mazmur dan Buku Gereja GGRI* was adopted at synod. Although the GGRI now has agreed to sing all 150 psalms, no agreement was reached on the hymns. The provinces of Kalimantan and Papua have their own hymns, while the province of NTT uses a different book called *Kidung Jemaat*. Initially br. Paratu suggested a selection of both, but the churches could not come to an agreement on this matter. For the time being they are united in their psalm singing but not in their hymn singing.
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- 30 • **Church Order.** The *Mazmur dan Buku Gereja GGRI* includes a church order based on the church order of Dort. During synod, a committee of representatives from all three provinces as well as some foreign delegates had the opportunity to provide input on the church order. What they now have is based on the church order of Dort, but with certain articles combined and some elements added to better fit the local situation.
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- 40 • **Registration.** The GGRI has been trying to get registered as an official church federation with the Indonesian government. The three provincial federations were already registered before 2012. Now the intention is to register the GGRI as a national federation. This has been complicated by what transpired in the GGRI-Papua. A faction broke off and essentially committed identity theft with the registration information of the GGRI-
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Papua. The Papuan delegates were emotional when they related how much trouble this has caused them. This will need to be dealt with. When the GGRI can prove to the government that all three branches belong together, they may be able to be registered as one church federation.

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- **Theological Education.** The GGRI-KalBar owns the STT (Sekolah Tinggi Theologia GGRI), which is their seminary. At this point it is not accredited or officially registered. In order for this to happen a number of conditions are to be met. The minimum requirements are to have five or six instructors with an S-2 (Master's degree). At this point two of their students are studying in Jakarta for their S-2. Moreover, the Director General of the Department of Religion has already indicated that they will not be accredited. The reason for this is that there is already an accredited institution of theology, and the government is concerned that if there were two such institutions, there would not be enough students for both. However, this other institution is Baptist. The seminary has now established an MOU with a branch of STT Setia which is in Ngabang, Kalbar, with which their theological students are registered from the beginning of their studies. Upon completion of their studies at the STT GGRI in Sentagi, they write their thesis and sit their final thesis exam under the auspices of the STT Setia in Ngabang. If they sustain their thesis exam, they graduate from the STT Setia in Ngabang with their B.Th.
 - **Next Synod.** The next General Synod will be convened DV in September 2025 in Papua.
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- d. continue to offer assistance in improving the Reformed character of the GGRI and addressing existing concerns by the current means of theological training support and seminars, subject to available resources:
- i. The FRCA continue to financially support the GGRI-NTT seminary in Wai Marang, Sumba.
 - ii. As of July 2023, the AIRS program (Austral-Indo Reformational Seminars) is under the oversight of LITINDO, which is run by the Mundijong Mission Board. At the same time, the topics for the seminars are developed in consultation with the Internal Deputies of the GGRI and other church leaders, and Rev. van Delden reports to the FRCA Deputies for Indonesia as well as the Mundijong Mission Board so as to keep them abreast of developments.
 - iii. Summary of AIRS seminars:
 - 1. The first seminar of this second tour (the first tour was in 2019) was conducted during the month of August 2022 in Timor, Sabu, and Sumba. These were run by Rev. A van Delden and br. Ferdinand Paratu. Br. Paratu conducted seminars on the Church Order and the necessity of following it, as well as on the necessity of Psalm singing in the church. Rev. van Delden conducted a seminar on the topic of Women in the Church Offices. Not all church members were convinced that it is unbiblical to have women serving in the offices, so this seminar generated some discussion as well. In addition, two new books published by LITINDO were given to all office-bearers present.
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2. The second seminar was conducted during the month of January 2023 in Papua by a team made up of Rev. A van Delden (FRCA), br Ferdinand Paratu and br Obed Pingge (both GGRI-NTT), and Rev Yan Wambraw (GGRI-Papua). The seminars conducted covered the importance of the Church Order and the need to conduct church life in accordance with it, so as to ensure uniformity among the churches in the federation. The seminar on Psalm singing was held in some places as well. Rev. van Delden also presented seminars on the topic of Women in the Church Offices. It is clear that the Church Order is not well known or applied. Not all practicing elders were formally called or ordained, and those who serve as preachers are sometimes non-ordained theological students who have graduated from non-Reformed seminaries and are not supervised during their preaching. Because they have graduated from non-Reformed seminaries, many do not understand the Reformed and scriptural objection to having women serve as office-bearers. Moreover, the psalms are not as well known as the hymns. Therefore the AIRS seminars fulfill an important role in improving the Reformed character of the GGRI on a local level. It appears that they were effective in persuading six theological students from non-Reformed seminaries to further study Reformed theology at the GGRI-NTT seminary in Wai Marang (Sumba). This is a tremendous development, since these men will be the future leaders in their churches.

- e. encourage the GGRI in their efforts to work towards federative unity with the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor:

At all the assemblies the deputies visited, they encouraged the churches to seek ecclesiastical unity with each other. There is some contact between these three church federations. The GGRI and GGRC usually send delegates to each other's synod (including the regional synods of GGRI-NTT and GGRI-KalBar). There is contact between the GGRI and the GGRI-T. There are some pulpit exchanges between the GGRI-NTT and the GGRI-T although that is limited to the Kupang (West Timor) area. Recently another church federation, the Bebas Churches in east Sumba (GBST - see 6.b.i) accepted the offer of a sister church relationship from the GGRI. These churches are in Sumba and have mainly contact with the GGRI-NTT, and recently also with the GGRI-T. They have an agreement with the GGRI-T that they can send their students to STAKRI, the seminary of the GGRI-T.

The ground for the mandate to have contact with the GGRC and the GGRI-T was that "because of ongoing contacts between the GGRI, the GGRC and GGRI-Timor, it serves the best interests of our ecclesiastical relations with the GGRI also to maintain contacts with these two other church groups in Indonesia." In line with this argument, it would serve the interests of our ecclesiastical relations with the GGRI also to have contact with the GBST. The deputies ask synod for directions in this, see also 7.a.

- f. continue contact with the GGRC, to visit their Synods subject to available finance, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches:

- i. for a report on this part of our mandate, see the reports below on the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor.

- g. continue contact with the GGRI-Timor:
- i. for a report on this part of our mandate, see the reports below on the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor.

- 5 h. as yet report to the churches with a clearer picture of the GGRI-Kalimantan Barat and GGRI-Papua, focusing on and confirming their Reformed character:

i. GGRI-KalBar

10 During their visit to synod, Deputies had the opportunity to attend the morning worship service on Sept 4 at the convening church in Bengkayang. The GGRI-KalBar does not have afternoon services. Catechism instruction takes place on a weekday. This service was well attended. Both psalms and hymns were sung. The congregation was respectful in worship and bearing. In fact, other than the difference in language, the service was not noticeably different from anything experienced in a FRCA setting. At the same time, these impressions are based on only one worship service in one church.

15 ii. GGRI-Papua

20 In 1956 the most extensive mission project from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands started with the sending of Rev MK Drost to Papua. In the decades to follow several missionaries served in different locations, supporting churches to expand and eventually form a federation called GGRI-P with its theological training in Boma. At this point, there is no training in Boma. A number of theological students were trained at a non-Reformed seminary called STT SAPPI on the island of Java. This seminary was chosen because it was helpful in developing practical skills in farming and animal husbandry since most ministers are bi-vocational. However, they are not adequately exposed to Reformed theology, as is evident from what was already reported on in connection with the AIRS seminars.

30 In addition to what has already been reported on in connection with the AIRS seminars, deputies can also report that a meeting with their GGRI-Papua counterparts took place during the GGRI National Synod in Sentagi (Bengkayang), West Kalimantan. It was previously reported to Synod Albany 2021 that infrastructure is lacking and therefore communication between the churches is more limited than what would otherwise be expected. However, when they needed help, a delegation from the GGRI-NTT and the GGRI-KalBar did visit the GGRI-Papua to help them deal with the Ministry of Religion. It is also reported that usually Regional Synod decisions are sent to the GGRI in other regions. On their own initiative, the GGRI-Papua has set up a WhatsApp group for their ministers and elders through which these can share opportunities, challenges, and theological concerns. So far they still have relations with the GKv, although this may not remain in force much longer. They are no longer part of the interdenominational Association of Churches in Papua. At this point they have contact with the GJRP (Reformed Congregational Church in Papua) which is the result of evangelism from the Dutch NRC. This relationship may be pursued further in the future.

45 Church visitation is an area where the GGRI-Papua deputies recognize a need for improvement. Parents need encouragement and instruction in how to raise their children in the Reformed teachings. The degree of Catechism preaching varies, although it was reported that most churches do have second services.

7. Evaluation

a. Contact with the GGRC, GGRI-T, GBST

5 The mandate of the deputies concerning Indonesia keeps increasing. Since 2012 part
of the mandate is the attendance of the regional synods, not only of the GGRI-NTT,
but also of the GGRI-KalBar and GGRI-Papua. The deputies maintain contact with
the GGRC and the GGRI-T, because our sister churches, the GGRI, have contact
with them. Deputies have not attended the synods of the GGRI-T yet, because this is
10 a young federation, but it may be expected that we receive an invitation for their next
synod in 2024. The GGRI now also have a sister relationship with the Bebas churches
in East Sumba (GBST). Does that mean that deputies should add this church
federation to the list of churches we should keep in contact with, visiting their synods,
subject to available finance? We believe it is time to evaluate this practice and maybe
15 we should not visit these contact churches as often as we do until now. If we receive
an invitation from the GGRI-T it would be good to attend their synod. However,
thereafter we could decrease the frequency to every other synod. Or synod could
decide to leave it to the deputies to determine the best way of having contact with
these churches.

b. Finances

20 Until Synod Albany part of the travel costs of the deputies was reimbursed by the
synod treasurer, and a part, especially the visits to the province NTT, were
reimbursed by the fund for the Indonesian churches, which is administered by the
deputies for Indonesia. The deputies determined that this was not a good situation.
The fund for the Indonesian churches is mainly for the support of the seminary in
25 Sumba. When deputies travel to attend synods in the province NTT, then that is part
of the execution of their mandate. For transparency and accountability, the deputies
believe that these costs should all be reimbursed by the synod treasurer and the fund
for the Indonesian churches should be entirely for the benefit of the churches in
Indonesia. We request the synod to take this into account when deciding about the
budget for the deputies.

c. A clearer picture

30 Synod Albany mandated the deputies to “as yet report to the churches with a clearer
picture of the GGRI-Kalimantan and GGRI-Papua, focusing on and confirming their
Reformed character.” This has been part of the mandate of deputies since 2015. In
our report to Synod Albany much information was given about Papua. There is also
35 information about Kalimantan Barat albeit not as extensive as about Papua. In this
report, it is the same: You can find more information about Papua and about
Kalimantan Barat. As deputies, we also made use of the reports of Rev van Delden
about the seminar tours, which showed much about the Reformed character of these
churches. As reported in this report as well as in our previous report, there are
40 concerns about the Reformed character of these churches. However, the deputies
can also report with thankfulness that the churches are willing to work on
improvement. The matters of concern have their attention and they are eager to work
with Rev. van Delden to address these matters during the seminar tours. Also at their
synods, deputies remind them of the need to address these concerns and we notice
45 that the churches are willing to receive these exhortations in a brotherly spirit. The
deputies are limited in their time and resources and cannot do much more than has
been done. We therefore request Synod to consider this part of the mandate fulfilled.

8. Concluding remarks

Deputies are encouraged by the desire within the GGRI churches to continue to reform, and to return to the Reformed principles of worship formerly adhered to, which was expressed by attendees during the seminar tours.

5 9. Recommendations

1. To continue sister relations with the GGRI according to the established rules.
2. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint deputies with the mandate to:
 - a. Maintain the sister church relations according to the adopted rules;
 - 10 b. Send two delegates to the next GGRI Regional & National synods subject to available finance;
 - c. Continue to offer assistance in improving the Reformed character of the GGRI Churches and addressing existing concerns by the current means of theological training support and seminars, subject to available resources;
 - 15 d. Encourage the GGRI in their efforts to work towards federative unity with the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor;
 - e. Continue contact with the GGRC, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches;
 - 20 f. Continue contact with the GGRI-Timor and send delegates to their synod if an invitation is received;
 - g. Learn more about the GBST through our contacts with the GGRI; and
 - h. Recommend to the next synod whether to continue contact, move to a sister church relationship, or terminate contact with the GGRC, GGRI-Timor, and GBST.

25 Grounds

1. The GGRI churches give evidence of continual striving for faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
2. Our rules for sister church relations indicate that the churches need to mutually care for each other so that they do not depart from the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy. Troubling aspects of the church polity and liturgy in the GGRI have been identified and discussed with the leaders in the GGRI. The deputies indicate that there is a desire to address these concerns and it is important that we continue to encourage them in these matters and offer them help wherever possible.
- 35 3. The seminars as organised over the past few years in cooperation with the deputies of the GGRI have been well received and are a valuable means which deputies can offer to assist the GGRI in improving the reformed character of these churches.
4. Our visits to Indonesia and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

5. The Indonesian churches request ongoing financial support for their theological college as they continue on a road to self-sustainability. Until such time that this support is no longer required, such support should be coordinated, the churches kept informed, and financial accountability maintained.
- 5 6. Because of ongoing contacts between the GGRI and GGRC, GGRI-Timor, and GBST, it serves the best interests of our ecclesiastical relations with the GGRI also to maintain contacts with these three other church groups in Indonesia. The deputies can determine how this contact should be maintained.
- 10 7. Synod 2024 will make some decisions about relationships and contact with other churches, which may have an impact on the contacts with the GGRC, the GGRI-T and possibly the GBST.

II. The Calvinist Reformed Churches (GGRC)

1. Name of Church

Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvinis (GGRC).

2. Introduction

5 The GGRC were established in the 1950s when they left the GMIT churches. Their name was first GGM (Pilgrim Churches) and later the word 'Reformed' was added and the name became GGRM. In 2003 the name was changed to GGRC (Calvinist Reformed Churches).

10 They are sister churches of the GGRI and have repeatedly offered the FRCA a sister church relationship. In response the FRCA has always encouraged them to become one with the GGRI and in that way become sisters of the FRCA. The Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches also accepted the GGRC as sister churches. The GGRC are a member of the ICRC.

3. Brief description of Church

Location (description of political & geographical context)	<i>All churches are in the province NTT and are divided over the islands West Timor (Kupang), Rote, and Sabu. There is also a mission post in Malang, Java.</i>		
History	<p><i>Initially the churches now known as GGRC left the GMIT churches to become the GGMM and later the GGRM. One of the leaders, Rev. Fangidae, had contact with the GGRI through Dutch Reformed mission workers in Indonesia. GGRM students together with GGRI students were taught by Dutch missionaries in Sumba in the 1990's.</i></p> <p><i>Disagreements led to a split from the GGRM and formation of the GGRC.</i></p> <p><i>The GGRC has a sister relationship with the GGRI, CanRC, and URCNA and are a member of ICRC.</i></p>		
Confessional documents	<p><i>Three Ecumenical Creeds</i></p> <p><i>Three Forms of Unity</i></p>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>15 established churches and 2 mission posts</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency	<i>Consistory/ Council</i>	<i>15</i>	
	<i>Classis</i>	<i>2</i>	
	<i>General Synod</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Every 3 years</i>
Training of theological students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>The churches are served by ministers who have been trained in different seminaries: the older ministers at STT Sumba (one of them continued at the CRTS in Hamilton), one at</i> 		

	<i>STAKRI in Timor, others at John Calvin College in Bali, others in Malang.</i>
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4. History of the Relationship

- 5 a. While in Indonesia in the late 1980's, FRCA Deputies met with members of the GGMM. One of the leaders of the GGMM, Rev. Fangidae, attended the FRCA Synod of 1990. This Synod mandated deputies to seek contact with the GGMM in Timor, to determine whether they could be recognised as true and faithful churches in accordance with our confessions.

The GGMM requested an ecclesiastical relationship with the FRCA, to which the FRCA responded by encouraging them to become one with the GGRI. Due to schism and splits within the GGMM, the churches are now known as the GGRC.

10 The FRCA supported Rev. Yonson Dethan to study at the Canadian Reformed Seminary. He graduated in 1997.

In 2003, the FRCA noted that these churches have demonstrated faithfulness to God's Word and encouraged the GGRC to seek unity with the GGRI.

15 Deputies have regularly attended GGRC synods and in the past Australian ministers have helped the GGRC with seminars on topics like the church order. The GGRC have sent delegates or greetings to FRCA synods since 2012.

5. Decision and Mandate

The mandate of the deputies from Synod Albany 2021 is part of the decision made about the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI), article 97.

20 **Article 97 - Reformed Churches in Indonesia**

...

Decision

- 25 1. Continue sister relations with the GGRI according to the established rules.
 2. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:

...

- e. continue contact with the GGRC, to visit their synods subject to available finances, and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches;

30 **6. Execution of Mandate Article**

- a. Official correspondence received:
1. Invitation to attend Synod at Noelbaki in West Timor (Kupang area) in August 2022 and a request for financial aid for Synod costs.

Deputies responded to this in a letter, accepting the invitation. However, deputies explained that it is not in their mandate to offer structural financial support to church federations with which we have contact. In special situations, financial aid can be offered, but in the regular maintenance of church life churches should strive to be self-sufficient.

b. Visits made:

1. In accordance with the mandate from Synod Albany 2021, two deputies attended the GGRC Synod held in Noelbaki, West Timor, in August 2022. Synod Albany used the words 'subject to available finances' with regard to visiting synods in Indonesia. Costs for travel to Indonesia have increased considerably and the amount allocated for visits to Indonesia in the past three years was not sufficient. With regard to the contact churches (non-sister churches) Synod could consider mandating the deputies to visit every other synod (or once in six years), or just leave it to the deputies to determine what is the best way to maintain contact. See also our comments in the report about the GGRI, under 7.a, contact with the GGRC, GGRI-T, and GBST.

Some of the items dealt with at Synod:

- i. Discussions regarding the sister church relationship of the GGRC with the RCN. The previous synod wrote a letter urging the RCN to turn back from their decisions. Since no change had occurred this synod decided to terminate the relationship with the RCN.
- ii. Registration of the churches: The government has refused official registration of these churches since their beginning in 2004. This regularly leads to problems. Police threaten to close church buildings, churches are 'shunned' by local people as being illegal churches, and marriages cannot be solemnised in the churches. The GGRC decided to request the GGRI to allow them to register under the registration number of the GGRI.
- iii. Theological education: The GGRC decided that candidates for the ministry could be educated in Sumba, at STAKRI (Kupang), or in Bali or Java. This is a de facto continuation of the existing situation.
- iv. The relationship between the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor, which remains a sensitive issue.

7. Execution of specific points in the mandate concerning the GGRC

1. to help them wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches.

As part of the seminar tour which was organised by Rev. VanDelden together with deputies of the GGRI in NTT, a series of lectures was held in Kupang, as well. Leaders from the GGRC attended.

8. Recommendation

As part of the recommendation to synod regarding the GGRI (see the report about the GGRI), the deputies recommend including in the mandate of the deputies:

- i. Continue contact with the GGRC and help them wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches; and
- j. Recommend to the next synod whether to continue contact, move to a sister church relationship, or terminate formal contact with the GGRC, GGRI-Timor, and GBST.

Ground

8. Because of ongoing contacts between the GGRI and GGRC, GGRI-Timor, and GBST, it serves the best interests of our ecclesiastical relations with the GGRI also to maintain contacts with these three other church groups in Indonesia. The deputies can determine how this contact should be maintained.
9. Synod 2024 will make some decisions about relationships and contact with other churches, which may have an impact on the contacts with the GGRC, the GGRI-T and possibly the GBST.

III. The Reformed Churches in Indonesia – Timor (GGRI-T)

1. Name of Church

Gereja-Gereja Reformed di Indonesia - Timor (GGRI-T).

2. Introduction

5 The GGRI-Timor are the result of the mission work of the Canadian Reformed Church in
Smithville, with Rev. Edwer Dethan as missionary. These churches have established a
Theological School for the training of teachers and ministers of the Word, which has the
name STAKRI. New Hope Orphanage, which is an organisation active in the GGRI-T and
run by members of these churches, receives regular support from members of the FRCA
10 and publishes regularly in the Mission News.

3. Brief description of Church

Location (description of political & geographical context)	<i>All churches are in West Timor in the province NTT. Some are close to Kupang, most of them are more inland.</i>		
History	<i>The Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville started mission work in West Timor and sent Rev. Edwer Dethan in 2003. The first church was established in 2005. A theological training center was established in 2006, which developed into a seminary, combined with a school for teachers, which operates under the name STAKRI.</i>		
Confessional documents	<i>Three Ecumenical Creeds Three Forms of Unity</i>		
Number of churches & church plants	<i>9 established churches and 4 mission posts</i>		
Assemblies, number, frequency	<i>Consistory/ Council</i>	<i>9</i>	
	<i>Classis</i>	<i>2</i>	
	<i>General Synod</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>Every three years</i>
Training of theological students	<i>The ministers serving in these churches are all trained at STAKRI.</i>		

4. History of the Relationship

15 Since 2007, the FRCA deputies have had contact with these churches, through the church of Smithville. After these mission churches formed a federation in 2016, they sent two delegates from Timor to the synod of the FRCA in 2018.

5. Decision and Mandate

Article 97 – The Reformed Churches in Indonesia

Decision

1. To continue sister relations with the GGRI according to the established rules.
2. Thank the deputies for their work, discharge them, and appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - ...
 - f. continue contact with the GGRI-Timor.

6. Execution of Mandate

When the deputies traveled to Kupang to attend the synod of the GGRC, they also met with deputies of the GGRI-Timor, hereafter referred to as GGRI-T.

The GGRI-T formed a federation in November 2016, which was supposed to be temporary. They intend to seek contact with the GGRI and possibly over time join this federation. They have considered joining the GGRC and some of their churches had sent a delegation to a classis meeting in 2015 but have decided to focus on the GGRI.

The seminary, STAKRI, is still partially supported by the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville, New Hope Orphanage receives support from individual members in the FRCA and the Canadian Reformed Churches. Apart from these two organisations, these churches do not receive support from outside Indonesia. The schools, Elpida (primary and high school) are supported by the parents themselves or other church members.

Although the churches outside the Kupang area are economically not very well off, they receive support from the Yerusalem church, which is in the Kupang area and is, with around 250 members, the largest church.

Most of the GGRI-T churches have two services. After the COVID lockdowns, it was a struggle for many of the churches to get the members back to church, especially in the second service, some churches have still only one service per Sunday, but the consistories are determined to get the second service back again.

The consistories, the two classes, and the synod meet regularly, and the churches support and encourage each other as much as possible. They are a young federation, and their first focus is to strengthen the bond between their own churches. They do have some contacts with other church federations, but it is only at their latest synod that deputies were instructed to gather information about other Reformed church federations. Many church members, also the deputies, have their daily work and cannot easily take time off to travel and attend assemblies of other churches. This makes it harder to maintain contact with other church federations.

They have had contact with the GGRC and have contact with the GGRI, and the GBST. The GBST have agreed to send their students to STAKRI and there is growing cooperation between these two federations, and there are also good contacts with the GGRI. The GBST also have a relationship with the GGRI-NTT.

The GGRI-T hope to have their third synod in 2024 and the deputies informed us that they hope to invite the FRCA to send delegates to this synod.

7. Recommendation

5 As part of the recommendation to synod regarding the GGRI (see the report about the GGRI), the deputies recommend including in the mandate of the deputies:

k. Continue contact with the GGRI-Timor and send delegates to their synod if an invitation is received; and

l. Recommend to the next synod whether to continue contact, move to a sister church relationship, or terminate formal contact with the GGRC, GGRI-Timor, and GBST.

10 Ground

10. Because of ongoing contacts between the GGRI and GGRC, GGRI-Timor, and GBST, it serves the best interests of our ecclesiastical relations with the GGRI also to maintain contacts with these three other church groups in Indonesia. The deputies can determine how this contact should be maintained.

15 11. Synod 2024 will make some decisions about relationships and contact with other churches, which may have an impact on the contacts with the GGRC, the GGRI-T and possibly the GBST.

IV. GGRI - Theological Training

1. Decision and mandate

Synod Albany 2021 decided (article 98):

1. To mandate deputies to:

- 5 a. continue to support theological training for the GGRI and make funds available for this cause, following the Guidelines for Deputies found in Article 86 of the Acts of Synod 2003. In addition, submit a budget, proposed assessment, financial reports, and annual auditor's reports to the local churches and Synod 2024;
- 10 b. provide funds for the renovation of the buildings in Waimarang as needed and redirect the remainder of the funds collected for a new campus to the running of the seminary;
- 15 c. find capable members and appoint them in a committee which functions under the responsibility of the deputies, to manage the support for the seminary of the GGRI in Waimarang;
- d. encourage the deputies for the training for the ministry at STT-GGRI (Sumba) to continue to seek the assistance of an external advisor in the person of Rev A Van Delden; and
- 20 e. financially support the ministers already invited to come to Australia to study English and familiarise themselves with the FRCA for three months, and thereafter no longer to invite brothers to come to Australia for this purpose.

Grounds

- 25 1. The financial support for this theological training ought to be managed with detailed attention to reporting and accountability, as well as due consideration for best practices related to avoiding long-term dependency.
- 30 2. Since the regional synod in NTT decided to move the seminary back to the existing buildings in Waimarang, there is no longer a need to keep the funds collected for a new campus and these funds can be redirected to the renovation of the existing buildings in Waimarang, and what is left, can be used to decrease the financial support requested from the churches.
- 35 3. No churches have indicated that they are able to take over the responsibility for the support of the seminary. Mandating deputies to appoint a special committee for this task allows them to find qualified members for this committee and to exercise proper oversight, while deputies can focus on their main task to maintain the sister church relationships.
- 40 4. The usefulness of inviting students or ministers to come to Australia is limited. Commitments made should be kept, but thereafter there is no clear need to continue to invite others.
5. The GGRI have appointed Rev Van Delden as an external advisor and can be encouraged to make good use of him. This has also proven to be beneficial for the deputies to maintain good contact with the seminary in Sumba.

2. Execution of Mandate Art 98

a. Correspondence

5 There was regular correspondence with the deputies for the theological training of the GGRI regarding the needs of the college and the financial support. This correspondence was mainly taken care of by the Sumba Seminary Support Committee (SSSC), which was established in accordance with the mandate 1.c.

10 The deputies received and discussed a proposal for the renovation of the seminary in Waimarang and asked the SSSC to investigate and serve the deputies with advice. Funds have been reserved for these renovations, but a final decision still must be made.

b. Visits Made

15 Visits to the seminary in Sumba are being made by the members of the SSSC. Indonesia opened up in 2022, after the COVID lockdowns, and a visit was made in November 2022. According to the mandate, each year at least one committee member will visit the seminary to meet with Board and Faculty.

c. Execution of specific points in the mandate

20 **a. continue to support theological training for the GGRI and make funds available for this cause, following the Guidelines for Deputies found in Article 86 of the Acts of Synod 2003. In addition, submit a budget, proposed assessment, financial reports, and annual auditor's reports to the local churches and Synod 2024;**

25 The deputies approached the churches to request financial assistance. This financial assistance has been forthcoming which has allowed the deputies to support the seminary with the required funding. The board of the seminary submitted budgets and in response, the deputies decided to support the seminary with a certain amount, while the churches of the GGRI-NTT were expected to provide the remainder of the support needed.

30 **b. provide funds for the renovation of the buildings in Waimarang as needed and redirect the remainder of the funds collected for a new campus to the running of the seminary;**

35 The deputies decided not to request a contribution from the churches for one year (the financial year 2021/2022) because there were sufficient funds available which were previously collected for a new campus. For the other years, the deputies were able to keep the requested contributions to \$18 per communicant member.

40 The deputies received a proposal regarding the renovation and upgrade of the buildings of the seminary in Waimarang. These plans were discussed and in principle it was agreed to reserve funds for the renovations and to provide the necessary funds after the SSSC had investigated these plans and provided the deputies with advice. The SSSC reported back to the deputies indicating support for this proposal. The deputies are discussing the report of the SSSC and hope to come to a decision in February 2024. This renovation will for a large part also contain an upgrade of the existing buildings, to bring them in agreement with the requirements of the government for a possible future

registration of the seminary. If the deputies agree with this proposal, it will mean an increase in the contribution asked from the churches of probably somewhere between 5 and 10 dollars per communicant member per year.

- 5 **c. find capable members and appoint them in a committee which functions under the responsibility of the deputies, to manage the support for the seminary of the GGRI in Waimarang;**

10 The deputies appointed a 'Sumba Seminary Support Committee', consisting of the brothers Ian Swarts (chairman), Chris Bruning, and Eric Heerema. This committee managed the support for the seminary, providing the deputies with advice wherever needed. The committee recommended that br. Marianus Tuaty Waang, one of the lecturers at the theological college of the GGRI-KalBar in Bengkayang, travel to Sumba to attend the synod of the GGRI-NTT and serve as advisor regarding certain matters pertaining to the seminary in Sumba, especially with regard to establishing an MOU with another theological institution. The deputies provided financial support for this trip.

- 15 **d. encourage the deputies for the training for the ministry at STT-GGRI (Sumba) to continue to seek the assistance of an external advisor in the person of Rev A Van Delden;**

20 Because the previous GGRI-NTT synod appointed Rev. van Delden as advisor for the board, he was given the opportunity to address the synod with recommendations. These included suggestions for new members of YASTRI (which the synod accepted and acted upon.) Rev, van Delden met with the new board, and came with suggestions for the improvement of the college.

25 Another important decision that Rev. van Delden could suggest to the previous board and reiterate at synod was the need to make a definitive decision to permanently relocate the college to Waimarang. He emphasised our last synod's decision not to support the establishment of a new campus. He could also encourage them to formulate a long-term, realistic plan to build some new buildings on the old campus, which would cater to the increased student population, and more importantly, be in accordance with government requirements for accreditation. The board presented the SSSC with a very modest proposal for some new buildings.

30 The churches in Papua have recently decided to send all theological students to the Theological College in Waimarang.

35 Rev. van Delden had the opportunity to conduct seminars for the office bearers of the Free Churches of East Sumba (GBST) which is a sister church of the GGRI-NTT. Formerly, they have sent their students to John Calvin Theological College in Denpasar. But that school has become quite liberal, so they are looking for a new college for their students.

40 Finally, as advisor, Rev. van Delden could suggest two men to be appointed as professors. One is well-gifted in the original languages (Rev Yan Domu Marahongu). He was a student taught by Rev. van Delden and was supported by the church of Darling Downs to get his Masters. The other is a gifted minister who already has his Masters (Rev Windi Kurung) but is highly suitable to obtain his doctorate. Synod appointed both members as full-time professors.

- e. **financially support the ministers already invited to come to Australia to study English and familiarise themselves with the FRCA for three months, and thereafter no longer to invite brothers to come to Australia for this purpose.**

5 The Rev. Marianus Tuaty Waang was invited to come to Australia, as well as the Rev. Windi Kurung. They came and visited in October and November of 2022. They met with many members of the FRCA, as well as visited several organisations. This visit was helpful for them to get a good impression of church life in the FRCA and to improve their language skills in English.

10 d. **Concluding Remarks**

a. The Regional Synod of the GGRI-NTT in 2022 made the decision to reinstate YASTRI as the board responsible for the running and oversight of the seminary. Capable brothers were appointed and the communication with the deputies of the FRCA is good. The deputies believe that this is an improvement in the oversight and running of the seminary.

b. The Regional Synod of 2021 decided that in the long-term the location of the seminary will remain in Waimarang. This makes it possible to begin extensive renovations and upgrades of the buildings in Waimarang.

c. The Sumba Seminary Support Committee started working and has received a mandate from the deputies. The SSSC is overseen by and reports to the deputies and is responsible for the management of all matters related to the seminary. This takes away a considerable amount of work from the deputies. Although some improvements can still be made, the deputies recommend continuing the use of the Sumba Seminary Support Committee.

25 **3. Recommendation**

1. To mandate deputies to:

a. continue to support theological training for the GGRI and make funds available for this cause, following the Guidelines for Deputies found in Article 86 of the Acts of Synod 2003. In addition, submit a budget, proposed assessment, financial reports, and annual auditor's reports to the local churches and Synod 2024;

b. provide funds for the renovation and upgrade of the buildings in Waimarang as needed;

c. Appoint or reappoint capable members in the Sumba Seminary Support Committee, which functions under the responsibility of the deputies, to manage the matters regarding the seminary of the GGRI in Waimarang; and

d. encourage the deputies for the training for the ministry at STT-GGRI (Sumba) to continue to seek the assistance of an external advisor in the person of Rev A Van Delden.

Grounds

1. The financial support for this theological training ought to be managed with detailed attention to reporting and accountability, as well as due consideration for best practices related to avoiding long-term dependency.
- 5 2. Providing funds for the renovation was part of the previous mandate and funds have been reserved for this cause.
3. The Sumba Seminary Support Committee is mandated to exercise proper oversight over the seminary, which makes it possible for the deputies to focus on their main task to maintain the sister church relationships.
- 10 4. The GGRI have benefited from the help of Rev Van Delden as an external advisor and can be encouraged to continue to do so. This has also proven to be beneficial for the deputies to maintain good contact with the seminary and the churches in Sumba.

4. Appendix

The Financial Statements of 2020/2021; 2021/2022; 2022/2023.

15

Appendix 1: Audited Account 2020-2021

Statement of Receipts and Payments Deputies for Interchurch Relations - Indonesia For the 12 month period ending 30 June

	Notes	2020-21			2021-22	
		CM	Budget	Actual	CM	Budget
RECEIPTS						
Regular Contributions	1					
FRC Albany		249	4,482	8,838	244	0
FRC Armadale		240	4,320	8,676	227	0
FRC Baldivis		238	4,284	8,586	247	0
FRC Bunbury		105	1,890	1,890	106	0
FRC Busselton		67	1,206	1,206	79	0
FRC Byford		270	4,860	5,208	294	0
FRC Darling Downs		182	3,276	3,276	184	0
FRC Kelmscott		199	3,582	3,690	202	0
FRC Launceston		177	3,186	4,860	166	0
FRC Legana		76	1,368	1,368	82	0
FRC Melville		81	1,458	1,458	85	0
FRC Mt Nasura		156	2,808	2,808	174	0
FRC Mundijong		241	4,338	4,338	259	0
FRC Rockingham		210	3,780	3,780	225	0
FRC Southern River		277	4,986	4,986	280	0
FRC West Albany		225	4,050	8,136	263	0
Late Payments			17,100	0		0
Other Receipts						
Training (Greek) Rev Domu - FRC Darling Downs			0	2,771		0
Student Food - FRC Mt Nasura			9,500	9,500		9,500
Interest			80	32		0
Total Receipts		2,993	80,554	85,407	3,117	9,500
EXPENSES						
GGRI Seminary						
General operating costs	2		40,000	40,000		40,000
Communication expense			1,500	0		0
Rent Seminary Building - move to Waimarang			3,000	9,500		0
Seminary Renovations - Waimarang	3		0	0		17,500
Students Practical - travel to Papua			0	5,200		0
Staff & Student Support						
Students to study English in Australia	4		2,500	0		0
Computers for final year students	5		5,000	13,000		7,000
Training - Greek for Rev Jan Domu			5,000	2,550		0
Student food expenses	6		9,000	7,800		9,500
Degree related costs			4,000	0		3,000
Fraternal Costs						
GGRI National Deputies Communication Expense			1,500	0		0
Report GGRI Papua and Kalimantan	7		4,000	0		0
Contribution to GGRI synod costs			3,000	0		0
Administration						
Bank Fees			500	192		500
Unforeseen Costs			1,500	0		1,500
Honarlum - Indonesian Treasurer			1,200	1,200		1,200
Total Expenses			81,700	79,442		80,200
Net Cashflow			-1,146	5,965		-70,700

CASH RESERVES

Transaction Account			
Opening Balance	92,629	92,629	98,594
Net cashflow	-1,146	5,965	-70,700
Closing Balance	91,483	98,594	27,894
Term Deposit			
Opening	60,422	60,422	61,026
Interest	1,500	604	153
Closing Balance	61,922	61,026	61,178
Total Cash Reserves	153,405	159,620	89,073

NOTES

1. Membership numbers taken from the 2021 and 2022 Metro yearbooks
2. The Deputies contribute 540,000 to the seminary budget of approx 565,000. The Indonesian churches contribute the remaining balance.
3. Theological Seminary Renovations at Waimarang (Synod 2021 Article 98 Decision 1b).
4. Support for two students to travel to Australia improve their English (Synod 2021 Article 98 Decision 1e).
5. Final year students are gifted a laptop to use in their ministry.
6. FRC Mt Nasura has committed to additional payment of \$9,500.00 per annum for student food expenses.
7. Deputies were to report on regions Papua and Kalimantan (Synod 2021 Article 97 Decision 1g)

20th September , 2021

The Secretary ,
Deputies Indonesian Churches.

AUDIT OF FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE 2020/2021 FINANCIAL YEAR.

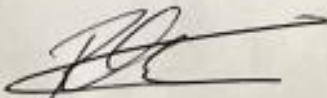
Dear Brothers.

We, the undersigned checked and audited the financial books of the deputies for Indonesian Churches. Our examination found them to be in good order and they accurately reflect the transactions for the 2020/ 2021 financial year.

With Christian Greetings,



Brian Maring
5 Wungong Close
Wungong WA, 6112
Member FRC Darling Downs



Brendan Plug
138 Masters rd
Darling Downs WA. 6122
Member FRC Darling Downs.

Appendix 2: Audited Account 2021-2022

Statement of Receipts and Payments Deputies for Interchurch Relations - Indonesia For the 12 month period ending 30 June

	Notes	2021-22			2022-23	
		CM	Budget	Actual	CM	Budget
RECEIPTS						
					per CM	18
Regular Contributions	1					
FRC Albany		244	-	-	244	4,392
FRC Armadale		227	-	-	227	4,086
FRC Baldivis		247	-	-	247	4,446
FRC Bunbury		106	-	-	106	1,908
FRC Busselton		79	-	-	79	1,422
FRC Byford		294	-	-	294	5,292
FRC Darling Downs		184	-	-	184	3,312
FRC Kelmscott		202	-	-	202	3,636
FRC Launceston		166	-	6,719	166	-
FRC Legana		82	-	1,368	82	-
FRC Melville		85	-	-	85	1,530
FRC Mt Nasura		174	-	-	174	3,132
FRC Mundijong		259	-	-	259	4,662
FRC Rockingham		225	-	-	225	4,050
FRC Southern River		280	-	-	280	5,040
FRC West Albany		263	-	-	263	4,734
Other Receipts						
AIRS Seminar Support - FRC Rockingham						25,000
Student Food - FRC Mt Nasura			9,500	9,500		7,800
Donation - Library Support			-	3,869		-
Total Receipts		3,117	9,500	21,456	3,117	84,442
EXPENSES						
GGRI Seminary						
General operating costs	2		40,000	30,000		40,000
Seminary Renovations - Waimarang	3		17,500	-		17,500
Students Practical - travel to Papua			-	694		2,400
Library Support			-	3,869		-
Staff & Student Support						
Students to study English in Australia	4		-	-		5,500
Computers for final year students	5		7,000	-		6,150
Student food expenses	6		9,500	5,850		7,800
Degree related costs			3,000	-		4,500
Fraternal Costs						
Report GGRI Papua and Kalimantan	7		-	-		4,000
Austral-Indo Reformational Seminars (AIRS)			-	-		25,000
Sumba Seminary Support Committee Travel			-	-		1,500
Synod Travel Costs (Marianus, Papua Delegates)			-	-		3,500
Administration						
Bank Fees			500	64		300
Unforeseen Costs			1,500	-		-
Honarium - Indonesian Treasurer			1,200	1,200		1,200
Total Expenses			80,200	41,677		119,350
Net Cashflow			-70,700	-20,221		-34,908

CASH RESERVES**Transaction Account**

Opening Balance	98,594	98,594	78,373
Net cashflow	-70,700	-20,221	-34,908
Closing Balance	<u>27,894</u>	<u>78,373</u>	<u>43,465</u>

Term Deposit

Opening	61,026	61,026	61,178
Interest	153	153	153
Closing Balance	<u>61,178</u>	<u>61,178</u>	<u>61,331</u>

Total Cash Reserves

<u>89,073</u>	<u>139,552</u>	<u>104,796</u>
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NOTES

1. Membership numbers taken from the 2022 Metro yearbooks
2. The Deputies contribute \$40,000 to the seminary budget of approx \$65,000. 2021/22 was lower by \$10,000 to realign payment timing to 1st day of quarter
3. Theological Seminary Renovations at Waimarang (Synod 2021 Article 98 Decision 1b).
4. Support for two students to travel to Australia improve their English (Synod 2021 Article 98 Decision 1e).
5. Final year students are gifted a laptop to use in their ministry.
6. FRC Mt Nasura supports student food expenses of \$9,500.00 per annum. 2021/22 was lower by \$1,950 to realign payment timing to 1st day of quarter.
7. Deputies were to report on regions Papua and Kalimantan (Synod 2021 Article 97 Decision 1g)

22 January 2023

The Secretary
Deputies Interchurch Relations - Indonesia

Report on the Audit of Financial Statements

Dear Brothers

We, the undersigned, checked and audited the financial books of the deputies for Indonesian Churches. Our examination found them to be in good order and they accurately reflect the transactions for the year ending 30 June 2022.

With Christian greetings,



Lyndon Reitsema
Deacon
FRC Melville



Wynand Breytenbach
Deacon
FRC Melville

Appendix 3: Audited Account 2022-2023

Statement of Receipts and Payments Deputies for Interchurch Relations - Indonesia For the 12 month period ending 30 June

	Notes	2022-23		Actual
		CM	Budget	
RECEIPTS				
		<i>per CM</i>	18	
Regular Contributions	1			
FRC Albany		244	4,392	4,392
FRC Armadale		227	4,086	4,086
FRC Baldivis		247	4,446	4,446
FRC Bunbury		106	1,908	1,908
FRC Busselton		79	1,422	1,422
FRC Byford		294	5,292	5,292
FRC Cardup Brook		-	-	-
FRC Comet Bay		-	-	-
FRC Darling Downs		184	3,312	3,312
FRC Kelmscott		202	3,636	3,636
FRC Launceston		166	-	1,879
FRC Legana		82	-	-
FRC Melville		85	1,530	1,530
FRC Mt Nasura		174	3,132	3,132
FRC Mundijong		259	4,662	4,662
FRC Rockingham		225	4,050	4,050
FRC Southern River		280	5,040	5,040
FRC West Albany		263	4,734	4,734
Other Receipts				
AIRS Seminar Support - FRC Rockingham			25,000	25,000
Student Food - FRC Mt Nasura			7,800	7,800
Interest			-	153
Donation - Library Support			-	1,379
Total Receipts		3,117	84,442	87,853
EXPENSES				
GGRI Seminary				
General operating costs	2		40,000	40,000
Seminary Renovations - Waimarang	3		17,500	-
Students Practical - travel to Papua			2,400	-
Library Support			-	1,279
Staff & Student Support				
Students to study English in Australia			5,500	5,900
Computers for final year students	4		6,150	3,200
Student food expenses	5		7,800	7,800
Degree related costs			4,500	-
Fraternal Costs				
Report GGRI Papua and Kalimantan			4,000	-
Austral-Indo Reformational Seminars (AIRS)			25,000	21,382
Sumba Seminary Support Committee Travel			1,500	-
Synod Travel Costs (Marianus, Papua Delegates)			3,500	3,652
Adminstration				
Bank Fees			300	200
Honorarium - Indonesian Treasurer			1,200	-
Total Expenses			119,350	83,412
Net Cashflow			-34,908	4,440

CASH RESERVES

Transaction Account

Opening Balance	78,373	78,373
Net cashflow	-34,908	4,287
Closing Balance	<u>43,465</u>	<u>82,660</u>

Term Deposit

Opening	61,178	61,178
Interest	153	153
Closing Balance	<u>61,331</u>	<u>61,331</u>

Total Cash Reserves

<u>104,796</u>	<u>143,992</u>
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30 October 2023

The Secretary
Deputies for Interchurch Relations - Indonesia

Report on the Audit of Financial Statements

Dear Brothers

We have checked and audited the financial information of the Deputies for Interchurch Relations - Indonesia for the financial year ending 30 June 2023. The Deputies for Interchurch Relations – Indonesia are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and its contents. We have conducted an independent audit of this information to express an opinion on it to the Synod.

We examined evidence supporting the amounts as presented in the Statement of Receipts and Payments in order to provide reasonable assurance that the Statement was free from material misstatement. We have been provided access to banking records and supporting documents to enable us to conduct the audit.

Opinion:

In our opinion the Statement of Receipts and Payments gives a true and fair view of the financial position and performance of the accounts of the Deputies for Interchurch Relations – Indonesia for the financial year ended 30 June 2023.

With Christian greetings,



Lyndon Reitsema
Deacon
FRC Melville



Caleb Jongeling
Member
FRC Melville

Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise

Report to Synod to be convened, God willing, in Darling Downs, June 2024

Introduction

The *Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise* hereby submit our report on the mandate given by Synod Albany, 2021. This Synod acknowledged with thankfulness that the work towards publishing the Australian Book of Praise had been completed, a significant moment in the history of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. They appointed new deputies as members of the Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise with the mandate to:

- (a) express the gratitude of the FRCA to the brothers W Helder, G van Popta and W Gortemaker for their contribution to the Australian Book of Praise;
- (b) receive feedback from the churches regarding the contents and appearance of the Australian Book of Praise;
- (c) record corrections and possible improvements for reprints and revisions;
- (d) maintain good contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches;
- (e) clarify with the copyright-holders under what conditions we might be allowed to make modifications to the Australian Book of Praise;
- (f) monitor quantities available for distribution and authorise new print runs when necessary;
- (g) maintain contact with Pro Ecclesia Bookshop regarding the distribution and sales of the electronic versions;
- (h) deal with all financial matters relating to the Australian Book of Praise via a separate bank account controlled by Deputies;
- (i) assess the churches as necessary and arrange for repayment for the loans made by the FRC Darling Downs, FRC Rockingham and any other churches that might wish to be reimbursed; and
- (j) assess the churches as necessary to arrange financing for future print runs at the appropriate time.

The Deputies are pleased to report that under God's blessing they were able to fulfill their task, as outlined in the following report.

Humbly submitted by the Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise

Rev C Vermeulen (convenor)
Rev R Eikelboom
RH Eikelboom
G Plug
H Van Dijk

The activities of the Standing Committee are outlined under the various elements of their mandate.

1. Express the gratitude of the FRCA to the brothers W Helder, G van Popta and W Gortemaker for their contribution to the Australian Book of Praise

5 Letters were sent to W Helder and G van Popta. We acknowledged that producing the Australian Book of Praise was relatively straightforward because we had used the Canadian Reformed Book of Praise for so many years and had access to the work done by them and the Standing Committee for Book of Praise in Canada (SCBP). On behalf of the FRCA we thanked them for allowing us to make use of the fruit of their work. The letter was
10 accompanied by a complimentary copy of the Australian Book of Praise.

A letter was also sent to W Gortemaker expressing our appreciation on behalf of the FRCA for his work, as well as the work of Premier Printing as a whole, in managing the production of the two editions of the Australian Book of Praise.

15 Although not specifically mandated, the Committee also sent a letter with a copy of the Book of Praise to the United Reformed Church, copyright holders of the tune *We Come, Oh Christ, to You*. We thanked them for giving permission to use this tune in our Psalter.

2. Receive feedback from the churches regarding the contents and appearance of the Australian Book of Praise

20 The Committee invited feedback on the contents and appearance of the Australian Book of Praise via a *Una Sancta* article published in August 2023. Informal feedback suggested general satisfaction with the appearance, though there was some minor criticism of the quality of the gold print on the cover of the soft edition. Specific feedback relating to an error, and a suggestion to make a change to content, is covered under the next point.

3. Record corrections and possible improvements for reprints and revisions

25 So far, only one textual correction has been brought to our attention, and that is in the *Subscription Form for Ministers of the Word*, on page 662 of the Book of Praise. The last column repeats some of the text of the second last one, and the form should have ended after "...consistory and/or classis." As committee, we do not have any other requests for corrections.

30 We received a suggestion from an accompanist from one of the churches to replace the Genevan Tune of Psalm 23 with the Crimond Version (due to the fact that the congregations typically do not sing Psalm 23 exactly according to the musical notation), and also to consider adding some more commonly known hymns into our Book of Praise. We replied to the accompanist to discuss solutions to the Psalm 23 issue together with other
35 accompanists in the churches, and also pointed to the local consistory as the way to progress the suggestion to add some hymns to the Book of Praise.

As far as the physical quality of the books go, we note that there were a number of copies that were delivered faulty e.g. covers upside down, pages torn. This matter has the attention of Pro Ecclesia, who will take this up with Premier Printing in Canada.

4. Maintain good contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches

5 Good contact with the SCBP was maintained, including a face-to-face meeting with Rev D Agema, a member of the committee, while he was in Australia. The SCBP was mandated by the last Canadian Reformed synod to consider several aspects of the publication of the Book of Praise. One element that stands out is the funding model: all the Canadian Reformed Churches were recently surveyed to determine how the churches might fund the production of a new Book of Praise. No decision is expected before the next Canadian Reformed Synod. This is of interest to us as we face similar questions about funding future print runs, with our proposed solutions outlined later in this report.

The SCBP informed us that it is a registered not-for-profit organization that is subject to corporate law and required to fill out tax returns and keep other records. They also utilise the services of a lawyer to deal with the copyright issues entailed in using some sections of the Book of Praise, especially in relation to recordings of church services.

15 The SCBP fully supports the Free Reformed Churches of Australia developing its own Book of Praise and has assured us that it does not intend to stand in our way if we wish to give our book its own distinct flavour.

5. Clarify with the copyright-holders under what conditions we might be allowed to make modifications to the Australian Book of Praise

20 It has taken our committee some time to come to terms with the breadth of this question and all the issues involved. Initially we had hoped that we might find a way to make the Australian Book of Praise our very own in the sense that we would be free to do as we please with all the psalms, hymns, creeds, confessions, liturgical forms, and prayers, but that situation is not likely to eventuate. Instead:

25 I. As pages 679-681 of our Book of Praise indicate, there are numerous individuals and organisations that hold copyright to parts of our Book of Praise. For any change that we decide to make, we must obtain (written) permission from the relevant copyright holder(s). This constraint appears to be permanent.

30 II. There is no copyright on the prose section of the Book of Praise – the creeds, confessions, liturgical forms and prayers. However, the Canadian Reformed Churches should continue to be acknowledged as the original source of the text.

35 III. The SCBP holds the copyright to numerous psalms and hymns. To ensure a common understanding between the Standing Committees of Canada and Australia, we have agreed to an official protocol for making changes to those psalms and hymns. The protocol has been included as an appendix to this report.

IV. For hymns and psalms for which the SCBP does not hold the copyright, we have to respect the rights of the copyright holders.

40 V. While it appears that changing psalms and hymns in our Book of Praise may be difficult, this should not overshadow our gratitude for the book we currently have, which is proving to be of the highest quality: we continue to be impressed by how closely the psalms reflect Scripture and how beautifully they have been set to music.

6. **Monitor quantities available for distribution and authorise new print runs when necessary**

5 The Standing Committee received a shipment containing the first print run of 2000 hard cover and 800 soft cover versions of the Australian Book of Praise in August 2021. These books were stored in a warehouse belonging to a member of the Free Reformed Churches in the Armadale Industrial area, and the Standing Committee became responsible for their distribution. Around this time a financial arrangement was entered into with Pro Ecclesia to take ownership of the books (as mentioned elsewhere in this report). However, the Committee has continued to work closely with Pro Ecclesia in maintaining responsibility for storage and distribution.

10 A substantial bulk order was shipped to Tasmania mid-September 2021 to supply the Free Reformed Churches of Legana and Launceston, John Calvin School and the local church bookshop. A second bulk order was arranged for FRC Baldivis in lieu of repaying loaned money. The remaining books have been selling through Pro Ecclesia bookshops in Armadale and Rockingham, and the bookshop in Albany. The committee supplies the bookshop with quantities of books from the warehouse as needed, which occurs approximately twice a year.

The projections indicate a remaining 12-18 month supply of the current print run, so another is likely to be needed before the next synod.

20 7. **Maintain contact with Pro Ecclesia Bookshop regarding the distribution and sales of the electronic versions**

25 The Standing Committee has maintained close contact with Pro Ecclesia, with one member of the committee also a member of Pro Ecclesia's committee, and another member of the committee in close contact with the Bookshop manager. Electronic sales are approximately 1 per week, with approximately 200 copies sold to date.

8. **Deal with all financial matters relating to the Australian Book of Praise via a separate bank account controlled by Deputies**

30 The Standing Committee decided not to set up a bank account for two primary reasons. Firstly, setting up a bank account nowadays would have required us to set up an official incorporated body, which would cause a significant administrative burden, including registering for GST. Secondly, the matter was providently simplified when the initial import was registered with Pro Ecclesia as the address of the consignment, and the responsibility of GST fell on Pro Ecclesia. Advice received was that managing sales of the Book of Praise GST-free would have administrative challenges. This arrangement with Pro Ecclesia is therefore similar to how Premier Printing in Canada serves the churches there.

9. **Assess the churches as necessary and arrange for repayment for the loans made by the FRC Darling Downs, FRC Rockingham and any other churches that might wish to be reimbursed**

40 The Standing Committee made thankful use of short- and medium-term loans from a number of congregations. These have been repaid in full or in exchange for copies of the Book of Praise.

10. Assess the churches as necessary to arrange financing for future print runs at the appropriate time

5 The Standing Committee has considered ways to finance future print runs, estimated at approximately \$80 000. Three options were considered: to ask Pro Ecclesia to finance the full cost; for Pro Ecclesia to partially finance the cost, supplemented by loans from individuals or organisations; or to request Synod to levy the churches to fund the project. We considered the third option problematic since levies are not typically repaid and we believe that Books of Praise should be sold rather than exchanged for a levy.

10 The committee consulted with Pro Ecclesia about the role they can continue to play in managing the storage, distribution and sales of the Book of Praise in the future and financing any future print runs. Pro Ecclesia has agreed in principle to continue to assist in selling and administering the Australian Book of Praise, providing that the Standing Committee would continue managing the storage. They are committed to continuing the current arrangements, including financing the reprint, although they do not yet have clarity on how they will fund this; for example, through their reserves or through obtaining loans.

15 We express our gratitude to Pro Ecclesia for the excellent cooperation we have experienced in our dealings with them. Their willingness to take responsibility for managing the receiving and selling of the books has certainly facilitated a smooth implementation of using the Australian Books of Praise in the churches.

20 **11. Recommendations**

11.1 *Appoint or reappoint members to the Standing Committee of the Australian Book of Praise*

25 We remind Synod that Rev C Vermeulen has now completed his fourth term on this committee and its predecessors; the other current members are available to be reappointed.

11.2 *Mandate*

Provide the Standing Committee with the following mandate:

Appoint new deputies as members of the Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise with the following mandate to:

- 30 (a) Receive feedback from the churches regarding the contents and appearance of the Australian Book of Praise;
- (b) Record corrections and possible improvements for reprints and revisions;
- (c) Maintain good contact with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches;
- 35 (d) Monitor quantities available for distribution and authorise new print runs when necessary, engaging the services of Pro Ecclesia;
- (e) Maintain contact with Pro Ecclesia Bookshop regarding the distribution and sales of the electronic versions; and
- 40 (f) Assess the churches as necessary to arrange financing for future print runs at the appropriate time, should such financing be necessary.

Appendix:

Protocol for making changes to the Australian *Book of Praise*

5 The Standing Committee for the Publication of the Australian Book of Praise (SCABP) and the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP) agree to the following protocol for making changes to the Australian *Book of Praise*:

(1) With respect to the prose section of the *Book of Praise*:

- There is no copyright, and freedom to make changes is unrestricted.

10 (2) With respect to changing psalms and hymns for which the SCBP of the CanRC holds copyright:

- The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, through their Standing Committee, will inform the SCBP of the CanRC of changes they wish to implement;
- The SCBP of the CanRC is authorized to approve such proposals. Permission from ecclesiastical assemblies of the Canadian Reformed Churches is not required;

15 - In all cases the FRCA will ensure that the necessary acknowledgements are duly published.

(3) With respect to changing psalms and hymns for which other parties hold copyright:

- The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, through their Standing Committee, will take up direct contact with copyright holders;

20 - Involvement of the SCBP of the CanRC will not be required.

(4) With respect to changing the tunes of psalms and hymns:

- The SCBP of the CanRC holds no copyright to any of the tunes;
- The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, through their Standing Committee, will take up direct contact with copyright holders, should they be subject to copyright;

25 - Involvement of the SCBP of the CanRC will not be required.

Deputies – Training for the Ministry

Report to Synod Darling Downs 2024 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

1. Introduction

Synod Albany 2021 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia appointed as Deputies – Training for the Ministry:

Rev Reuben Bredenhof

Rev Wes Bredenhof

Br Bruce Huizinga

Br Wayne Pleiter

Rev Dirk Poppe

Br Alwyn Terpstra

As alternate, Br Rob Eikelboom was appointed.

The brothers who were appointed each accepted their appointment. However, early in the term, Rev Reuben Bredenhof, Rev Wes Bredenhof and Br Wayne Pleiter requested to be relieved of their deputyship. Br Rob Eikelboom was engaged as the alternate deputy, as appointed by Synod Albany 2021 and the deputies recruited Br Warnar Spyker and Br Pete Witten to fill the remaining vacancies.

The deputies met regularly to discuss and work through the different aspects of the mandate extended by Synod Albany 2021.

What follows is the report of deputies outlining activity undertaken in relation to the various elements of the mandate, considerations around the matter as well as recommendations for consideration by Synod Darling Downs 2024.

2. Mandate

Deputies were guided in their activity by the mandate derived from Synod Albany 2021 Acts, Article 101, as outlined below.

2.1 Part 1: Australian Reformed Theological Training

To mandate deputies to:

- a. continue discussion with CRTS to explore the feasibility of a CRTS Australian affiliate and assuming a positive outcome, to develop a plan and report to the next synod with recommendations towards implementation. Discussions will need to include (but are not limited to) working towards agreements regarding:

- a responsible timeline;
- Governance;
- financing and infrastructure; and

- ATS Accreditation requirements;
- b. engage a consultant to advise on the development of a CRTS Australian affiliate within the TEQSA regulatory framework;
- 5 c. introduce an additional levy to the regular assessments towards the implementation of a CRTS Australian affiliate in the medium term:
 - \$3.00 pcm for 2022, \$6.00 pcm for 2023, \$9.00 pcm for 2024;
- d. present a report to the churches, if possible 12 months before the next synod to enable adequate time for a written evaluation from the churches to be collated by the deputies and presented to synod;
- 10 e. communicate with our sister churches, and other churches in Australia and the Asia Pacific region with whom local FRCs have contact, regarding the potential benefits of a CRTS Australian affiliate;
- f. solicit the churches' input regarding an Australian theological seminary that could serve the wider Reformed community (eg office bearer training);
- 15 g. continue to monitor the factors that have been identified by the churches as reasons for not establishing our own theological seminary at this time, as outlined in Acts of Synod Bunbury Art 80 Ground 1; and
- h. continue to oversee the Library and Library Fund.

2.2 Part 2: Contact with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

20 To mandate deputies to:

- a. continue to assess and collect monies from the churches at a rate of \$90 per communicant member;
- b. continue to oversee the Hamilton Theological fund;
- 25 c. continue to arrange a guest lecturer from CRTS every three years, subject to finances;
- d. continue to arrange a deputy to attend the CRTS convocation and Board of Governors meeting in the next inter-synodical period, subject to finances;
- e. continue to arrange the financial matters associated with hosting a conference every inter-synodical period;
- 30 f. approve the proposed refund regarding loss of income of \$1,180 to the deputies;
- g. approve the proposed budget for the 2021-2024 period, namely \$14,000 consisting of:
 - i. \$7,500 for a guest lecturer from the CRTS;
 - 35 ii. ii. \$4,000 for a deputy to represent FRCA and attend the CRTS convocation and Board of Governor's meeting in the next inter-synodical period; and

iii. \$2,500 for the promotion of the ministry of the gospel amongst young men through means of a conference held during the next inter-synodical period;

5 h. maintain contact with CRTS and to express appreciation for the work undertaken by the CRTS across all fronts;

i. continue to be as closely involved as is practically possible in the work of the Board of Governors of CRTS;

j. convey congratulatory messages and words of support and encouragement on special occasions such as the annual convocation;

10 k. monitor the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program (PTP) of CRTS within the Australian churches by seeking feedback from the ministers and students participating in this program;

15 l. collect and disburse funds for the PTP in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the PTP; and reimburse students taking the PTP in Australia, at an increased level to match Canadian churches' level of support;

m. continue participation in the CRTS ad hoc Distance Education Committee; and

n. promote the CRTS within the FRCA.

2.3 Part 3: Contact with other Churches

20 To mandate deputies to:

a. wherever reasonably possible and meaningful, establish and maintain contact with sister churches in relation to theological training.

2.4 Part 4: Needy Student Fund

To mandate the deputies to

25 a. continue to levy the churches and oversee the Needy Student Fund for the support of theological students; and

b. approve the following regulations and forms relating to the financial aid for theological students.

2.5 Part 5: Promoting Ministerial Study and Supporting Prospective and Current Students

30 To mandate deputies to:

a. Promote the study for ministry among young men in whatever way possible; and

35 b. meet periodically with prospective and current theological students to provide encouragement and support and to have good oversight over their education.

2.6 Part 6: FRCA Vicariate Model

To mandate deputies to:

- a. develop guidelines for a voluntary vicariate program (including financial arrangements) to be presented to Synod 2024 for implementation beginning 2025.

2.7 Number of Deputies

Synod appoints one additional deputy to the Deputies Training for Ministry.

3. Reports

3.1 Part 1: Australian Reformed Theological Seminary

- a. *Continue discussion with CRTS to explore the feasibility of a CRTS Australian affiliate.*

Discussions with CRTS on the feasibility of a CRTS Australian affiliate have continued. Whereas this topic was only briefly raised at the CRTS Board of Governors meeting in September 2020, since then discussions have moved forward significantly.

Record of discussions with CRTS

27th August 2021 - Deputies sent letter to CRTS which outlined the Synod Albany 2021 mandate for deputies and our request for ongoing dialogue.

4th September 2021 - CRTS Board of Governors appointed an Ad Hoc Committee to respond to deputies request for ongoing dialogue.

13th January 2022 - CRTS Board of Governors meeting instructed the Ad Hoc Comm. to investigate the following aspects of an Australian Affiliated CRTS Campus: Governance, Faculty, Financing / Infrastructure, Timeline.

30th August 2022 - Ad Hoc Committee released an 'Interim Report'. This report provided the CRTS Board of Governors with a good review of the key issues. It also requested the deputies to provide a 'vision statement' regarding a CRTS Australian Affiliate Campus. The CRTS Board of Governors request that this Interim Report not be included in the DTM Report to Synod as it was based on unverified information. The CRTS Board of Governors hopes to finalise a statement on these matters following their January '24 Board meeting. Upon receiving this statement DTM will forward it to be considered alongside information in this report.

8th December 2022 - Deputies sent letter to Ad Hoc. Comm. with a 'vision statement' of a CRTS Australian affiliate campus. ([Appendix 1](#))

12th January 2023 - Board of Governors Meeting mandates Ad Hoc Comm. to prepare a report and recommends that a face-to-face meeting be held with FRCA deputies.

20th June 2023 - Ad Hoc Committee released a report entitled: 'Discussion Paper: Australian Affiliate Campus' completed. As this discussion paper is also based on unverified information, it is not included as part of this report.

5 6th September 2023 - Deputies attended a meeting with the CRTS Ad-Hoc Comm. with Australian FRCA Deputies. The discussion held was comprehensive and an agreed summary of the meeting was published. (Appendix 2)

10 7th Sept. 2023 - Deputies attended the meeting of CRTS Board of Governors. Deputies were able to provide clarity regarding several key issues. A subsequent CRTS press release of this meeting, stated the following:

15 *"The committee report on an Australian affiliate campus was put into discussion, along with a brief report of the committee's discussion with the Australian Deputies Training for the Ministry. The Australian deputies expressed their deep appreciation for the work at CRTS and the good cooperation between our churches. They explained the reasons for their desire to have an affiliate campus in the Australian churches. The board had a good discussion with the deputies on the this and the deputies will write a letter to the Board for further consideration at the January 2024 meeting.*

20 5th Dec 2023 - Deputies sent letter to Board of Governors of the CRTS. (Appendix 3)

Key Issues Summary

Governance

25 The issue of 'governance' is perhaps the most significant challenge to any immediate progress towards establishing a CRTS Australian Affiliate Campus. The CRTS has explained to us that according to their degree granting body, the College Act of 1981, their bylaws and the ATS 2020 standards by which they are governed, it is only possible for them to operate with one board of governors. They explained to us:

30 *"With this in mind, and thinking about a potential Australian affiliate, the Board sees two governance models that would be possible, each of which maintains one Board ultimately governing two campuses:*

35 *An advisory committee of FRCA brothers could be formed in Australia focusing on the work of the affiliate but with the CRTS Board retaining final authority over both the Canadian and Australian campuses, including the responsibility of appointing professors for both campuses.*

40 *If we successfully went the route of modifying our by-laws through a private members' bill in the Ontario legislature, FRCA brothers with Australian citizenship could serve on the current CRTS Board. At the same time, if we would gain provincial permission to include non-Canadians on our Board, we would also need to decide whether other church federations that support CRTS would have a certain representation on the Board as well and what qualifications and stipulations might lead to such an appointment. Any change in representation on the Board would also require approval of a CanRC*

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general synod. Also, in our predominantly secular society it is hard to predict how a private members' bill concerning a Christian institution, such as CRTS, would be received."

This leads to two questions:

- 5
1. Would the FRCA accept an 'Advisory Committee' form of governance? Under this form of governance, FRCA brothers would advise the Board of Governors about the work at the affiliate, but the CRTS Board would retain final authority over all decisions.
 2. Do we wish to ask the CRTS Board to seek an amendment to the private members bill with the Ontario Government under which they have degree granting authority? This would be a significant request which the CRTS may view with some hesitancy since it is possible that the current Ontario government may place new and unwanted demands on the CRTS's legal accreditation requirements.
- 10

15

At this stage in the discussions, the CRTS Board of Governors has not given any indication on whether they would be willing to approach the Ontario government with a private member's bill. And, to progress this, the Board of Governors may first require a specific request to do so, from the FRCA deputies. We responded that an instruction from Synod Darling Downs 2024 would be required to fully answer this question. Therefore, we are asking for your direction on this matter.

20

We would recommend to synod that we advise the Board of CRTS that if they and the synod of the CanRC anticipate that they are able to support our desire to have an Australian affiliate seminary with regards to other matters (e.g. accreditation, faculty, financing and timelines) and if they are confident that it won't harm their cause, that they approach the Ontario government for an amendment to the private members' bill.

25

Recommendation

To request the CRTS Board of Governors to approach the Ontario government for an amendment to the private members' bill, should all other factors align and be favourable.

30

Faculty

The second most significant hurdle in moving forward with a CRTS Australian Affiliate Campus is the availability of 'qualified' professors. To remain compliant with the requirements of an 'accredited seminary', i.e. a seminary permitted to grant a recognised M.Div. degree, CRTS instructors will need a doctorate degree. There is a real concern about the low number of potential professors available. Furthermore, the current workload of CRTS faculty leaves little room for any extra work. Plainly put, the lack of available professors will impact the prospects of moving forward with a CRTS Australian Affiliate Campus. The CRTS Board of Governors have urged the deputies to raise the need for ministers to pursue doctoral studies, within the FRCA.

35

40

Financing and Infrastructure

At this stage in the discussions with the CRTS, budgetary or financing/infrastructure details have not been considered. FRCA will continue to support the CRTS prayerfully and financially and (as set out below) we propose to continue to do so at a level that matches the contribution paid by our Canadian sister churches. The introduction of an additional levy to the regular assessments for the CRTS has not featured in our discussions with the CRTS.

Timeline

Discussions regarding a timeline have reflected a realisation that acknowledges that it will take much more time to progress the CRTS Australian Affiliate Campus discussions. The CRTS Board of Governors meetings are held bi-annually, their synod meets triennially and many members within the Canadian Reformed Churches are unaware of matters regarding our desire to establish our own affiliate seminary. Hence, it seems unhelpful to construct a concrete timeline, without for example, a resolution to the governance question. Nevertheless, the deputies have indicated that 'building' an Australian Reformed Theological Seminary remains a goal to be realised over time.

- b. *Engage a consultant to advise on the development of a CRTS Australian affiliate within the TEQSA regulatory framework.*

On the 3rd of March 2023, deputies met with Dr. Derek Swarts. Previously, Dr. Swarts had advised the deputies on this matter as outlined in the Synod Albany 2021 DTM report. His advice served to identify the key issues surrounding a CRTS Australian affiliate.

Dr. Swarts indicated that he had not been involved with TEQSA for 5 years and could no longer act as the consultant. He shared the contact details of several consultants who could possibly assist. Deputies followed up on Dr. Swarts suggestions and contacted a few possible consultants.

However, through this process, it became clear that prior to engaging a consultant, the questions regarding 'governance' will first need to be answered. In other words, without an agreed pathway between CRTS and FRCA on governance, it will be very difficult to engage and direct a consultant's inquiries. Yet should the CRTS Board of Governors agree to pursue a governance model change, through a private members bill with the Ontario government, then the expert support of a consultant will become valuable for both the CRTS and FRCA.

Recommendation

That new deputies engage a consultant to advise on the development of a CRTS Australian affiliate within the TEQSA regulatory framework, at such time as matters surrounding governance have been clarified.

- c. *Introduce an additional levy to the regular assessments towards the implementation of a CRTS Australian affiliate in the medium term.*

Deputies continue to collect monies for the purposes of the establishment of an ARTS/CRTS Australian affiliate in the future. This levy was introduced and adopted by Synod Albany 2021 at a rate of \$3 pcm for 2022, increasing at a

rate of \$3 per year thereafter until Synod 2024. Currently the deputies have collected \$25,922 for this purpose, with an expected income of a similar amount for 2024 (current levy set at \$9 pcm). See Appendix 6.3.

Deputies do not anticipate significant expenses within the next inter-Synodical period, although recognise that the costs of engaging a consultant may be significant if plans towards the establishment of an ARTS/CRTS Australian affiliate do progress. Deputies consider that a levy of \$6 pcm per year will suffice.

Recommendation

To maintain a separate levy towards the implementation of a CRTS Australian affiliate at a rate of \$6.00 pcm/year.

d. *Present a report to the churches.*

In a report entitled, "Towards an Australian Reformed Theological Seminary" (Appendix 4) the deputies shared not only the feedback that was received in response to a survey, that was previously sent to all the consistories, but also highlighted the key issues facing the founding of an Australian Reformed Theological Seminary. This report was sent to all the FRCA consistories and also published in the *Una Sancta* (Vol.70, No 8, p.231).

In addition to the above-mentioned report, the Rev. D. Poppe authored an article entitled, "Thinking of Ministry?" (*Una Sancta*, Vol. 70, No 6, pg. 166) in which he described how the CRTS is instrumental in preparing for the ministry.

e. *Communicate with our sister churches, and other churches in Australia and the Asia Pacific region with whom local FRC's have contact, regarding the potential benefits of a CRTS Australian affiliate.*

Although deputies have had informal discussions with others, no official dialogue has taken place. Deputies were taken up with considerations around the setting up and did not want to get ahead of themselves. However, through the FRCA inter-church-sister relations with the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, in assisting this church with the examination of a candidate minister, the potential benefits of a CRTS Australian affiliate were discussed. This is one aspect of Synod Albany 2021's mandate which requires further attention, once there is more clarity on whether and how an Australian Affiliate will function.

Recommendation

To communicate with sister churches, and other churches in Australia and the Asia Pacific region with whom local FRC's have contact, regarding the potential benefits of a CRTS Australian affiliate.

f. *Solicit the churches' input regarding an Australian theological seminary that could serve the wider Reformed community (e.g. office bearer training).*

As noted in the report from deputies to the churches, referenced in d. above, most of the churches believe that an Australian Theological Seminary could serve to benefit the wider community. Nevertheless, the churches also believe

that this benefit is secondary to the main goal of training young men for the ministry.

- g. *Continue to monitor the factors that have been identified by the churches as reasons for not establishing our own theological seminary at this time.*

5 Deputies have continued to review and consider comments and feedback received from the churches regarding this matter. Although no specific factor has been raised with the deputies, the challenges associated with the 'immigration process', for students travelling to Canada has been raised. Although travel restrictions caused by COVID 19 have been removed, the sense of isolation, as prompted during COVID 19, is at times mentioned, with regards to why we need our own theological seminary. The churches' feedback has been summarised within Appendix 5.

- h. *Continue to oversee the Library and Library Fund.*

The deputies have continued to manage the Library and the Library Fund.

15 The collected library continues to be stored at the FRC Darling Downs, after a careful cleaning and sorting process completed by Dr. R Bredenhof.

20 The Library Fund continues to be re-invested in a term deposit, only growing due to interest earned. The Library Fund has increased to \$132,471, earning \$2,263 of interest in the period between synods. This is quite a low rate of return, even with the low current interest rates, at approximately 0.57% p.a. for the three years.

25 Following a discussion as deputies, it was decided to split the fund into four term deposits, each with approximately \$33,117, invested with an expected rate of return of about 4.0% p.a. The four term deposits are invested for 1, 2, 3, and 4 years each, each to be re-invested for 4 years, on a rotating cycle. This strategy maximizes earned interest, but also allows access to at least one term deposit within a 12-month period, should it be needed.

For further information on this fund, see Appendix 6.4. See Appendix 7 for the audit of this fund.

30 **Recommendation**

To task new deputies to continue to oversee the Library and Library Fund.

3.2 Part 2: Contact with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

- a. *Continue to assess and collect monies from the churches at a rate of \$90/cm.*

35 The deputies continued to assess and collect monies from the churches at a rate of \$90/cm, during the years 2021 – 2023. As set out below, Deputies recommend that this rate be reviewed by Synod 2024, to achieve parity with the rate paid by the churches of the CanRC.

40 During the period 2020 – 2023, the number of communicant members in the FRCA has risen from 3016 to 3181 (5.5% increase). During this same period the rate of the levy has remained unchanged, at \$90/cm.

During this period deputies have collected a total \$838,938 from the churches, while a total of \$841,825 was transferred to the CRTS over this period. The monies transferred to the CRTS were always received and acknowledged with much thankfulness and gratitude.

5 At the time of this report, \$17,513 was still owing from the churches for the 2023 assessments, whilst \$15,112 still needs to be transferred to the CRTS for 2023 (awaiting income).

10 Deputies have previously been mandated to propose a level of contribution that matches (as closely as possible) the amount of contribution paid by our Canadian sisters (cf. Synod Baldivis 2015, Art 93, VIII 12.1(b); Synod Albany 2021, Art 101, V, Ground 1).

Our Canadian sisters presently contribute an amount of CA\$100 pcm / year. On the current exchange rates, this equates to around AU\$110.

Recommendation

15 Request the churches to contribute AU\$110 pcm / year for the maintenance of the CRTS as from 1 January 2025.

b. *Continue to oversee the Hamilton Theological fund.*

During the period 2020 – 2023, the deputies managed this fund, as this account is the main account through which churches pay the assessments for the CRTS.

20 At the beginning of this inter-synodical period, the CRTS began a fundraising campaign to fund the refurbishments needed to the existing infrastructure at the CRTS. The invitation to contribute to this fundraising campaign was made to the FRCA and the churches contributed generously. The deputies collected a total of \$217,773 from the churches of the FRCA and passed this amount on to the CRTS.

25 It can also be seen that the deputies reimbursed some \$8,468 for the costs of flights for Dr. Arjan De Visser and his wife Inge De Visser. Unfortunately, they were not able to travel due to health issues and the cost of the flights could not be refunded to Dr. de Visser by the airline. These costs, however, have been refunded by synod treasury to the deputies.

30 Under refunds and donations, it should be noted that the \$7,110 of income and \$7,110 of expenditure is for refunding a church for accidental double payment of a CRTS assessment during 2023.

35 For further information on this fund, see [Appendix 6.1](#). See [Appendix 7](#) for the audit of this fund.

Recommendation

To task the new deputies to continue to oversee the Hamilton Theological Fund.

c. *Continue to arrange a guest lecturer from CRTS every three years.*

40 With sincere regret deputies report that Dr. Prof Arjan and Sr. Inge De Visser were unable, due to health reasons, to travel to Australia. Dr. De Visser was

scheduled to visit the churches and would have addressed the congregations with his farewell address, which is entitled, "Enlarge the place of your tent". Plans to speak at the Timothy Conference were also cancelled. Although deputies did attempt to find a replacement for Dr. De Visser, with the start of another academic year about to begin, no one was able to take Dr. De Visser's place. The Lord willing, another CRTS guest lecturer will be able to visit the FRCA in the near future.

Recommendation

To continue to arrange a guest lecturer from CRTS every three years.

- d. *Continue to arrange a deputy to attend the CRTS convocation and Board of Governors meeting in the next inter-synodical period.*

Deputies Rev D Poppe and Dr P Witten were able to visit the CRTS facility, attend the CRTS Convocation and meetings with the Ad Hoc Committee and the CRTS Board of Governors (see Deputies Report on Visit to CRTS Appendix 2). Deputies arranged for a two-member delegation, at the request of the CRTS Board of Governors with a view to the complexity and detail of discussions around establishing an Australian Affiliate of CRTS. The additional costs were funded by the ARTS levy.

Recommendation

Continue to arrange a deputy to attend the CRTS convocation and Board of Governors meeting in the next inter-synodical period.

- e. *Continue to arrange the financial matters associated with hosting a conference every inter-synodical period.*

Due to the cancelled visit by Dr. Prof. de Visser, deputies were unable to host a conference during this inter-synodical period.

Despite this, the deputies were still able to meet with quite a few young men on Friday 10 November 2023, as an alternative to the conference. This meeting was very well attended by many young men. Information regarding the seminary, language requirements, student life and financial aspects were covered.

Recommendation

To continue to arrange the financial matters associated with hosting a conference every inter-synodical period.

- f. *Approve the proposed refund regarding loss of income of \$1,180.00 to the deputies.*

This was done.

- g. *Approve the proposed budget.*

Deputies consider that the budget be maintained at the same level as previously.

Recommendation

To approve the proposed budget for the 2024-2027 period, namely \$14,000, consisting of:

- \$7,500 for a guest lecturer from the CRTS;
- \$4,000 for a deputy to represent FRCA and attend the CRTS convocation and Board of Governor's meeting in the next three-year term; and
- \$2,500 for the promotion of the ministry of the gospel amongst young men through means of a conference held during the next synod period.

- h. *Maintain contact with CRTS and to express appreciation for the work undertaken by the CRTS across all fronts.*

On several occasions during this inter-synodical period, deputies were able to express heartfelt appreciation and gratitude for the work accomplished by the CRTS, not least during the visit to the CRTS and at the CRTS Convocation. (See [Appendix 8](#) for Convocation Address by Rev. D. Poppe)

Recommendation

Maintain contact with CRTS and to express appreciation for the work undertaken by the CRTS across all fronts.

- i. *Continue to be closely involved as is practically possible in the work of the CRTS Board of Governors.*

There is a good and strong working relationship between the CRTS Board of Governors and FRCA deputies. The communication between us is brotherly, respectful, and appreciated. On occasions when no deputies can be present at the meeting of the Board of Governors, the chairman and the principal meet with two deputies afterward for a full discussion of the matters on the agenda to ensure that we are fully in the picture as to the discussions of the Board and the operations of the seminary. Deputies were granted full access to the Board of Governors meeting in September '23 and absent from the meeting only during a personal private agenda matter.

Recommendation

Continue to be closely involved as is practically possible in the work of the CRTS Board of Governors.

- j. *Convey congratulatory messages and words of support and encouragement on special occasions.*

Rev D Poppe and Dr P Witten were able to attend the CRTS Convocation and shared much support and encouragement with the CRTS faculty and community. Dr Witten also attended the funeral of Dr Nicolaas Gootjes, expressing on behalf of the FRCA our sincere condolences and prayers for Sr Dini Gootjes and her family.

Recommendation

Maintain contact with CRTS and to express appreciation for the work undertaken by the CRTS across all fronts.

- 5 k. *Monitor the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program (PTP) of CRTS within the Australian churches by seeking feedback from the ministers and students participating in this program.*

10 The church of Baldivis hosted br. Marc Vermeulen a student from CRTS for a ten-week internship with Rev. A. Witten as his mentor. The experience was very beneficial for br. Vermeulen and also a blessing for Rev. Witten and the church of Baldivis.

- l. *Collect and disburse funds for the PTP in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the PTP and reimburse students taking the PTP in Australia.*

15 As per Appendix 6.2, during 2023, the deputies disbursed funds for the ten-week internship of br. Marc Vermeulen at the FRC Baldivis. The cost of this internship was \$14,171, which included the cost of the flights as well as a weekly wage payment. The costs were paid from the Needy Students Fund.

Deputies recommend some changes to the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the PTP (see Appendix 9).

Recommendation

20 To adopt the recommended changes to the Australian Guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program.

To continue to collect and disburse funds for the PTP.

- m. *Continue participation in the CRTS Ad Hoc Distance Education Committee.*

25 The CRTS Ad Hoc Distance Education Committee completed its work and was disbanded shortly after Synod 2021 since the necessary work was completed when the seminary did online classes during COVID. This mandate is not required to be repeated.

- n. *Promote the CRTS within the FRCA.*

30 This mandate has been discharged in the various ways referred to throughout this report.

Recommendation

To mandate new deputies to promote the CRTS within the FRCA.

3.3 Contact with other Churches

- a. *Synod instructs deputies to, wherever reasonably possible and meaningful, establish and maintain contact with sister churches in relation to theological training.*

5 Although deputies have had some discussion with sister churches in relation to theological training, there has been no official exchange of information between the deputies and other churches. Deputies found this part of the mandate difficult to undertake, given that sister churches mostly do not have specific contacts for Training for Ministry. Given that the aspect of theological training is generally discussed with Deputies for Inter-church Relations, deputies did not consider that this mandate needs to be repeated.

3.4 Needy Student Fund

- a. *To continue to levy the churches and oversee the Needy Student Fund for the support of theological students.*

15 The deputies managed the financial support for theological students via the Needy Student Fund. For detailed information on this fund see the treasurer's report of this fund in [Appendix 6.2](#).

20 During the period 2020 – 2023, the deputies collected \$41,985 in regular assessments from the churches. The deputies also continued to receive funds from the FRC Rockingham for support of their student, br Anson van Delden. The deputies received \$100,000 from FRC Rockingham for this support. During this period the deputies provided financial assistance totalling \$104,368, provided between 2020 and 2022.

25 At the end of 2022, it was decided that, given there were no needy students for 2023 and that the balance of the fund was quite healthy, the deputies would not assess the churches for the Needy Student Fund for 2023. They would need to revisit this at the beginning of 2024.

Recommendation

30 To mandate new deputies to continue to levy the churches and oversee the Needy Student Fund for the support of theological students.

- b. *To approve regulations and forms related to the financial aid for theological students.*

These regulations are in place and functioning and this mandate does not need to be repeated.

3.5 Promoting ministerial study and supporting prospective and current students

- a. *To promote the study for ministry among young men in whatever way possible.*

40 On 26 August 2021, 3 November 2022 and 10 November 2023, the Deputies of Training for the Ministry hosted an information evening in Armadale for any young men interested in learning about what is involved in the ministry of the gospel. During these meetings we informed them about how to prepare for the ministry, what life at the seminary is like and what life as a minister is really like.

We also used the opportunity to explain how financial support for students works. These evenings were attended by many young men in the Perth metro area who had expressed an interest in the ministry of the gospel. In addition, as deputies we had numerous private meetings with young men who needed information and assistance in pursuing the ministry of the gospel. The deputies have also participated in the JCCC career expo assisting any young men who expressed interest in the ministry of the gospel.

Recommendation

To mandate new deputies to promote the study for ministry among young men in whatever way possible.

- b. *Meeting periodically with prospective and current theological students to provide encouragement and support and to have good oversight over their education.*

The deputies have had some informal contact with various seminary students to encourage them in their education.

Students receiving ongoing financial support were contacted regularly to ascertain how they were going financially and if their circumstances had changed, but also to encourage them in their education.

Annual meetings with deputies and prospective students occurred at least once per year, between 2020 and 2023, to provide both information as well as encouragement for prospective students.

Recommendation

To mandate the deputies to continue to meet periodically with prospective and current theological students to provide encouragement and support and to have good oversight of their education.

3.6 FRCA Vicariate Model

- a. *To develop guidelines for a voluntary vicariate program (including financial arrangements) to be presented to Synod 2024 for implementation beginning in 2025.*

The deputies have developed guidelines for a voluntary vicariate program as requested. Please find them attached in Appendix 10.

Recommendation

To adopt the suggested Vicariate Guidelines for implementation beginning in 2025.

3.7 Number of Deputies

Synod 2021 appointed one additional deputy to the Deputies TFM.

During the inter-synodical period br W Pleiter, Dr W Bredenhof and Dr R Bredenhof left the deputyship, leaving three deputies (Rev D Poppe, br B Huizinga and br A Terpstra).

As a result, br Rob Eikelboom (alternate) was appointed to the deputyship. Since there were no other alternates provided by Synod 2021, the deputies requisitioned brothers P Witten and W Spyker to the deputyship, requesting that synod officially appoint them at Synod 2024.

5 In performing their work, Deputies have sought to divide the various tasks between themselves. It is fair to say, however, that a weighty item which featured on each agenda of Deputy meetings was the establishment of the ARTS/CRTS affiliate. This is a matter that, moving forward, will continue to require significant focus, energy and expertise. To this end, Deputies suggest that this mandate be given to a stand-alone deputyship. If that were done, then:

1. Such stand-alone deputyship can direct all their energy and focus to this issue;
2. Deputies TFM can better focus on their mandate, and be of reduced size (say 4 members).

Recommendations

15 To appoint new deputies such that:

1. Deputies Training for the Ministry have four (4) members and one (1) alternate, with an appropriate number remaining for continuity.
2. Deputies for an ARTS have three (3) members and one (1) alternate, with an appropriate number remaining for continuity.

4. Recommendations

4.1 Australian Reformed Theological Seminary

Synod decide to mandate new deputies:

- 25 4.1.1 To request the CRTS Board of Governors to approach the Ontario government for an amendment to the private members' bill, should all other factors align and be favourable.
- 4.1.2 To engage a consultant to advise on the development of a CRTS Australian affiliate within the TEQSA regulatory framework, at such time as matters surrounding governance have been clarified.
- 30 4.1.3 To maintain a separate levy towards the implementation of a CRTS Australian affiliate at a rate of \$6.00 pcm / year.
- 4.1.4 To communicate with sister churches, and other churches in Australia and the Asia Pacific region with whom local FRC's have contact, regarding the potential benefits of a CRTS Australian affiliate.
- 35 4.1.5 To task new deputies to continue to continue to oversee the Library and Library Fund.

Grounds

The CRTS Board of Governors require a specific request prior to conducting additional research into the discussion of an CRTS Australian affiliate campus.

A resolution of the governance questions will provide clarity on the compliance requirements needing to be met for the TEQSA regulations.

The complexity of the TEQSA registration requirements will require such expert advice as is possible through the employment of a TEQSA consultant.

5 Deputies were only able to give the matter of communication with other churches limited attention.

The rationale for a library and a library fund remain unaltered.

4.2 Contact with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Synod decide to mandate new deputies:

10 4.2.1 Request the churches to contribute AU\$110 pcm / year for the maintenance of the CRTS as from 1 January 2025.

4.2.2 To continue to oversee the Hamilton Theological Fund.

4.2.3 To continue to arrange a guest lecturer from CRTS every three years.

15 4.2.4 Continue to arrange a deputy to attend the CRTS convocation and Board of Governors meeting in the next inter-synodical period.

4.2.5 To continue to arrange the financial matters associated with hosting a conference every inter-synodical period.

4.2.6 To approve the proposed budget for the 2024-2027 period, namely \$14,000, consisting of:

20

- \$7,500 for a guest lecturer from the CRTS;
- \$4,000 for a deputy to represent FRCA and attend the CRTS convocation and Board of Governor's meeting in the next three-year term; and

25

- \$2,500 for the promotion of the ministry of the gospel amongst young men through means of a conference held during the next synod period.

4.2.7 Maintain contact with CRTS and to express appreciation for the work undertaken by the CRTS across all fronts.

4.2.8 Continue to be closely involved as is practically possible in the work of the CRTS Board of Governors.

30 4.2.9 Convey congratulatory messages and words of support and encouragement on special occasions.

4.2.10 To adopt the recommended changes to the Australian Guidelines for the Pastoral Training Program.

4.2.11 To continue to collect and disburse funds for the PTP.

35 4.2.12 To mandate new deputies to promote the CRTS within the FRCA.

Grounds

The new amount of \$110 pcm / year maintains parity with the Canadian contribution.

All other items (4.2.2 – 4.2.12) are part of the DTM continuing functions.

4.3 Contact with other Churches

5 No recommendations from this section.

4.4 Needy Student Fund

Synod decide to mandate new deputies:

4.4.1 to continue to levy the churches and oversee the Needy Student Fund for the support of theological students.

10 Grounds

The Needy Student Fund is a significant way of supporting students while studying for the ministry.

4.5 Promoting ministerial study and supporting prospective and current students

15 4.5.1 To mandate new deputies to promote the study for ministry among young men in whatever way possible.

4.5.2 To mandate the deputies to continue to meet periodically with prospective and current theological students to provide encouragement and support and to have good oversight of their education.

20 Grounds

20 There is a continuing need for ministers to serve in the churches.

Supporting young men in the course of their training and study is an important part of them completing the journey.

4.6 FRCA Vicariate Model

25 4.6.1 To adopt the suggested Vicariate Guidelines for implementation beginning in 2025.

Grounds

Previous Synods have expressed a desire for a voluntary Vicariate Program.

The guidelines provide a structure for such a program to be commenced in the FRCA.

4.7 Number of Deputies

30 4.7.1 To appoint new deputies such that:

1. Deputies Training for the Ministry have four (4) members and one (1) alternate, with an appropriate number remaining for continuity.

2. Deputies for an ARTS have three (3) members and one (1) alternate, with an appropriate number remaining for continuity.

Grounds

5 Having two deputyships allows for better focus in relation to the tasks to be undertaken.

The work around establishing an ARTS is considerable and requires specific understandings.

5.0 Conclusion

10 Deputies submit this report with thankfulness for the opportunity to serve the churches and some regret for only having made limited progress in relation to a significant part of the mandate. We express the wish that Synod will deal with the various elements with integrity and make decisions that will be workable for the churches going forward and to their benefit. Training for ministry is a significant aspect of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in gathering, defending and preserving for himself a church. May the blessings of the LORD rest upon
15 the work done and to be done.

Deputies:

Rob Eikelboom

Bruce Huizinga

Dirk Poppe

20 Warnar Spyker

Alwyn Terpstra

Pete Witten

Appendix 1

Free Reformed Churches of Australia Deputies - Training for the Ministry

5

8 December 2022

Dr. Jason Van Vliet
Principal - Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary
Email: jvanvliet@crtsc.ca

To the Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus.

15 Synod Albany 2021 mandated the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry develop a plan for a
seminary in Australia, possibly as an Australian affiliate of CRTS. They asked us to consider how
we would work out a responsible timeline, governance, financing and infrastructure, faculty and
ATS accreditation requirements. Although these plans are at a preliminary stage, we thought it
helpful to provide you with our vision of what a future seminary might look like. Thank you for your
20 willingness to join with us in investigating the possibility of establishing a seminary in Australia as
an affiliate of the CRTS.

Governance

We believe that it would be important for our churches to have oversight of the education of our
seminary students if being conducted in Australia. To that end, we anticipate that we would have
25 some members of our churches serve on the Board of Governors of the affiliate seminary of the
CRTS in Australia.

Accreditation

We envision pursuing accreditation as an affiliate of the CRTS. In order for the CRTS to secure
the ability to grant a degree, they would need approval from the ATS as well as from the governing
30 body in Australia, called the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

Faculty

In order to provide the training, we would seek to call two to three professors with doctoral
degrees. The rest of the teaching would be done by distance learning through the CRTS. Guest
lecturers or part time staff would be sought to enrich the teaching or to fill in any gaps in the
35 training.

Financing and Infrastructure

We envision financing the running costs of the seminary by assessing the churches the required
amount. We envision some of the start up costs could be collected in the coming years and any
additional start up costs collected via a fundraising drive. We envision buying or renting a building
40 where we could conduct the lectures, provide office space for the professors and administration
and also house a library.

Timeline

As churches we envision establishing a seminary in the medium to long term.

5 Brothers, we hope that this gives a helpful overview of our vision for a seminary. We are acutely aware that there are many factors out of our control that would have to fall into place for a seminary to come to fruition. For that reason we acknowledge that the only way that a seminary is possible is under the blessing of the LORD and we ask you to join us in praying to God that one day this may become a reality.

May God bless you in your work.

10 On behalf of the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry,



15 Rev. Dirk Poppe

Appendix 2

Deputies Report on visits and meetings with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Dr. Nicolaas Hendrik Gootjes Funeral

5 Unofficially, contact between the deputies and the CRTS began unexpectedly on Friday, 25th of August. That was the day of the funeral for Dr. Nicolaas Gootjes. The CRTS faculty and community had gathered together to comfort Sr. Dini Gootjes and the family. They were also there to remember the life and work of Dr. Gootjes’.

10 On behalf of the FRCA, it felt right and good to attend this funeral. Present also at this funeral were representatives of the Kosin Theological Seminary, where Dr. Gootjes had first served as professor of dogmatics, prior to his CRTS appointment in 1989. The service was led by Dr. C. Van Dam and Dr. J. Smith provided the organ accompaniment.

15 Sr. Gootjes recalled how Dr. Gootjes had planned to visit Australia, and how Lord had guided things differently. Sadly, his final years were greatly affected by the early-onset of Alzheimer’s disease. Sr. Gootjes expressed her gratitude for the prayerful comfort and support from Australia. Likewise, faculty members also acknowledged the encouragement they had received from Australia. At this funeral, it felt like the CRTS is much more than a theological training centre. Rather, as an expression of the communion of saints, it was a blessing to have shared this time with the CRTS.

Ad Hoc Committee Meeting with Australian Deputies

20 The Facilities

25 On Wednesday, 7th September, a meeting scheduled with the Ad Hoc Committee was to begin at 9am. However, prior to the meeting, we enjoyed a guided tour of the newly renovated CRTS facilities. The Principal, Professor Dr. Jason Van Vliet proudly displayed a new fully equipped kitchen and lunchroom area, two spacious and IT-smart classrooms, a proper boardroom and a new toilet facility, which included showers, something that the students had been requesting for quite a few years. When these renovations are added to the building’s already beautiful chapel, neatly decorated offices and well-stocked library, then the attention to detail and the commitment to a purposeful-functional building were obvious. It felt like a really good place to teach and learn!

The Meeting

30 What follows is a summary of the meeting, as recorded during the meeting and later forwarded to the CRTS Board of Governors for their meeting on the next day. Although this summary correctly captures the contents of the meeting’s discussions, it does not adequately describe the spirit of cooperation, deep respect and willing cooperation present during this meeting. The discussions were conducted in a harmonious manner, with a genuine desire to make progress and understand the issues at hand.

(As submitted to the CRTS Board of Governors)

September 6, 2023

Meeting of CRTS Ad-Hoc Committee with Australian FRCA Deputies

Present: D. Poppe, P. Witten, C. Vandervelde, K. Van Veen, J. Van Vliet

5 Jason Van Vliet welcomed all to the meeting and opened with the reading of Acts 1:1-11 and prayer; reflecting on God's providential work and His guidance to the churches across the globe.

The CRTS BoG meeting of January 12, 2023 established four (4) priorities to frame our discussions. In summary they were:

1. Clarity from the FRCA Deputies as to their end goal.
- 10 2. Clarity from the FRCA Deputies and CRTS Board on the questions of governance models and accreditation; both from church federation, ATS, TEQSA and legal perspectives.
3. Clarity from the FRCA Deputies as to the FRCA motivation for an affiliate seminary / independent theological education.
- 15 4. Clear written consensus of the direction and opportunity for a win-win situation that can serve the churches

The discussion aimed at this matter took place as follows:

1. General introduction comments:
 - 20 a. The Deputies expressed a deep appreciation for the opportunity for discussions. The FRCA has a deep love for the CanRC federation and profound appreciation for the work being done at the CRTS. This desire for local theological education is not by any means motivated upon rejection of CRTS or a non-appreciation for the CRTS/CanRC Federation. The deputies expressed concern that, as such, our ongoing communication needs to reflect such.
 - 25 b. On behalf of the CRTS, Jason VanVliet also voiced appreciation for the FRCA churches and the relationship between the two federations but also between the FRCA and the CRTS
2. Discussion points
 - a. The FRCA motivation for an Australian seminary:
 - 30 i. Desire to establish a seminary "by the churches for the churches" to fulfill the Church Order, if at all feasible; similar (although not identical) to the historic motivation of the CRTS in the 1960's. Reference, [CanRCSemReasonsRev.pdf](#) ([canadianreformedseminary.ca](#))
 - 35 ii. Immigration policies and visa approvals have changed and are making it more and more difficult to bring ministers into the country. The vacant churches realize that calling a Canadian citizen will be a hard road to travel; the situation is difficult when calling an ordained Canadian minister and even more difficult when calling a Canadian candidate. These difficulties have received extra clarity over the last few years and can have lasting effects on the effectiveness of the called minister's work within the congregation. The establishment of

“ARTS” may not be the resolution, but it addresses the emotional, visceral and perceived barriers.

5 Visa restrictions have also made matters more difficult over the past few years (lack of medicare, baby bonus/child support, insurance, student loans, etc), resulting in greater financial burden for the congregation to support the called minister.

- 10 iii. Larger student body: tying strongly to ii) above but from the other international direction, there is a significant barrier / disadvantage for mature students (with families) to cross to Canada for seminary education. Personal health insurance exclusions can make it difficult for a man to see his way clear to pursue the ministry.

Although there is the possibility for on-line studies when proper criteria is met.

- 15 iv. Border closing: Covid exemplified the apprehension of crossing borders and the possible consequences.

- v. Interaction with other churches – ARTS provides the potential for greater interaction with other federations, especially with regards to the education and mentoring of individuals and leaders in these churches. Eg. Singapore, New Zealand, PNG, Malaysia, Philippines, South Africa.

20 Theological education is a strong (the strongest) connection with other federations and the affiliation is a means to promote those relationships. (the history of CanRC & FRCA is evidence of such).

- 25 vi. Benefit for the churches – the availability of an “ARTS” will allow the FRCA to easily seek consult from professors regarding difficult pastoral and ecclesiastical matters and provides the natural development of expertise within the churches.

Clarifying point: the motivation is NOT a matter of a questions / concerns / perceptions with the instruction taking place at CRTS or concerns of what may be happening within the CanRC churches. The most recent survey (2023) as well as the previous (2018) showed no indication of motivation stemming from these types of concerns.

- 30 b. Affiliate or Independent – what lives in the FRCA?:

- i. This distinction does not live within the federation; there is openness to either approach. This mostly comes from the fact that there are not many people that understand what it takes to operate a seminary.

- 35 ii. From the deputies perspective, continued association with CRTS as an affiliate seminary would be to the greater benefit of Christ’s church and the general consensus of the FRCA members engaged on this matter. The preferred approach would be to establish ARTS with affiliation to CRTS, provided the BoG supports such matter. This may not exclude the possibility that over time this may move towards an independently run facility as a “seminary by the FRCA churches, for the FRCA churches”.
- 40

c. Governance:

i. The deputies have not had detailed conversations regarding this matter, however having governance of the affiliate is considered a matter of priority for FRCA, in so far as is possible.

5 1. As an affiliate seminary of CRTS, the legalities requires CRTS to govern the affiliate as well. To change this would require a private members bill before Ontario government to allow Australian citizens to sit on the current BoG, which will require significant effort and risks undesirable consequences.

10 2. Possibility of an Australian Committee of the CRTS could be a consideration where this committee has tangible influence on the direction of the affiliate seminary.

15 3. The definition of governor requirements could be considered; CRTS Handbook (pg. 14) indicates "*No person may be a Governor unless, (a) he is a Canadian citizen; and (b) he is a member in good standing of one of the churches. (Act 5.6).*" This could be considered further to investigate if an Australian resident who is a Canadian citizen could fill the requirements.

20 4. Under one governance model, competition between two seminaries could be minimized. Eg. appointment of professor.

d. Professor / Student Body / Timelines:

i. The underlying question remains, "How do we get ministers on our pulpits?" thus changing the perspective of what is necessary vs what can be done; changing the priority from "best practices" to "what can be done".

25 ii. Professors – The availability of professors is likely the most important consideration. There is an urgent need for our ministers (in Canada and Australia) to continue their studies to get to the PhD level that qualifies them for professor opportunities. A doctoral degree is also what ATS requires, as a rule (Standard 8.2).

30 iii. Student body – the ideal student body is very much facility and faculty related.

iv. Timelines – there has not been concrete timelines put against this matter from the FRCA deputies at this point.

e. Miscellaneous:

35 i. Workload – the administrative effort to establish a seminary in Australia is significant. The Deputies will approach FRCA Synod 2024 to appoint a contract position to assist in this matter. To that end, would the BoG consider proposing to General Synod 2025 to establish a contract position to facilitate an Australian affiliate? This would allow us to get to a clearer picture of what is necessary.

40 ii. Overall Perspective – is the CRTS willing to help the FRCA churches in moving this forward. Clarity was required from various perspectives; the key aspect is the number of professors to make this work. If this has scope, then we can move forward together and our independent responsibilities are complete.

Priorities to move forward:

1. Professors – there needs to be a concerted effort to encourage our ministers to further advance their qualifications in order to fill future professor roles for the training of ministers.
- 5 2. Conceptual Support – does the BoG support the concept of an Australian seminary?
3. Workload – if there is support, appointment / resources are required to formulate a governance model, accreditation and jointly address Gov't of Ontario, TEQSA and ATS requirements.
- 10 4. Communication / Awareness – the number of vacancies is the burning felt need in Australia and Canada. From this communication can be made to the federations that we are working together to jointly improved the training the ministers for the furtherance of Christ's church. To this end, congregations can remember this matter as they come before the Lord in prayer, knowing that it is His greatest joy that His Church is being equipped for the furtherance of His Word.

15 **CRTS Board of Governors Meeting: Thursday, 8th September 2023**

On Thursday, 8th Sept., the chairman of the CRTS Board of Governors, Rev. John Louwerse, welcomed all to the meeting. He made special mention of the Australian deputies' presence, and highlighted the long history of cooperation, benefits, and support between the CanRC and the FRCA. He then opened the meeting with reading Ps. 72:1-11 and prayer; reflecting on the Lord's kingship and sovereignty over this world!

The Board of Governor's meeting agenda was full and detailed. There were many topics and much work had gone into the agenda preparations. (This report is restricted to the matter of an Australian Theological seminary.) The chairman invited Rev. D. Poppe to address the meeting and encouraged the governors to raise questions or share comments.

25 Rev. Poppe began his presentation by highlighting Australia's sincere thankfulness and appreciation for the work of the CRTS, and underlined Australia's continued support for the CRTS. He then outlined, as he also did during the Ad Hoc Committee, the rationale and motivation to establish an Australian seminary. And, it was this topic that appeared to be most essential in the minds of the governors.

30 The governors raised a number of questions: The first question asked if Australia had completed any research into other Australian seminaries with similar circumstances. Next, there were several questions dealing with visa or immigration requirements and how these have influenced Australia's desire to have a theological seminary. There were also a number of questions regarding governance. The governors expressed concern about possible undesirable consequences, if the Ontario government were requested to change the CRTS governance model. Likewise, there was concern about available professors and the workload of the CRTS currently. Both are in short supply. And, especially these last two aspects of the discussion appeared to be most difficult to resolve.

40 Unofficially, in response to the meeting discussion, the chairman raised the following considerations; First, he asked if Australia would be satisfied if the CRTS were to form a new 'Australian Advisory Committee'. This committee would not have an actual governance position within the CRTS. Nevertheless, its voice would feature in the overall governance model of the CRTS. Second, he asked if Australia would be willing to provide financial support to progress this matter. For example, would Australia be willing to pay for research and consultancy. Lastly,

the chairman encouraged Synod Darling Downs 2024 to communicate directly with the CRTS (via deputies) regarding future cooperation in the training for the ministry.

This meeting, like the meeting with the Ad Hoc Committee, was conducted in a respectful and harmonious manner. The discussions were not rushed and each topic was carefully considered. Lastly, the prospect of continued discussions appears very good!

CRTS Convocation 2023

On Friday, 8th September, at 8pm, in the auditorium of the Redeemer University, the CRTS held the 2023 CRTS Convocation. There was a sense of excitement in the audience, this convocation would feature not only the conferral of the degree of Master of Divinity for six graduates, but also the installation of the new professor, Dr. Reuben Bredenhof and a main and 'farewell' address by Dr. Arjan de Visser. However, before the evening commenced, Rev. John Louwerse invited Rev. D. Poppe to share an Australian greeting. This special invitation created a wonderful opportunity to share publicly Australia's support for the CRTS and also why FRCA has continued to discuss the topic of establishing its own theological seminary.

Following the conclusion of the convocation, everyone came together in the university's gymnasium. Everyone congratulated the graduates and Dr. R. Bredenhof. And, it again felt like the 'CRTS family' had come together. No one was in a hurry to leave and one could just sense that the CRTS is much more than an institution for the training of the ministry. What was also particularly interesting to observe and notice, was the presence of the new and current CRTS students, their interest and involvement. It's this sense of CRTS community which is very hard to describe and yet very real.

2023 CRTS Conference "Christ Lives in Us: Witness and Worship"

On Saturday, 9th Sept., at 8:30am, in the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church, in Burlington, the CRTS community once again came together. All current and former CRTS faculty members were present, as well as all the CRTS students, and about 150 CanRC members. The conference featured three keynote speeches and an opportunity to discuss various topics. (Details about this conference are available via the CRTS website.)

This conference displayed the strong leadership and depth of knowledge present at the CRTS. The participants were truly enriched in their understanding of God's word. And again, especially during the breaks and at lunch, one could sense that the CRTS is more than just a place where students are trained to be ministers.

We thank the Lord that we could 'experience' the CRTS! We pray that He will continue to bless the CRTS. And, may the FRCA continue to 'experience' the blessings of the CRTS!

In His service,

Rev. D. Poppe

Br. P. Witten

Appendix 3

Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia

5 5 December 2023

Dear Board of Governors of the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary,

Greetings in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Introduction

10 As deputies we are thankful to God for the good cooperation we have with you over many years
in the education of seminary students. We praise God for the faithful, Reformed teaching offered
in a context of academic excellence at CRTS. God has been good to you and to us in the
education that is offered at CRTS. In the Free Reformed Churches of Australia at this time, all
15 our serving ministers, with one exception, graduated from the CRTS. We are deeply thankful to
God for the faithful preaching and teaching and the spirit of unity that exists among us.

We'd like to thank you also for your willingness to explore the possibility of cooperating with the
FRCA in offering seminary training in Australia. We are grateful that you do so and we trust God
to guide the outcome. It is our prayer that one day we can offer faithful, Reformed seminary
training in Australia to our students and other interested seminary students in the Southern
20 hemisphere.

Thank you also for the meeting that br. P. Witten and Rev. D. Poppe could have with the ad-hoc
committee and with the Board of Governors on 6-7 September 2023. We are grateful for the
discussion paper put forward by the ad-hoc committee and the ensuing fruitful discussion. We
were blessed by those conversations and we hope that they were also helpful for you.

25 The purpose of this letter is to lay out our vision for a seminary in Australia, summarise the
challenges we face, and ask for clarity from you if you are able and willing to assist us in
establishing an affiliate of the CRTS in Australia.

Motives

30 Before explaining our requests, we would first like to clearly explain to you our motives for
pursuing seminary training in Australia. We believe it would be good to have a seminary in
Australia for the following reasons.

- As churches we have agreed in accordance with 2 Timothy 2:2 and our Church Order that
the churches take responsibility for the theological training of their future ministers. Up to
35 this point we are extremely thankful to God for the good cooperation with CRTS in educating
our future ministers. Yet, if it is feasible, we believe that it is beneficial for a federation of
churches to establish a seminary "by the churches for the churches." Our motivation is
similar to that of the CRTS in the 1960's which can be found at [CanRCSemReasonsRev.pdf](https://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca/CanRCSemReasonsRev.pdf)
([canadianreformedseminary.ca](https://www.canadianreformedseminary.ca))
- An Australian seminary may make theological training more accessible to some in our
40 churches, especially for those students who are married.

- Having a seminary in Australia may attract other students from Reformed churches in the Asia Pacific region (eg. Singapore, New Zealand, Philippines, China, Korea). Having these students join our churches and possibly even serve here for a time would be a blessing for our federation.
- 5 • Moving overseas between Australia and Canada is challenging at times because of difficulties with immigration, medical travel insurance and accessing government support services.
- 10 • Having a seminary in Australia would require professors who have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures and a board of governors who are knowledgeable about and invested in seminary training. This would require significant expertise which would benefit not only the seminary, but also many aspects of church life in our federation.
- A faithful, Reformed seminary in Australia may be a wonderful complement to CRTS which could lead to mutual support and encouragement.

15 We also wish you to understand that our desire to pursue a seminary does not come from a spirit of pride, nor any dissatisfaction with the work at CRTS. It is not coming from a spirit that we think that we can do better than you. The faithful, Reformed teaching and the level of excellence at the CRTS is wonderful. It is amazing to see how richly God has blessed you. So we are not coming from a competitive spirit. Rather, we have a lot of need within our churches. We need ministers and students and professors and we would love to build up relationship with the Reformed churches around us. We are humbly asking God for men in the ministry, for men who would take up further studies to become professors and for a seminary if God is willing to grant it.

Options

In our report to Synod Albany 2021, which we shared with you, we explained to synod three options for accredited seminary training in Australia. Here is a brief summary.

25 1. *Independently Accredited Seminary*

This would involve making an application to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and meeting all their requirements. After seeking advice, we learned that this would be extremely difficult and practically impossible as a first step. Therefore, we do not regard this as a viable option.

30 2. *A seminary affiliated with the Australian College of Theology (ACT)*

35 The ACT is historically and constitutionally an Anglican foundation, and describes its operation as “an ecumenical consortium.” The ACT is fully accredited through TEQSA, and it has several affiliate schools throughout Australia, including e.g., Trinity Theological College in Perth and the Reformed Theological College in Melbourne. If we were not able to gain accreditation as an affiliate of the CRTS, this would likely be our best option for establishing an accredited seminary. Nevertheless as we pointed out to synod, we would have to see if we could work through significant challenges. Briefly, the ACT requires a comprehensive operating plan, adequate buildings, finances, library, student body, and a minimum of four professors with advanced degrees. They also require policies around governance and organisational structure, ongoing student support, pastoral care for students, stability of academic staff, student numbers, and professional development of academic staff. Preparing for an application with the ACT would be a long and complicated process. If affiliation were achieved, then continuing to meet their requirements would require significant ongoing work. It would require four professors with academic degrees. 45 Finally, we do not know if working with an Anglican institution would be a hindrance in

getting broad support from the churches. Because of these challenges, we recommended to Synod Albany 2021 that we regard affiliation with the ACT as presently unfeasible.

3. *CRTS Australian Affiliate*

On 13-14 June 2019, we met face-to-face with Dr. Jason VanVliet (as principal of CRTS) and Rev. Richard Aasman (as then-chairman of the CRTS Board of Governors). During a discussion on the possible establishment of an Australian Reformed Theological Seminary, we had a discussion about the possibility of having an Australian affiliate of CRTS. This model, if pursued, might see an Australian brick-and-mortar campus with a number of full-time professors on site. These professors could offer a substantial amount of the curriculum in person. The remainder might be resourced through a combination of distance-learning from the CRTS campus in Hamilton and modular courses offered in-person from Canadian CRTS professors.

Some of the *advantages* of this model would be an ability to offer accredited Reformed seminary education in Australia, but at the same time continue to capitalise on our long-standing relationship with CRTS. We could take optimal advantage of CRTS's experience and expertise. This arrangement could be mutually beneficial, since CRTS student numbers continue to rise and this will eventually begin to stretch the capacity of current facilities at CRTS. Moreover, CRTS would gain some professors on staff, adding to the breadth of expertise in the seminary as a whole. This could also prove to be mutually beneficial, since Australia-based professors could also provide teaching to Hamilton-based students either in modular courses offered in-person or through distance learning. Finally, FRCA seminary students will be more likely to remain in Australia to serve within the FRCA.

Some of the *challenges* would be ATS and TEQSA accreditation, an appropriate governance model, sufficient professors with advanced degrees, sufficient student numbers, challenges around distance education and sufficient investment in infrastructure and library resources.

The Deputies recommended to Synod Albany 2021 that the best way forward seems to be pursuing an accredited seminary as an affiliate of the CRTS. Synod then mandated us to pursue this with you and come back with recommendations on a responsible timeline, governance, financing and infrastructure, faculty and accreditation requirements.

Governance

In your *Discussion Paper: Australian Affiliate Campus* dated June 2023, you explain that according to your degree granting body, the College Act of 1981, your bylaws and the ATS 2020 standards, it is only possible for you to operate with one board of governors. You explain, "With this in mind, and thinking about a potential Australian affiliate, the Board sees two governance models that would be possible, each of which maintains one Board ultimately governing two campuses:

iii. An advisory committee of FRCA brothers could be formed in Australia focussing on the work of the affiliate but with the CRTS Board retaining final authority over both the Canadian and Australian campuses, including the responsibility of appointing professors for both campuses.

iv. If we successfully went the route of modifying our by-laws through a private members' bill in the Ontario legislature, FRCA brothers with Australian citizenship could serve on the current CRTS Board. At the same time, if we would gain provincial permission to include non-Canadians on our Board, we would also need to decide whether other church federations that support CRTS would have a certain representation on the Board as well and what qualifications and stipulations might lead to such an appointment. Any change in representation on the Board would also require

approval of a CanRC general synod. Also, in our predominantly secular society it is hard to predict how a private members' bill concerning a Christian institution, such as CRTS, would be received."

5 On the basis of these observations, you state, "The CRTS Board would like to discuss with you whether a one-Board governance model is your understanding of how a potential affiliate would operate, and whether this also fits with your vision of things. Would the FRCA be content with this? As part of that discussion, the pros and cons of options iii) and iv) could be considered."

10 Our synod has not yet given us direction on this matter. We would anticipate that the synod will require as much governance as possible of a future seminary. We anticipate that at a minimum, synod will ask for an advisory committee of FRCA brothers who would be responsible for overseeing the affiliate seminary and who would advise and seek approval from the board about matters of governance. Would that be possible? We also anticipate that synod may request that, if possible, the CRTS bylaws be modified to allow FRCA brothers to sit on the Board of Governors. Our question to you is: would the CRTS be willing to pursue the modification of your bylaws via a private members bill in the Ontario Legislature? We ask this with humility recognising that it is hard to predict how an amendment to a private members' bill would be received. We are recommending to synod that we request of you that if the Board of CRTS and the synod of the CanRC anticipates you are able to support our desire to have an Australian affiliate seminary with regards to other matters (e.g. accreditation, faculty, financing and timelines) then you approach the Ontario government for an amendment to the private members' bill.

20 **Accreditation**

25 We are thankful that you as Board understand that we are seeking accredited theological education in Australia. In your *Discussion Paper: Australian Affiliate Campus* you note, "We have confirmed that, following due process, an accredited, affiliate campus is certainly possible from an ATS point of view. However, ATS would require that any local regulatory bodies are satisfied with the establishment of a new, affiliate campus. Thus, in the case of Australia, the "heavy lifting" would be with TEQSA. The CRTS Board wonders how much time and effort would be required of current faculty and staff to go down the path of a TEQSA application. We are assuming that the FRCA Deputies would want to take the lion's share of this work, but it almost seems inevitable that some work would have to be done by CRTS faculty, staff, or governors. How could this remain manageable within current workload levels, which the Board has been trying to make more sustainable in recent years?"

35 We envisage that the "heavy lifting" for a TEQSA application would indeed fall on the FRCA. We anticipate that we will have to do a significant amount of work and we will also have to hire a consultant to guide us through this process and assist us to lodge an application. In our report to Synod Albany 2021, we informed synod that any application with TEQSA would be beyond our ability as Deputies and that synod may have to look at hiring someone to fulfil these requirements. We will make a similar recommendation to Synod Darling Downs 2024. If a significant investment of time or money is needed from CRTS for a TEQSA application, we would be open to approaching our synod to ask for funding for such an endeavour.

40 **Faculty**

45 In your Discussion Paper, you note that "At the 2019 Roundtable Discussion the CRTS Board indicated to FRCA Deputies that a realistic minimum to run a seminary, and most likely even an affiliate, is four professors with help from adjuncts or guest lecturers. "In a pinch," to quote the document approved by the Board for brs. Aasman and Van Vliet, three professors with adjuncts may be possible, but two is probably not enough, putting too much stress on everyone and not necessarily being sustainable (see p 5 of Notes for "Meeting With Deputies for Training for the Ministry in Australia"). However, your letter (Dec 8, 2022), mentions the possibility of starting with two or three professors, rather than three or four. We should discuss further how many

professorial positions would be required to start an affiliate, without putting undue stress or workload expectations on anyone.”

5 We envisage that to start a seminary we would have three professors appointed to teach with the rest of the work being done via Distance Education, adjuncts, guest lecturers or modular courses offered by CRTS professors in person. We recognise that best practice is face to face education. While it may be difficult to schedule classes for students in Australia because of the differences in time zones, one possibility may be requiring students to attend evening classes so that they can fully participate in the class at CRTS via Zoom. Another possibility may be recording the lectures and then requiring students to watch them later and discuss them with the support of a local professor.

Timeline

15 In our discussions with you over the years, you have emphasised that you do not wish to work towards the establishment of a CRTS affiliate in Australia under a strictly chronological timeline, but rather when you have sufficient students and professors to establish an affiliate without undermining the work at CRTS. In point 5 of the History section of your *Discussion Paper*, you explain your perspective. “To make this more concrete and only by way of example, if the Lord would bless our federations to the point that we have enough ministers with advanced degrees to fill and sustain 8 full-time professorial positions, and if the student body at CRTS would grow to about 50 students, then a win-win situation could come into focus: CRTS Hamilton could have 5 professors and 30-35 students and an affiliate in Australia could have 3 professors and 15-20 students. Broadly speaking, this would be feasible.” In your next comments you explain that at present the student numbers have reached a high of 34 students last year, but that there is no guarantee that such high numbers will be maintained in the future. Your other concern is that although we currently have five professors with PhD degrees who are serving at the seminary, and five more who are serving as ministers in the churches, all these men are 40-50 years old. You explain that in the next 12-14 years three of your current professors will be retiring. Further, at this time we do not have anyone aged 20-40 with a PhD, and there is only 1 student pursuing a PhD and four other students who are in the process of completing or have completed various Master’s level programs which may only be relevant to teaching at a seminary if they continue to pursue a PhD program.

35 We understand your hesitation with pursuing an affiliate of the CRTS if you anticipate that in 12-14 years time you may have difficulty filling three vacancies at CRTS. You do not want to jeopardise your ability to offer seminary training at your institution, let alone set up another institution which would increase the demand for professors. However, we would suggest that it is possible that in the next 10-15 years some of the men currently studying may have the necessary qualifications to serve at a seminary. Further we can pray to God that in the next twenty years the LORD will raise up men who could serve as professors not only at CRTS but also at an affiliate seminary in Australia. In your more than fifty year history, the LORD has always provided men who could serve at seminary. Further, more than 20 percent of the men who studied at CRTS have gone on to further studies. There were times in your history when you faced significant challenges around professors, and yet the LORD always provided professors and students were continually educated to bring the Word to God’s people.

45 Furthermore, we believe that building support among the membership of the CanRC and FRCA for pursuing an affiliate seminary, achieving accreditation, adopting appropriate policies and procedures, finding a suitable model for governance, building a library, finding a suitable building, attracting a librarian and attaining financing for an affiliate seminary is a significant task that will take many years. If we only begin pursuing the establishment of a seminary after we have a vision of attracting 8 professors and having an adequate number of students in 10-15 years time, then realistically it will take longer than a generation before we have a seminary in Australia. We do not think that this is the best way forward. Instead we ask that, in faith, you would be willing now

to commit to assisting us in establishing an affiliate seminary in the awareness that finding sufficient professors is one of the challenges that we will have to overcome before a seminary is established in Australia.

Conclusion

5 Dear brothers, it is our prayer, desire and goal to establish seminary training in Australia at some point in the future. We are on a journey to investigate the best way to make this happen. In many ways we would love to do this with you. We would love to benefit from your faithfulness, insights and excellence. We would love to import some of your culture to assist us to offer similar training here in Australia. We also value the mutually beneficial relationship that we have with CRTS and
10 the CanRC and would love to continue to work together in seminary training. We understand that in asking you to assist us in investigating the establishment of an affiliate of the CRTS in Australia, we are asking a lot of you. If this were to come to fruition, it would be even more costly to you. It would take a significant amount of work to attain accreditation. Figuring out a mutually acceptable governance model could also be challenging. It would mean that we would need
15 several additional seminary professors with advanced degrees. It would also impact the diversity and depth of the student body at CRTS. Financially, it would also be a significant commitment to follow this through. If it is so costly, why pursue it?

We ask you to consider this for the glory of the Lord and the well being of his church. Let us use an analogy. Some years ago a number of members from our churches moved about 2 hours
20 south of Perth to Bunbury and Busselton. Initially they did not have a school to educate the children. At some point they requested the school board in the Perth metro area to assist them in establishing a school. They needed the help of the Free Reformed School Association (FRSA) to get accreditation with the government and provide governance. The FRSA also assisted them by asking a number of teachers to move to Bunbury, providing additional financial resources and
25 also eventually assisting in the funding and construction of a brand new school building. The FRSA did this out of a love for the LORD and care for his people. In one way, it was costly. On the other hand, what a beautiful way of serving the LORD and assisting his people. It is in this spirit that we ask you to consider our requests.

At the same time, please be assured that we will understand if you are not able to provide this
30 assistance. You have a significant responsibility in governing CRTS. If this is a bridge too far, then please be forthright with us so that we might know where we stand and that we might make plans for the future. We wish to assure you that we do not seek to do this work by our own wisdom or in our own strength. The only way that we will ever have a seminary in Australia is if the LORD wills it. We trust that our heavenly Father loves us a lot and that he knows what is best for us. We
35 will ask him for his blessing and receive from his hand whatever he gives us.

With love, in Christ,

The Deputies for the Training for the Ministry

Appendix 4

Towards an Australian Reformed Theological Seminary

Introduction

5 One of the privileges of the Deputies for the Training of the Ministry is supporting and encouraging young men in pursuing the ministry of the gospel. Synod Albany 2021 also mandated us to work on a plan for a seminary in Australia, possibly as an Australian affiliate of Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). They asked us to consider how we would work out a responsible timeline, governance, financing and infrastructure, faculty and ATS (Association of Theological Schools, a North American organisation to which the CRTS is accountable) accreditation requirements. We were asked to report on this plan at least 12 months before the next synod. Although our committee has been busy with that work in conjunction with the CRTS, we have a lot more work to do before we can present a plan for a seminary. Up to this point we been predominately focused on how we could secure accreditation. This is an involved process which will need approval not only from the ATS in Canada but also from the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Association (TEQSA), an agency of the Australian government. They have informed us that once a complete application has been submitted, it usually takes 1 to 2 years for them to make a decision. We plan to report on our progress in this matter along with our regular report 6 months prior to synod.

20 Back in 2018, Synod Bunbury provided some reasons why having our own seminary would be desirable. Synod noted:

- a. it is in accordance with 2 Timothy 2:2 that a bond of churches take responsibility for the theological training of their young men;
- b. an Australian theological seminary could benefit our sister churches and other churches in the Asia Pacific region;
- 25 c. an Australian theological seminary could benefit the local FRCA through such endeavours as office bearer training, teacher training and enrichment courses for the members;
- d. accreditation would be a valuable aspect in attracting students, and will help to ensure a quality education with academic integrity; and
- 30 e. in view of what deputies have reported about the financial feasibility, and the many financial blessings God has given our churches, the financial cost involved in establishing a theological seminary at some point in the future, while likely substantial, is not anticipated to be prohibitive or a decisive factor, given the potential benefits of a theological seminary as described.

At some point, it would be a blessing for us as a federation of churches to have our own seminary.

35 At the same time, since back in 2018 just half of the churches considered that it was desirable to begin working toward an Australian seminary, Synod asked us to “continue to monitor the factors that have been identified by the churches as reasons for not establishing our own theological seminary at this time” (Acts Synod Bunbury, 2021, Art. 101, III 6, 7). In order to ensure that our work remains closely in line with the churches’ views on these matters (cf. Synod Bunbury, Acts, 40 Art. 80), synod also asked us to solicit feedback from the churches. The churches were asked to provide feedback in six key areas. We summarise these below, along with the questions asked.

Feedback from the churches

1. *In order to set up a seminary, we would need to take ministers out of the churches and these men would need specialised training. Even an affiliate of the CRTS would require 2 or 3 men with doctorates who are devoted to full time teaching. How important is this matter and how do you see it playing out?*

The majority of the churches saw this as a very significant factor and recognise that it will be challenging to find suitable candidates. Some churches suggested that it's okay to endure some short term pain of taking ministers out of the churches for the greater benefit of having a seminary. One church suggested that we don't need to insist that the professors would have PhD's. Several churches suggested that setting up a seminary is not feasible since having a PhD is a requirement for an accredited seminary and we simply do not have enough ministers with doctorates.

2. *In your view, how urgent is it for us to establish a seminary in Australia?*

The majority of the churches suggested that there is no real urgency in setting up a seminary. It is probably best for us to consider this in the medium to long term. One church suggested that it might be good for us to get started on a small scale and get some experience. Another church suggested that the loss of FRCA students will affect CRTS funding and that this should be considered.

3. *Historically, the FRCA values the input and influence from the Canadian churches that comes via the ministers who have been trained at CRTS. This positive input could be diminished if we trained our own men here in Australia. How do you view the potential loss of influence from the CanRC?*

Most churches recognised that we would lose some input and influence from the CanRC. Some churches suggested that this wouldn't be a significant loss since we could still call ministers from Canada and the CanRC can still provide a positive influence on our churches via magazines and other contacts. A few others noted that there is significant value in sending students to Canada and that our students benefit greatly from their interaction with others.

4. *It has been said that Australian students greatly benefit from the experience of studying overseas. Exposure to a wider ecclesiastical scene, the experienced staff at CRTS, as well as the access to a variety of conferences and seminars are all beneficial in providing a well-rounded training experience for Australian students.*

Most churches expressed some concern that our students will miss out on the blessing of the experience of studying overseas. One church suggested that there is value in forcing men to travel since they must be willing to serve where they have been called. Some suggested that this loss could be minimised by pursuing internships overseas or having professors from Canada teach in our seminary.

5. *Historically, the number of FRCA men studying for the ministry has not been substantial, though it has been increasing in recent years (one student in 1970-90, four in 1991-2000, five in 2001-10, and eleven in 2011-22). What impact should student numbers play in our establishment of a seminary?*

Most churches indicated that having a reasonable number of students is important prior to setting up a seminary. Some churches suggested that it is unreasonable to set up the necessary infrastructure and place a substantial financial commitment on the churches for only a few students. Some churches suggested that it is important to have enough students

since students learn a lot from one another and from each other's interaction with the professors and material. Although some churches suggested that having a local seminary may attract more students, one church noted that the CRTS experience shows us that having a seminary nearby does not encourage more men to take up studies. One church suggested that the deputies should investigate this matter more closely.

6. *It has also been suggested that an Australian seminary could serve the needs of the broader FRCA community through bearer training, teacher training, and enrichment courses for members. Do you think this would be important?*

The majority of churches said that although this could be a secondary benefit, it should not be a primary focus. One church suggested that considering the amount of work involved in setting up and running a seminary, this should not be pursued at all.

As deputies we are thankful to the churches for the input provided. This information will be helpful for our next synod to provide direction for the way forward in the future.

Some reflections

The churches highlighted that there are several challenges that we face to establishing a seminary in Australia. The first is the availability of professors with doctoral degrees. Since the churches have decided that we wish to establish an accredited seminary, the professors we appoint would need a doctoral degree. Presently there are a few disciplines where there are currently no extra ministers available with doctoral degrees. The CRTS is already concerned about this matter because of the future retirement of some professors in their own seminary, and they are praying and doing what they can to encourage capable young ministers to pursue advanced degrees.

Another matter we would need to think about and pray about is student numbers. In the past ten years, we have sent more men to CRTS than at any time in our history. But on average, over these 10 years, we have only sent one man per year. It's hard to envision setting up a seminary for one student per year. Although more students might come to seminary if it were in Australia, this has not been the experience in Canada. Although about half the churches in Canada are in Ontario where the seminary is located, more students have come from other provinces than from Ontario. It may be possible that students from South Africa, New Zealand, the Philippines or elsewhere could come to Australia. If so, that could boost our student numbers.

The churches also indicated some concern about the loss of contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Virtually all the ministers who have studied in Canada attest that it was a growing experience to go to CRTS where there is a diverse ecclesiastical scene with contact with various Reformed churches, experienced staff and students from a wide range of countries and backgrounds. This loss of influence would come at some cost to our churches.

There are also two other areas that would need work. The first is the area of governance. If we would establish an ARTS, as churches we would like to have some governance of this seminary. At present the CRTS is able to grant a Master of Divinity degree under the authority of a private members bill passed in the Legislature of Ontario back in 1981. According to the legislation, a governor at the seminary must be a Canadian citizen and a member of one of the churches. The Board of Governors of the CRTS has referred the matter to legal counsel to see if it would be possible for someone who is not a Canadian and not a member of one of the CanRC to be a governor. If not, they would have to go back to the Ontario government, to seek, through an act of parliament, a change in the legislature. There are no guarantees that the government would be willing to make this change.

The second matter that would need some work would be accreditation. For an affiliate of the CRTS to grant a Master of Divinity degree to a student studying in Australia, the CRTS would need permission to do so from the Association of Theological Schools (ATS). Presently they do not have permission to grant a degree to a student who is based overseas. Yet, they are hopeful they can do so in the future, since many other institutions are now offering online degrees. We would also need to receive permission from the Australian government to grant a degree. The governing body in Australia is called the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). Since overseas students spend many billions of dollars at Australian universities, the government of Australia is very concerned to ensure that any institution granting a Master's degree be of high quality. In order to receive permission from TEQSA to grant a Master's degree, an affiliate from the CRTS would have to meet their standards around issues like admissions, course design, learning outcomes, assessments, physical infrastructure, staffing, governance, etc. Although their requirements are quite stringent, we are hopeful that the CRTS with its fifty years of experience and its major overhaul of its policies and procedures in the past twenty years, would help us to secure this accreditation.

Another matter we should be aware of is that setting up and running a seminary will take a lot of work from many people. Since as deputies we are invited to participate in all the work of the Board of Governors of the CRTS we have come to understand the investment of time that many people make in the seminary. CRTS is constantly challenged to not overwork their five professors. They have three support staff (a librarian, administrative assistant and assistant to the professors and the Board of Governors) alongside of numerous other volunteers. These days board members have to invest a significant amount of time into governing the seminary, due to increased regulatory and accreditation requirements. Half of the board members are ministers. In our planning for the establishment of a seminary, we should recognise that if we set up a seminary here, we will need to place an additional significant workload on several of our ministers and other competent individuals.

Conclusion

So where does that leave us? Synod has mandated us to investigate and plan for establishing a seminary in Australia. It would be wonderful for us to have our seminary at some point. That would be good for our federation of churches and it could attract more students from among us. It might also bring to our shores some students from other Reformed churches in the Southern hemisphere. It might also lead to having some ministers among us who have greater expertise in various disciplines. At the same time, as a number of the churches have pointed out, we should recognise that this is a major undertaking. We will have to pray to the LORD that he provide us with professors and students. We will need his blessing to achieve accreditation and governance. In all this, what stands out most clearly is how utterly dependent we are upon the LORD for his blessings. The only way we will ever get a seminary in Australia is if he wills it. Will you please join us in keeping this matter in your prayers?

On behalf of the Deputies of the Training for the Ministry,

Rev. D. Poppe

Appendix 5

Summary of responses from the churches in 2022 regarding setting up a seminary in Australia

- 5 **Manpower and specialised training of profs – how significant is this factor?**
- Albany - depending on the type of instruction offered and the help from Canada, we might not need ministers with PhD's
- Armadale - would require vast resources
- 10 Baldivis - if PhD is needed it will be challenging
Bunbury - very real factor and our primary concern
- you should check data to see if it is feasible to have enough profs
- don't proceed if you pull ordained men out of local congregations
- Byford - this is a very significant factor
15 - short term vacancy is okay for long term gain
- maybe we could use retired ministers
- in long term, having a seminary will be a blessing
- Darling Downs - this is an important factor. Sad to lose men from churches
- maybe look into men teaching short term blocks
- 20 Melville - vacancies not a concern if it leads to more trained men
Mt. Nasura - people is the most significant factor. But we could share resources with CRTS
Mundijong - inconvenient in short term, but a great investment for future if we have seminary
- will be challenging to find suitable candidates
- 25 - seminary should give opportunity for additional training to become prof
Southern River - would have to come from churches, but support that since this is important work
- West Albany - not feasible since we don't have enough ministers with doctorates. We would also continue to have to find their replacements which is a concern
- 30 - urgency of setting up seminary?
Albany - we've been well served by CRTS, but good to have our own seminary
Armadale - no urgency. Good to look at this in medium to long term
- loss of students and finances for CRTS will be hard when we leave. Not too quickly
- 35 - when numbers at CRTS go up, would be a good time for us to consider ARTS
Baldivis - no urgency, pursue medium to long term
Bunbury - moral decline is not a factor since it affects both of us
- COVID is not a factors any longer
- if we can't send students to CRTS we could set up seminary fast or do distance ed from CRTS
- 40 - let's trust God for future and maybe make plans for worst case scenario
Byford - no urgency
- it's becoming increasingly urgent
- Darling Downs - maybe medium to long term
- 45 Melville - urgency not a driving factor
- changing political climate not a factor in establishing a seminary
- other seminaries could be investigated if CRTS were not an option
- Mt. Nasura - get started on a small scale and get some experience instead of waiting
- Mundijong - although concerns remain, urgency from external factors seems to have diminished
- 50 Southern River - no urgency. Look to set up seminary in long term
West Albany - loss of FRCA students will affect CRTS funding and should be considered

CRTS trained ministers have been a blessing to FRCA. How serious would this loss of influence be?

- 5 Albany - we won't necessarily lose influence - close relationship between CanRC and FRCA
 - FRCA seminary might influence rest of Oceania
- Armadale - no comment
- Baldivis - we will continue to call ministers from Canada so influence will continue
 - if new seminary established, then there would be strong contact with CRTS which would ensure influence
- 10 Bunbury - we would lose input and influence from CanRC
 - there is significant value in sending men to Canada
- Byford - not a huge factor
 - can still call Canadian ministers
- 15 Darling Downs - CanRC can still provide positive influence on our churches via media, other contacts
- Melville - there would still be an interchange between CRTS and Australian seminary
- Mt. Nasura - we value all biblically sound contributions to FRCA from Canada or elsewhere
 - for foreseeable future, we will still get influence from Canada
- 20 Mundijong - will lose some influence, but congregation can still nurture and shape a minister
 - could include overseas stint as part of seminary training
 - we have same basis as CanRC and so differences between us are not that big
- 25 Southern River - we are thankful for influence that comes through CRTS
 - influence could continue through calling men from Canada
- West Albany - very beneficial for FRCA students to mix with all those at CRTS

Students benefit from time at CRTS – broader ecclesiastical scene, experience staff, conferences. How significant is this loss of experience?

- 30 Albany - but FRCA students lose contact with FRCA and technology can bridge distance
- Armadale - no comment
- Baldivis - we will lose this influence and should be careful not to become insular
- 35 Bunbury - there is value in sending men to CRTS. Also value in forcing men to travel since they must be willing to serve where they have been called
- Byford - students will miss out on this experience – maybe internships overseas?
 - our students learn from Canada, but their students can also learn from us
- 40 Darling Downs - students can still benefit from overseas learning, internships overseas
- Melville - we should listen to what the students who have gone to Canada say about this
- Mt. Nasura - we envisage that our students will still get training at CRTS for foreseeable future
 - in future, two seminaries will provide even more well rounded training experienced
- 45 Mundijong - exposure to another ecclesiastical scene is valuable
 - maybe send vicars overseas
- Southern River - thankful for benefit from overseas
 - as churches grow and others come from overseas this loss will be less of a concern
- 50 West Albany - if we attract pros from Canada, this influence may continue
 - going to Canada is a great benefit – personal interactions with other students enhances ability to study, understanding of Scripture and understanding of how church functions

How important are student numbers at Australian seminary?

- Albany - local seminary may stimulate more to study for ministry
Armadale - no comment
5 Baldivis - unreasonable for infrastructure for only a few men. Three of our men went to Canada. Distance was not an issue. It was a good experience for them
Bunbury - you should investigate if there is any evidence that local seminary would increase student numbers
Byford - important for us and CRTS to consider
10 Darling Downs - relevant but not determinative. If no students, profs could help out elsewhere
Melville - if we have a seminary here, more mature age and other students may study
- a larger student body is important for discussion and growth
- we should have enough students before substantial financial commitment
- we should consider that future Federal funding for JCS may drop off
15 Mt. Nasura - student numbers are important
- we should set up seminary to attract possible students
Mundijong - student numbers are important. Student life is a big thing
- better to have more students
- Australian seminary would mean a loss of students for CRTS
20 Southern River - Australian seminary will not only attract Aussies
- student numbers are important since you need a learning community
- not smart to start off for only a few students. Yet don't despise small beginnings
West Albany - the CRTS experience shows us that having a seminary nearby does not
25 encourage more men to take up studies

Should Australian Seminary pursue office bearer training, teacher training or enrichment courses?

- Albany - would be good to pursue
30 Armadale - no comment
Baldivis - should not be primary focus, although churches will benefit
Bunbury - this would be beneficial, but not a huge consideration
Byford - can be helpful if there is time for it
- ought to be secondary
35 Darling Downs - good to consider, but not that important
Melville - maybe we could combine past initiatives (ie. ORE) with seminary
Mt. Nasura - this is a side benefit only
Mundijong - a seminary may be a benefit for the metro churches
Southern River - it is not reasonable to expect seminary to provide this additional training
40 West Albany - this is a secondary benefit and should not be the focus

Additional comments

- Albany - we are supportive of CRTS
- no consensus on necessity and feasibility of ARTS
45 Armadale - loss of support for CRTS will be hard for them, so don't move too quickly
- we might be a blessing for other Reformed Churches in our area
Baldivis - build on the language and mentorship program by supporting Rev. Anderson
- we need to continue to encourage young men to pursue ministry
- investigate ministry apprenticeship model
50 Bunbury - what impact would it have on CRTS if we no longer sent our students?
Mt. Nasura - support for Australian seminary should not come at cost of support for CRTS
- Australian seminary and CRTS should be mutually beneficial
Mundijong - opportunities for distance education should be investigated

Appendix 6

Appendix 6.1 Treasurer's Report – CRTS Fund

**Deputies Training for Ministry
CRTS Fund (Hamilton Theological Fund)**

*Statement of Income and Expenditure
30 October 2020 to 2 November 2023*

Income	2020	2021	2022	2023	Note	Total
Church Assessments	\$10,990.00	\$274,798.43	\$289,308.95	\$263,840.12	%	\$838,937.50
CRTS Fundraising	\$11,816.00	\$190,211.29	\$10,996.15	\$4,749.50		\$217,772.94
Donations & Refunds	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7,110.00	\$0.00	#	\$7,110.00
Income from Synod Treasury	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,870.94	^	\$8,870.94
Interest	\$0.00	\$9.78	\$9.74	\$5.57		\$25.09
Total	\$22,806.00	\$465,019.50	\$307,424.84	\$277,466.13		\$1,072,716.47
<hr/>						
Expenditure	2020	2021	2022	2023	Note	Total
Regular support for CRTS	\$11,476.70	\$274,590.00	\$284,580.00	\$271,178.51	**	\$841,825.21
CRTS Fundraising Campaign	\$0.00	\$202,027.29	\$10,996.15	\$4,749.50		\$217,772.94
Transaction Fees	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$9.00		\$9.00
Refunds	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$7,110	\$0.00	#	\$7,110.00
Timothy Conference 2023	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$393.99	^	\$393.99
Deputy visits to CRTS (flights)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$0.00
Professor from CRTS (flights)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,467.96	^	\$8,467.96
Total	\$11,476.70	\$476,617.29	\$302,686.15	\$284,798.96		\$1,075,579.10
<hr/>						
Closing Balance						\$3,670.54

Notes

- % \$17,512.50 is outstanding for FRCA Assessments for 2023.
- ** \$15,111.49 is outstanding for CRTS transfers for 2023.
- # Refund to FRC for accidental double payment.
- ^ Refunds from Synod Treasury.

Appendix 6.2 Treasurer's Report – Needy Student Fund

Deputies Training for Ministry Needy Student Fund

*Statement of Income and Expenditure
15 October 2020 to 2 November 2023*

Opening Balance						\$117,508.13
Income	2020	2021	2022	2023	Note	Total
Church Assessments	\$0.00	\$21,894.25	\$20,090.70	\$0.00		\$41,984.95
Other Income	\$25,000.00	\$69,800.00	\$25,000.00	\$0.00	*	\$119,800.00
Interest	\$15.51	\$60.78	\$15.21	\$11.01		\$102.51
Total	\$25,016	\$91,755	\$45,106	\$11.01		\$161,887.46
Expenditure	2020	2021	2022	2023	Note	Total
Student Support	\$18,360.98	\$61,190.01	\$24,817.39	\$0.00		\$104,368.38
Other Expenditure	\$0.00	\$19,800	\$0.00	\$14,171.12	%	\$33,971.12
Fees	\$76.00	\$157.80	\$120.00	\$84.00		\$437.80
Total	\$18,436.98	\$81,147.81	\$24,937.39	\$14,255.12		\$138,777.30
Closing Balance						\$140,618.29

Notes

- * Payments from FRC Rockingham of \$25,000 in 2020, \$50,000 in 2021, and \$25,000 in 2022, for the support of br A van Delden. In 2021 this includes an inadvertent payment of \$19,800 for a CRTS assessment to Needy Student fund.
- % In 2021 this includes a refund of \$19,800 to the CRTS account for FRC payment to incorrect account. In 2023 this includes the cost of the PTP for br. Marc Vermeulen at FRC Baldivis.

Appendix 6.3 Treasurer's Report – ARTS Fund

Deputies Training for Ministry ARTS Fund

*Statement of Income and Expenditure
01 January 2022 to 2 November 2023*

Opening Balance				
				\$0.00
Income	2022	2023	Note	Total
Church Assessments	\$8,975	\$16,945	%	\$25,920
Interest	\$0.56	\$1.51		\$2.07
Total	\$8,975.36	\$16,946.71		\$25,922.07
Expenditure	2022	2023	Note	Total
CRTS Flight Cost	\$0.00	\$1,782.40	*	\$1,782.40
Total	\$0.00	\$1,782.40		\$1,782.40
Closing Balance				
				\$24,139.67

Notes

- % The ARTS levy began on 1 January 2022 at a rate of \$3 pcm for 2022, increased to \$6 pcm in 2023 and will increase to \$9 pcm for 2024.
- * Cost of flight of extra DTM delegate to visit CRTS in September 2023 for discussion regarding CRTS Affiliate in Australia (at CRTS request).

Appendix 6.4 Treasurer's Report – Library Fund

Deputies Training for Ministry
Library Fund

Statement of Income and Expenditure
14 May 2020 to 2 November 2023

Opening Balance \$130,208.37

Term Deposit Amount	Date Lodged	Maturing on	Frequency	Rate (p.a.)	Note	Interest
\$130,208.37	14 May 2020	14 Nov 2020	6 monthly	0.76%		\$492.30
\$130,700.67	14 Nov 2020	14 May 2021	6 monthly	0.30%		\$194.44
\$130,895.11	14 May 2021	14 Nov 2021	6 monthly	0.10%		\$65.98
\$130,961.09	14 Nov 2021	14 May 2022	6 monthly	0.10%		\$64.94
\$131,026.03	14 May 2022	14 Nov 2022	6 monthly	0.10%		\$66.06
\$131,092.09	14 Nov 2022	14 May 2023	6 monthly	2.10%	^^	\$1,378.91
Total						<u>\$2,262.63</u>

Income	2020	2021	2022	2023	Note	Total
Interest	\$492.30	\$260.42	\$131.00	\$1,378.91		\$2,262.63

Total Income \$2,262.63

Total Expenditure \$0.00

Closing Balance \$132,471.00

Summary of Investment Details from 14 May 2023

Term Deposit Amount	Date Lodged	Maturing on	Frequency	Rate (p.a.)
\$33,106.18	14 May 2023	14 May 2024	1 year	4.10%
\$33,106.18	14 May 2023	14 May 2025	2 years	4.00%
\$33,106.18	14 May 2023	14 May 2026	3 years	4.00%
\$33,152.46	14 May 2023	14 May 2027	4 years	4.00%



FREE REFORMED CHURCH OF SOUTHERN RIVER

LOT 16 SOUTHERN RIVER ROAD, SOUTHERN RIVER, WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6110
PO BOX 1082, KELMSCOTT DELIVERY CENTRE, WESTERN AUSTRALIA 6997

Appendix 7

5 2nd November 2023

Deputies for Training for the Ministry Audit

Dear Deputies,

10 The consistory of the Free Reformed Church of Southern River has requested the undersigned to complete a financial audit on the following funds:

- Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary Fund
- Needy Student Fund
- Australian Reformed Theological Seminary Fund (established 2022)
- Theological Library Fund

15 The transactions for the period 31st October 2020 to 2nd November 2023 have been audited and the financial statements are an accurate representation of the financial activity and position of each fund for this period.

20 No warranty is implied, or liability accepted for any reliance upon this statement which has been made in good faith and based on a review of a sample of the transactions undertaken during the period.

Regards,

25 **Carina Dekker**
B. Comm

Melanie Wielstra
CPA, B. Comm

Appendix 8

Speech at the convocation of the CRTS

8 September 2023

Dear brothers and sisters,

5 Greetings to you from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. We are grateful to be here. The
Canadian Reformed Churches are churches with whom we have very close fellowship and you
are very dear to us. We are here to also extend our congratulations for the students who are
graduating. We are grateful to God for the training you could receive, the fact that you can
complete your work and we wish you God's blessing in whatever task he gives to you in his
10 church.

A little bit about us as Free Reformed Churches: we had 18 churches plus one church plant in
Cairns. God has blessed us with quite a few children within our churches. He also continues to
bring new members to us from within our communities. Just recently two new churches were
established, one in Comet Bay and another in Cardup Brook. There are two other churches that
15 are looking at splitting: Southern River and West Albany. It is a testament to the grace of God
that he continues to bless us so that we can grow and he establishes more churches for us.

That leaves us with a need for preachers. We are deeply grateful for the close trust and the good
cooperation we have with CRTS. Currently within our federation all of our serving ministers, with
one exception, come from CRTS. One of the blessings that comes out of this is that we have
20 close fellowship, a lot of unity and there is a lot of peace in our churches. To a large extent that t
is a result of much of the work that is done at seminary and we are so thankful to God for that
and we praise him for that.

Now since we have all these churches and a number of vacancies, we need ministers. As
churches in Australia we have always had a vision for one day setting up a seminary. It's not
25 because we don't appreciate CRTS. Rather because we recognize the foundational principle that
ministers ought to be educated by the churches for the churches. Also in trying to bring ministers
from Canada to Australia we have had increasing difficulties in meeting the visa requirements.
On some occasions, this has not worked. We are thinking that a beautiful way to manage this is
by working towards an affiliate seminary of the CRTS. A couple of the other reasons we are
30 thinking about establishing an affiliate seminary is because we also have a lot of contact with
other Reformed churches in the Asia/Pacific region For example, the mission project in PNG, the
contact with the churches in Sumba and Indonesia. We have contact with the Philippines and the
Reformed Church of New Zealand. Also on the way over here last weekend I was able to stop in
Singapore and together with Rev. 't Hart assist them to examine a student so that he could do
35 his exam to receive preaching consent within the churches. In the future, if we were to set up a
seminary that would be one point of contact that would really benefit us and them. Also having a
seminary close by and having the expertise of those that can teach at the seminary is a real
blessing for the churches and that is something that would serve us well.

We also wish you to understand that our desire to pursue a seminary does not come from a spirit
40 of pride. It is not coming from a spirit that we think that we can do better than you. The level of
excellence at the CRTS is wonderful. It is really amazing to see how richly God has blessed you.

There is no way that a federation of churches can ever match that in a short period of time. So we are not coming from a competitive spirit. Rather, we have a lot of need within our churches. We need ministers and professors and students and we need to build up relationship with the Reformed churches around us. We ask then that you would pray with us for men in the ministry,
5 that there would be men who would take up the task of further studies to become professors and that God would provide us with a seminary if it is his will.

And we ask these things with great hope because our Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven. Sometimes when we think of the ascension, we think of what happened on this side of the cloud. The Bible doesn't tell us very much about that. But if you think of what happened on
10 the other side of the cloud it's quite amazing. They had the greatest celebration in the history of the world. At the coronation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's heart was filled with joy at the work that his Son accomplished. You have these powerful angels and millions upon millions of angels who joined them, together with the saints who have gone before us who praise the Lord Jesus for the work that he had done. He is ruling on the throne and he is able to accomplish his
15 work of gathering his church. In the words of Daniel 7:13, "I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there was one like a son of man and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages should serve before them. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed." Christ is
20 victorious. It is his will to gather his church. So we can be so thankful that we can be a part of that. We can ask him for his help and we will receive his blessing. Thank you.

D. Poppe

Appendix 9

Pastoral Training Program Guidelines

Introduction

5 In the past number of years, several students from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) have completed the 10-12 week internship of the Pastoral Training Program (PTP) here in Australia. The guidelines adopted by Synod 2009 and updated by Synod 2018 (see Appendix A), have generally worked well in supporting the students during their time in our midst. And yet, there are a few aspects of the guidelines that could be updated to reflect the current situation and provide guidance for the deputies about how to handle certain requests.

10 Proposed Changes

As Deputies Training for the Ministry, we are proposing five changes to these guidelines. We propose:

1. To update section 1.a. to incorporate the decision of Synod Bunbury 2018 and to explain the method of compensation which the Canadian churches use.

15 *Rationale:* it would be helpful to update this section to provide clarity to the Deputies and prospective churches about the funding requirements and practices.

2. To update section 1.a. to explain that the assessment and payment of the PTP comes out of the Needy Student Fund.

20 *Rationale:* Since the deputies already assess the churches to support (a) the Needy Student Fund, (b) CRTS and (c) the future Australian Reformed Theological Seminary (ARTS), the deputies do not want to burden the churches with still another assessment. In our report to synod, we will give an accounting of how much money was collected for Needy Students and how much was for the support of the PTP.

3. To update section 1.c. to allow the Deputies to pay for the travel costs of the student's family and to allow them in exceptional circumstances to assist a congregation to pay for the housing and vehicle costs for the student and his family.

30 *Rationale:* Over the past few decades the student body of CRTS has changed so that the majority of students at CRTS are now married men (with children). Since travel costs to Australia are significantly more expensive than travel costs in Canada, the Deputies propose to cover these additional travel costs. Also since some smaller churches may have difficulty funding a vehicle and housing costs for a student, the Deputies may assist these churches with such costs in exceptional cases.

4. To update section 1.d. to allow the Deputies to pay for the travel costs for a student and his family who are participating in a four week mission internship to one of our mission fields.

35 *Rationale:* The PTP includes not only a 10-12 week internship with an experienced minister. A year before this it also includes a four week mission internship. The Deputies were recently asked to provide funding for a student who was planning to do his four week mission internship in PNG. We believe that it would be helpful to bring interested students to our mission fields since this may stir up a love for the mission work and lead to these men considering serving as missionaries in our mission fields. Under the current guidelines, we do not have authority to do so.

40

5. To remove the time frame from section 2, since the current time frame is untenable. At this point, we usually receive requests from CRTS for the placement of students near the end of the year.

Rationale: It is helpful for the guidelines to reflect the current reality of our work.

5 Updated Guidelines

Pastoral Training Program Guidelines for FRCA

1. Compensation for students in the Pastoral Training Program

- 10 a) Deputies Training for the Ministry (Deputies) will liaise with the Canadian Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee in Guelph (appointed to oversee payment of students in Canada in the PTP) to determine the rate of pay for students undertaking the PTP. The students taking the PTP in Australia will be reimbursed at a level to match the Canadian churches' level of support. Their Canadian Committee decided to pay the student interns the rate of pay that the Government of Canada would pay a student employed in a Masters level program the previous year. The Deputies will pay each of the Churches employing a student the equivalent amount (taking into account the foreign exchange rate) in a manner ensuring that the student can be paid on time. The deputies will assess the churches and pay the funds out of the Needy Student Fund and give an accounting of this work to synod.
- 15 b) To encourage participation of the Churches in Australia in the Pastoral Training Program, the travel expenses to and from Australia will be paid by the Australian Churches. This amount would also be sent to the local hosting church.
- 20 c) Deputies Training for the Ministry will pay for the travel costs for the student and his family. In exceptional circumstances the Deputies will also consider assisting a church employing a student to pay for a student's housing and vehicle costs.
- 25 d) In the situation where a student participates in a PTP internship with an experienced minister, the Deputies will fund the PTP for only a ten week period. Students should be able to complete the requirements of the mandatory 10-week Pastoral Training Program during that period of time. The Church employing the student may, at its discretion, enter into an agreement with the student to employ him for a period longer than 10 weeks but would then itself face payment of the additional costs. In cases where a student participates in a four week mission internship Deputies will only pay the travel costs for a student and his family who are participating in a four week mission internship to one of our mission fields.
- 30

2. Assessment

- 35 Deputies Training for the Ministry will consider requests and provide funding for churches participating in the PTP in a timely manner.

3. Foreign Students

It remains the responsibility of the student to apply for the necessary work permit where applicable.

40 4. Employment and taxes

Churches employing students will be responsible to determine the issues regarding employment of students and payroll deductions for taxes, unemployment insurance, etc.

Appendix A

Acts of Synod Bunbury 2018

Found at: <https://synod.frca.org.au/2018/acts/>

Article 90 - Training for the Ministry

- 5 II. 7. o. collect and disburse funds for the PTP in accordance with the Australian adaptation of the Guidelines for the PTP; and reimburse students taking the PTP in Australia, at an increased level to match Canadian churches' level of support;

Deputies Reports for Synod Baldivis 2015

Found at: <https://synod.frca.org.au/2015/reports/>

- 10 Report Deputies for the Training for the Ministry, pg. 408-409

Appendix H

Guidelines developed by the Pastoral Training Program Funding Committee (Canada), adapted by Deputies Training for Ministry and then adopted by Synod Legana 2009 for the Australian Context.

- 15 1. Compensation for students in the Pastoral Training Program
- a. Deputies Training for the Ministry will liaise with the Canadian Committee (appointed to oversee payment of students in Canada in the PTP) to determine the rate of pay for students undertaking the PTP. This Committee decided to pay \$20.00 per hour or \$750.00 per week for students employed during the summer of 2008. Since the requirements of PTP program are considered to be fulfilled during a minimum of 10 weeks of training, the Committee decided to pay the employer, the Church where the student is placed by mutual agreement between the PTP Coordinator and the mentor, a total amount of \$7,500.00 for the 10 weeks of training. The Committee will pay each of the Churches employing a student the above stated amount in a manner ensuring that the student can be paid on time.
- 20
- b. To encourage participation of the Churches in Australia in the Pastoral Training Program, the travel expenses to and from Australia will be paid by the Australian Churches. This amount would also be sent to the local hosting church.
- c. Deputies Training for the Ministry will not pay for additional travel costs, mileage, the student being married and having a family to look after, housing expenses, tuition fees or other considerations. The Canadian Committee considered that it has as mandate to fund an educational program. The Committee is not a Committee for Needy Students. Also, employers that hire students enrolled in a cooperative program of studies at Canadian universities pay students for the period of the training program, but not for travel expenses, family needs, housing expenses or other expenses. However, a local hosting church could, at its discretion, add to the approved amount based on the individual student's circumstances.
- 30
- 35
- d. Deputies Training for the Ministry will fund only the 10 week Pastoral Training Program period. Students should be able to complete the requirements of the mandatory 10-week Pastoral Training Program during that period of time. The Church employing the student may, at its discretion, enter into an agreement with the student
- 40

to employ him for a period longer than 10 weeks but would then itself face payment of the additional costs.

2. Assessment

5 Deputies Training for the Ministry will consider at its October meeting the number of students to be employed by the Churches in the ensuing year and send a letter to the Churches regarding the annual assessment for the PTP requesting the churches to pay the assessment before March 31 of the following year.

3. Foreign Students

10 It remains the responsibility of the student to apply for the necessary work permit where applicable.

4. Employment and taxes

Churches employing students will be responsible to determine the issues regarding employment of students and payroll deductions for taxes, unemployment insurance, etc.

15

Appendix 10

FRCA Vicariate Guidelines

5 The vicariate is considered a useful (albeit voluntary) part of our theological training. At this time, our students study at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). Upon completion of the Master of Divinity program at CRTS, students originating from the FRCA will be offered the opportunity to further their training with a vicariate.

All correspondence concerning the vicariate shall in the first place be addressed to the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the FRCA (DTM).

Definitions

10 *Vicar* – a man who has completed his seminary training, is not yet ordained, and who is taken on by a church for a period of further practical ministry training and development.

Vicariate – a supervised program of practical ministry training and development.

A. Form of Subscription

15 Vicars are required to sign the Form of Subscription prior to the commencement of their duties. This shall be done at the consistory of the church providing the vicariate training.

B. Duration of Vicariate

The vicariate training shall take place over a period of up to twelve months.

C. Deputies

20 The DTM shall have the right to approach a church which they believe could provide suitable vicariate training.

D. Guidelines for Vicariate Training

1. Principles Regarding Vicariates

25 a. Each year, the DTM shall offer fourth year students originating from the FRCA the opportunity to return to Australia to receive the vicariate training. All the churches shall then be informed of potential candidates for vicariates. The churches shall be invited to submit applications.

b. The purpose of a vicariate is to provide training for a vicar. Except in exceptional circumstances vicars should not be placed in vacant congregations or in isolated settings where they cannot be properly supervised and trained.

30 c. A vicariate can be an important part of preparation for the ministry. A local church may benefit greatly from a vicar's work, but this should be seen as a 'fringe benefit' to the vicariate; the main purpose is to train the vicar.

35 d. This training ought to be provided by experienced and able ministers. Some ministers have more experience and/or ability to train a vicar than others. The DTM ought to consider the suitability of the supervising minister in the placement of vicars and the DTM may approach churches and ministers with a request to take a vicar. Supervising ministers ought to be aware that training a

vicar will take a significant amount of time; time saved in a reduced preaching load will need to be spent in evaluating the vicar's sermons and supervising other areas of his ministry.

5 e. A vicar will need adequate time to prepare for his candidacy (preparatory) exam. Consistories should discuss this with the vicar so that he has time during his vicariate and as his exam approaches. The exam should ordinarily take place towards the end of the vicariate period.

f. The Supervising Minister

10 1) The minister may expect to spend between two to four hours per week with the vicar, excluding consistory meetings, joint visits, etc. This time would be spent in sermon evaluation, planning and reporting on pastoral visitation, advice and guidance on the work of the ministry, e.g. devotions and prayer, church polity and the functioning of the consistory and classis, time management, general organisation, the spiritual growth and development of the vicar, etc.

15 2) Vicars need to be encouraged in a regular program of reading and study. The supervising minister and vicar should agree on a program, perhaps in an area of interest or weakness.

20 3) The vicar's work should be closely supervised, especially in the early part of the vicariate. As time goes on he should be given increasing freedom to work on his own and be given more responsibility in certain areas.

g. The Supervising Consistory

25 1) It may be helpful to have the vicar meet regularly (perhaps once a month) with an experienced and able elder who can give him some advice and input.

30 2) The consistory should also evaluate the vicar's sermons and development in the ministry. Both the minister and the consistory should make a careful evaluation of the vicar's progress. Honest advice, encouragement, and criticism ought to be given in a sensitive manner. Time should be set aside for this at a consistory meeting not less than once every three months.

3) The consistory should take account of helpful feedback from the congregation and may seek this using sermon evaluation forms.

2. Elements of Vicariate Training

35 a. Preaching

40 This is obviously a crucial area of his training and much time needs to be spent here. A vicar will be expected to preach once per Sunday through his vicariate and twice per Sunday towards the end of it. The supervising minister should ensure that he has experience in preaching Catechism sermons, as well as sermons based on a single Bible text. Vicars may find it helpful to follow the discipline of preaching through a book of the Bible. It would be good experience for the vicar to preach in some of the other churches of the classical region and to have experience at preaching on special occasions where possible, e.g. a

funeral, wedding, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Sermons and their supporting exegesis are to be closely evaluated primarily by the minister, but also by the consistory, with input from members of the congregation via evaluation forms. Vicars may find it helpful to have a sermon workshop with other ministers (and vicars) of the classical region.

Sermon content is to be evaluated on the basis of the following:

- Is the exegesis accurate?
- Is the sermon well-structured and easy to follow for listeners?
- Is the theme drawn from the text and developed in a coherent and logical manner?
- Is the context (including the place of the passage in redemptive history) taken into account?
- Does the sermon preach Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation in him?
- Is the sermon doctrinally sound?
- Is the application in the sermon drawn from the text?

The delivery of the sermon is to be evaluated for evidence of gifts of communication and contribution to edifying worship.

b. Pastoral Work

- 1) Visitation with the minister: In the early part of the vicariate a vicar will find it helpful to visit members of the congregation with the minister. As time goes on, however, the vicar will be able to visit on his own.
- 2) Visitation with elders: A vicar will gain much experience by participating in home visits with the elders, especially if he can visit with a number of elders and be exposed to various styles and approaches.
- 3) Counselling: Training and practice at counselling will be valuable for a vicar. Much can be learned from watching and listening to an experienced minister helping people through their problems and struggles (if a congregational member is agreeable to the vicar listening in). Depending on their experience and maturity, vicars may be asked to counsel members on their own.

c. Consistory and Classis

Vicars are expected to attend all consistory and classis meetings. They should be prepared to take assigned responsibilities as deemed helpful (chairman, clerk, etc.). It would also be profitable for vicars to attend deacons meetings.

3. **Wife and Family**

Where a vicar is married it would be helpful for the vicar and his wife to meet with the supervising minister and his wife on a regular basis for encouragement, fellowship, and advice. It would also be helpful for the vicar's wife to meet with the wives of

elders (Titus 2:3-5). She should be encouraged to take an active part in the life of the congregation, as family responsibilities permit.

4. **Other Activities**

- 5
- a. Catechism: Part of the training will involve teaching at least one weekly catechism class; this is to be evaluated by the minister or the elder supervising the catechism classes.
- b. Bible studies: Bible study groups are an important part of congregational life and the vicar ought to attend these groups on a regular basis and take a turn at leading them.
- 10
- c. Evangelism: The vicar will find it helpful to learn from the insights of the supervising minister regarding the work of evangelism and to participate in such work as he has opportunity. He may be able to train a group in evangelism.
- d. Youth work: The minister and consistory may want to encourage the vicar to attend or be involved in the youth work of the congregation as part of his training.
- 15
- e. Other activities outside of the church may include a ministerial and useful conferences.

E. **The Financial Support of Vicars**

1. Support

20

A vicar is to receive not less than half of the stipend of the supervising minister. In addition, all allowances and benefits due the supervising minister will be provided to the vicar. The specific needs of each family and current government regulations shall also be taken into consideration.

2. Travel and Accommodation

25

Travelling expenses and accommodation are the responsibility of the church concerned.

3. Federational Support

- a. The DTM will utilise the Needy Student fund to provide financial support to churches who have a vicar.
- 30
- b. Churches may apply to the for up to two-thirds of the costs of the vicariates (i.e. travel, accommodation, vehicle, phone and stipend). Applications are to include a financial budget for that vicariate for that period, a date when funds are required by, and an indication of the minimum level of support required for the vicariate (the latter may be helpful to the deputies in the event of other vicariate applications).
- 35
- c. Should a vicariate be initiated directly by a local church, it will not be eligible for assistance.

4. Relocation

40

If a vicar wishes to relocate to where he came from, the DTM will provide him with sufficient funds to do so after the completion of his vicariate.

Committee for Contact with the EPC and SPC

Report to Synod 2024

1.0 Introduction

Synod 2021 appointed the churches of Launceston and Legana to again form a Deputyship for Contact with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and Southern Presbyterian Church (SPC). According to article 102 of the Acts, our mandate was to:

- a. Continue discussions with the EPC regarding the feasibility of further ecumenical contact. Discussions should specifically focus on:
 - i. The doctrinal points of the well-meant offer of the gospel and conditionality in covenant theology;
 - ii. The doctrinal commitment of communicant members of the EPC;
 - iii. The level of unity desired and how the unity ought to be expressed in our ecumenical contact.
- b. Continue discussions with the SPC regarding the feasibility of further ecumenical contact. Discussion should specifically focus on:
 - i. The doctrinal commitment of the communicant members of the SPC;
 - ii. The level of unity desired and how that unity ought to be expressed in our ecumenical contact; and
- c. Submit a report six months prior to the next synod.

Synod 2021 also decided to take note in article 102 that the Deputies for Interchurch Relations were mandated to develop guidelines for interchurch relations which will be relevant for our relationship with the EPC and SPC. This was to include the relevance of article 67 of Synod Launceston 1985.

To execute this mandate, Launceston and Legana consistories appointed Rev. Wes Bredenhof, br. Gerrit Brouwer, br. Mike Kroeze, br. Philip DeRuiter, and br. Craig Vanderschaaf to form a Committee for Contact with the EPC and SPC (CCES). This report has been prepared by the CCES and approved by both Launceston and Legana consistories.

2.0 Activities

To execute our mandate our committee engaged in the following:

2.1 Meetings

We met with a delegation from the SPC on June 18, 2022 and a delegation from the EPC on November 12, 2022. Both meetings were cordial and we were able to discuss all the items we were mandated to explore. The results of these discussions are found elsewhere in our report.

2.2 FRC Classis North of April 28, 2023

We extended an invitation to both the EPC and SPC to send observers to the classis held on April 28, 2023 in Launceston. Elder Stuart Coles from the Launceston SPC

congregation took up the invitation. He was given the opportunity to have the floor to extend greetings and some news about the SPC to this assembly.

2.3 *Ecumenical Conference*

In connection with the April 28, 2023 classis, CCES was planning to hold an ecumenical conference. Invitations were to be extended to all the classis delegates, as well as all the office bearers of the local FRC, EPC, and SPC congregations. This conference would have allowed FRCA, EPC, and SPC brothers to become better acquainted. Unfortunately, due to internal difficulties within the EPC, this conference could not take place as planned.

3.0 **Observations**

3.1 *Evangelical Presbyterian Church*

There were four specific areas we were mandated to discuss with the EPC:

3.1.1 The Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel

This issue has played a significant role in EPC history. For the EPC, they affirm the free offer of the gospel, but object to the idea of any unfulfilled desire in God. This is one of the points of doctrine connecting the EPC to the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The closer contact we desire with the EPC the more significant this issue would likely become, although there has never been any discussion regarding to what extent differences on this point could be accommodated in ecumenical relationships. The EPC does not have a “declaratory statement” on the well-meant offer, but they did issue a booklet on Common Grace in 1995 that speaks to this issue as well. We were encouraged to write a letter to the EPC Presbytery to get an official response on this question. For reasons that will be mentioned below, this has not yet been done.

3.1.2 Conditionality in Covenant Theology

It was noted that the Westminster Standards have a far more developed doctrine of the covenant than the Three Forms of Unity (TFU). While covenant conditions are not mentioned at all in the TFU, they are mentioned in WCF 7.3 and WLC 32. There were three points on which we readily agreed:

- The covenant of grace includes antecedent/necessary and consequent conditions. The antecedent/necessary condition is faith in Christ and the consequent condition is evangelical obedience.
- The fulfilment of these conditions is not in any way meritorious.
- God graciously supplies what the conditions call for.

We were encouraged to find from this discussion that we are on the same page. It was noted that there may be some diversity of opinion amongst the EPC ministers about the place of children in the covenant of grace. Nevertheless, between the participants in this discussion there was agreement that all the children of believers are covenant children who are to be raised as disciples of Christ. We all agreed that their privileged covenant status adds urgency to the call of the gospel extended to them.

3.1.3 Doctrinal Commitment

The EPC does not require those professing faith to make an explicit commitment to the Westminster Standards. However, they are asked:

- Will you submit in the Lord to all Scriptural teaching, discipline and government in the Church?
- Do you understand that the beliefs and practices of this Church are found in the Westminster Confessional Standards and that this Church believes that they consistently summarise the truths of the Bible?

It was noted that it could be argued that since the Church believes the Westminster Standards to summarize faithfully the Bible, its members do too. Furthermore, submitting in the Lord to the teaching of the Church would also mean submitting to the Reformed faith confessed in the Standards. Practically speaking, the outcome is the same: they do not have members who disagree with the Westminster Standards.

If a Baptist wanted to become a member, the session would advise him or her that the EPC is not a good fit for them. They would be uncomfortable as members of this church and would be better off to worship and affiliate somewhere else.

3.1.4 Level of Unity Desired

We noted that the FRCA is exploring whether to have more categories for ecumenical contacts. From the EPC, there is a desire to recognize the FRCA as a Reformed church with whom they have much in common – there is also the longstanding John Calvin School connection. However, the EPC does not even have a sister church relationship with the PRCA or the Pilgrim Covenant Church in Singapore – and they agree on the well-meant offer of the gospel. So it is doubtful that our discussions will end up in a sister-church relationship anytime in the near future. However, the EPC would be happy to have some other level of formal ecumenical contact. This is, however, something that could also be clarified by the Presbytery.

3.1.5 Conclusion

The CCES was satisfied with the answers provided by the EPC delegates. We do not believe these matters should be impediments to further developing our relationship with the EPC. Unfortunately, over the last few years the EPC has been experiencing much internal strife. The reasons for this are not important for our report, but the practical outcome is that the EPC is not really in a position at this point to be moving forward with us. They will need to resolve their internal issues first.

3.2 *Southern Presbyterian Church*

There were two specific areas we were mandated to discuss with the SPC:

3.2.1 Doctrinal Commitment

In principle, the SPC does not have confessional membership like the FRCA does. Communicant members are not bound to agree with every point of doctrine in the Westminster Standards. However, those who do not agree in

5 everything in the Standards would never be permitted to serve as office bearers. Furthermore, any communicant member who would agitate against the doctrines of the confessions would be subject to church discipline. Finally, it was stressed that the SPC preaches the Reformed faith so strongly that those who disagree with the confessions would be unlikely to feel at home in the SPC and would not pursue membership. Therefore, in the final analysis, the “end product” appears similar. Their congregations are united around Reformed doctrine just as ours.

3.2.2 Level of Unity Desired

10 The idea of a sister-church relationship is not well-understood in the SPC – their relationships have tended to be less formalized. However, they stated that it would be better for us to be closer than we already are, especially for relationships between ministers in our small and isolated Tasmanian context. Ultimately, in principle, we should strive for the closest possible relationship, but we also need to look at what is possible and the steps that can be taken to move towards that. While we are grateful for what we already have on a local level, more can and ought to be done, but moving slowly and carefully.

3.2.3 Conclusion

20 The CCES was satisfied with the answers provided by the delegates from the SPC. On the basis of this discussion, we do believe that this relationship ought to be further developed in an official way.

4.0 Remaining Challenges

25 A significant potential challenge remains on our side with article 67 of Synod 1985. We asked Synod 2021 to decide that this article “has no bearing on the establishment of sister-church relationships with the EPC or SPC.” Synod 2021 declined to make that decision on the basis that the Deputies for Interchurch Relations (DIR) would look at it and make recommendations. However, when we received the Interim Report of the DIR, there was no discussion of this point. In fact, the Interim Report even appealed to article 67 of Synod 1985 as if it were a given that **it is** relevant for all interchurch relationships. Launceston consistory wrote to the DIR to provide feedback and asked them to take note of this assumption. Launceston further asked the DIR to provide a recommendation on whether article 67 of Synod 1985 has any relevance beyond the particular discussion at that synod regarding the PCEA. Since we have not yet seen the final report of the DIR, we do not know if they will follow up on this. To reiterate what was said in the CCES Report to Synod 2021:

35 We believe the way forward past this obstacle is to recognize that Synod 1985's Declaration was made in the limited context of discussions about the PCEA (whose congregations all existed at a lengthy distance from the FRCA). Synod 1987 emphasized that point in its response to Launceston's appeal. Synod 1990 further asserted that the Declaration was not an interpretation of Scripture and Confession, but an application of it – presumably to the situation presenting itself with the PCEA. In the FRCA, we do not have extra-confessional binding to synodical doctrinal pronouncements, thus the Declaration **must** only have that limited character. It served Synod 1985 in its discussions about the PCEA, but has no binding force beyond that. Synod 1985 could not have foreseen our situation where three true churches from three different federations exist in close geographical proximity to one another, nor did this Synod intend its Declaration to speak to such a situation. The Declaration therefore has no bearing on the establishment of sister-church relationships with the EPC or SPC.

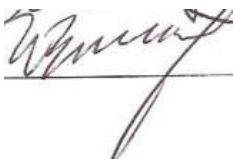
5.0 Recommendations

We recommend Synod decide:

- 5.1 To acknowledge the report submitted by Launceston and Legana as a Committee for Contact with the EPC and SPC (CCES) and thank them for their work.
- 5 5.2 To place a pause in this next inter-synodical period on ecumenical discussions with the EPC.
- 5.3 That if Synod 2024 should decide to adopt an additional category of ecumenical relationship (besides that of a sister-church), that such a relationship be extended to the SPC.
- 10 5.4 To reappoint the churches of Launceston and Legana with the mandate to:
 - 5.4.1 Continue discussions with the SPC about moving towards a sister-church relationship in due time.
 - 5.4.2 Maintain contact with both the EPC and the SPC.
 - 5.4.3 Monitor developments with the EPC and report back to the next Synod on the viability of resuming ecumenical discussions.
- 15 5.5 That Synod 1985 article 67 has no bearing on the establishment of sister-church relationships with the EPC or SPC.

Grounds

- 20 1. While both churches give evidence of the marks of a true church of Jesus Christ, the EPC is not currently a position to engage with us further in a meaningful way.
2. Our discussions with the SPC have been fruitful and there are no obstacles to developing our relationship. While a sister-church relationship might be out of reach at this point, some other form of ecumenical contact would be mutually agreeable.
- 25 3. The Declaration found in article 67 of Synod 1985 was made strictly within the context of discussions regarding the PCEA and did not consider the possibility of two (or more) geographically proximate true churches from different federations.



30 Submitted by Wes Bredenhof
Convenor of CCES
November 21, 2023

Report of Deputies Art. 48 C.O. to Synod Darling Downs 2024

MANDATE

5 Esteemed brothers,

Synod Albany 2021 made the following appointments to serve as Deputies according to Article 48 of the Church Order, i.e. “to assist the classes in all matters provided for in the Church Order”:

For Classis South-West: Rev A Hagg (alternate: Rev H Alkema)

For Classis Central: Rev R.D. Anderson (alternate: Rev R. Eikelboom)

10 For Classis North: Rev A. Souman (alternate: Rev S. 't Hart)

ASSISTANCE GIVEN

As deputies we were requested to assist with the classes in the following situations:

1. Examination of Candidate Rodney den Boer

Classis Central of 21 October 2022

- 15 a) Rev. A. Hagg and Rev. A. Souman were invited to attend the peremptory examination of Candidate Rodney den Boer, according to Article 6.A.1.b C.O., at Classis Central of 21 October 2022, convened by the FRC Darling Downs.
- b) The requisite documentation was presented and found to be in order and the examination could proceed.
- 20 c) After due deliberation, Classis, with the cooperation and concurring advice of the Synodical Deputies Art 48, sustained the examination, with the result that the candidate could be admitted to the ministry and be ordained in the Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs. The deputies are thankful to God for this outcome.

2. Examination of Candidate Anson van Delden

Classis North of 28 October 2022

- 25 a) Rev. R.D. Anderson and Rev. A. Hagg were invited to attend the peremptory examination of Candidate Anson van Delden, according to Article 6.A.1.b C.O., at Classis Central of 28 October 2022, convened by the FRC Mount Nasura.
- b) The requisite documentation was presented and found to be in order and the examination could proceed.
- 30 c) After due deliberation, Classis, with the cooperation and concurring advice of the Synodical Deputies Art 48, sustained the examination, with the result that the candidate could be admitted to the ministry and be ordained in the Free Reformed Church of Legana. The deputies are thankful to God for this outcome.

3. Examination of Candidate Timothy Slaa

Classis North of 20 October 2023

- 5 a) Rev. R.D. Anderson and Rev. A. Hagg were invited to attend the peremptory examination of Candidate Timothy Slaa, according to Article 6.A.1.b C.O., at Classis North of 20 October 2023, convened by the FRC Kelmscott.
- b) The requisite documentation was presented and found to be in order and the examination could proceed.
- 10 c) After due deliberation, Classis, with the cooperation and concurring advice of the Synodical Deputies Art 48, sustained the examination, with the result that the candidate could be admitted to the ministry and be ordained as missionary for PNG in the Free Reformed Church of Southern River. The deputies are thankful to God for this outcome.

Recommendations

Deputies respectfully recommend that synod:

- 15 1. receive this report, and release deputies from their task; and
2. appoint new deputies to assist the classes according to Art. 48 C.O., with one deputy and one alternate from each classical region, i.e. according to the manner decided by Synod Armadale 2012, Decision 3 (Art. 110, p.80-81).

With brotherly greetings,

20 Deputies Art. 48 C.O.

Rev. R.D. Anderson

Rev. A. Hagg

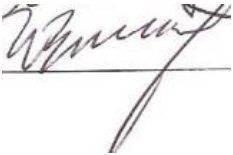
Rev. A. Souman

25

Report of Deputies for Church Order Article 66: Days of Prayer

5 In accordance with Church Order article 66, FRC Launceston was appointed by Synod 2021 to call a Day of Prayer “in times of war, general calamities, and other great afflictions the presence of which is felt throughout the churches.” Thankfully, no such events occurred in this past inter-synodical period and thus there was no need to call for a Day of Prayer.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wes Bredenhof', written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and stylized.

10 Wes Bredenhof
Chairman, FRC Launceston consistory

Indexing Synod Decisions

Deputies' Report to FRCA Synod 2024

Synod 2021 records the following decision:

Article 111 - Indexing Synod Decisions

5 **I. Material**

Item 11.i – Deputies' Report

II. Decision

1. Thank the deputies for their work and discharge them.

2. Appoint deputies with the mandate to:

- 10 a. collate the decisions of Synod Albany 2021 as they relate to articles of the Church Order and:
- i. publish these decisions on the official web page of the FRCA;
 - ii. place one bound paper copy in the archives after the decisions of Synod Albany 2021 have been indexed;
- 15 b. ensure that all the published Acts of the FRCA synods continue to be available on the FRCA website (without password protection, in searchable pdf format);
- b. ensure a copy of the Church Order is available on the FRCA website; and
- c. continue to update and publish the ecclesiastical documents currently on the FRCA website (e.g. Ecclesiastical Ordinances, Rules for Synods, Guidelines for Church Visits, Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations).
- 20

Grounds

1. The churches are well served by the ongoing collation of synod decisions as they relate to the various articles of the Church Order.
- 25 2. The Acts of Synod are of widespread interest both within our churches as well as our sister churches.
3. All information presented in the published Acts of Synod are generated in open session.

ADOPTED

Deputies have carried out their mandate by:

- 30 1. Collating the decisions of Synod Albany 2021 relating to articles of the Church Order.
2. Publishing these on the official web page of the FRCA.
3. Placing a bound updated paper copy in the archives.

4. Making the published Acts of all FRCA synods available on the FRCA website, without password protection, in searchable pdf format.
5. Placing an updated copy of the Church Order on the FRCA website.
- 5 6. Continuing to update and publish, on the FRCA website, ecclesiastical documents (e.g. Ecclesiastical Ordinances, Rules for Synods, Guidelines for Church Visits, Rules for Exercising Sister Church Relations).

Deputies

Warnar Spyker and Jelte Numan



Report on Archives and Library of Synod

29 November 2023

5 The Consistory,
Free Reformed Church at Mt Nasura.

Esteemed brothers,

REPORT ON ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY OF SYNOD

10 In accordance with 'Rules for the Archivist', Synod Acts 2021, Appendix 3, point 3. "*The Archivist reports to the church council on the contents and condition of the Archives; stating who has received or seen items, and the items involved*", I hereby submit my report as follows:

Contents of Synod Archives

Additions to archives since the December 2020 report

Synod 2021 material: Items 21.01 - 21.73

Additions to library

15 Deputies Report 2021
Acts of Synod 2021
Deputies - Book of Praise

Loans from Archives

None.

20 A detailed chronological listing of all documents added to the synod archive since December 2020 is attached.

A detailed chronological listing of all synod archived documents since 1954 is stored in the archive cabinet.

Archive Inspection

25 The date on which the archives will be inspected is yet to be advised by the deputies for inspection of the Synod Archives, the FRC Darling Downs.

With Christian greetings,

30 Peter Van Den Dolder
(Synod Archivist for the Church of Mt Nasura)

CHRONOLOGICAL INDEX TO SYNOD ARCHIVES

(Items added after last reported date December 2020)

Synod 2021 - Final Agenda / Credentials

- 21.1 Synod 2021 Agenda
- 5 21.2 Credentials Delegates

Correspondence Inwards

- 21.3 Free Reformed Church of Albany – Recommendation Sr K van Duyn as Administrative Assistant
- 10 21.4 Free Reformed Church of Albany – Recommendation FRC Darling Downs Synod 2024 Convening Church
- 21.5 Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura – Appeal re application of Article 31 CO by Synod 2018 (Art 76,77,78)
- 21.6 Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura – Appeal re Classis North decision re ICRC
- 15 21.7 Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura – Overture re sister church relationship RCNZ
- 21.8 Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura – Appeal re adoption of certain Hymns by Synod 2018
- 21.9 Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura – Overture re Financing Australian Book of Praise
- 21.10 Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura – Overture re DGK & GKN
- 21.11 Free Reformed Church of Mt Nasura – Overture re OPC
- 20 21.12 Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs – Appeal the decision of Synod 2018 to declare appeals by 3 members inadmissible (Art 76,77,78)
- 21.13 Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs – Appeal re Increasing Number of Hymn
- 21.14 Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs – Overture re Synod 2018 not interacting with concerns.
- 25 21.15 Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs – Overture re EPC and SPC
- 21.16 Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs – Overture re OPC
- 21.17 Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs – Overture re RCNZ
- 21.18 Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs – Overture re Classis North decision re ICRC (incl Appendix)
- 30 21.19 Free Reformed Church of Armadale – Appeal of Articles 76,77,78 of Acts of Synod Bunbury 2018
- 21.20 Free Reformed Church of Armadale – Overture re DGK & GKN
- 21.21 Free Reformed Church of Mundijong – Overture re DGK & GKN
- 21.22 Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott – Overture re OPC
- 35 21.23 Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott – Overture re DGK & GKN
- 21.24 Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott – Overture re Training for the Ministry
- 21.25 Free Reformed Church of Southern River – Overture re OPC
- 21.26 Free Reformed Church of Launceston – Overture re FRC Mt Nasura Appeal re adoption of certain Hymns
- 40 21.27 Free Reformed Church of Launceston – Overture re FRC Mt Nasura Appeal re Classis North proposal re ICRC
- 21.28 Free Reformed Church of Launceston – Overture re OPC
- 21.29 Free Reformed Church of Launceston – Overture re RCNZ & FRC Mt Nasura Overture re RCNZ
- 45 21.30 Free Reformed Church of Melville – Overture re Overall Deputies' Report – Interchurch Relations – Outside Australia
- 21.31 Free Reformed Church of Melville – Overture re Training for the Ministry
- 21.32 Free Reformed Church of Bunbury – Overture re Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise

- 21.33 Free Reformed Church of Bunbury – Overture re EPC and SPC
- 21.34 Free Reformed Church of Bunbury – Overture re Overall Deputies' Report –
Interchurch Relations – Outside Australia
- 21.35 Free Reformed Church of Bunbury – Overture re Training for the Ministry
- 5 21.36 Free Reformed Church of Bunbury – Confidential letter for Synod delegates
- 21.37 Classis Central – Decision made in regards to appeal it received re decision of Synod
2018
- 21.38 Classis Central – Overture re Sister Churches URCNA
- 21.39 Classis North – Proposal to send observers to ICRC meetings
- 10 21.40 Supplementary report from Deputies for Interchurch Relations – DGK & GKN, FRCSA,
KPKK
- 21.41 Supplementary report Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise
- 21.42 Further Deputies Material – Regulations for the Financial Aid of Students Pg 1-4,
Financial Assistance for Theology Students
- 15 21.43 Report from Deputies for Infrastructure and Venue
- 21.44 Treasurers Audit Report

SYNOD 2021 OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE

Letters of Appointment

- 21.45 Deputies – General Secretary: Br Jack den Boer, Alternate: Br Willem Amoraal
- 20 21.46 Deputies – Website Committee: Br Len Vermeulen [convenor], Sr Bronya Mulder, Br
Winston 't Hart, Rev Wes Bredenhof. Alternate: Sr Justine Wagenaar
- 21.47 Deputies for Interchurch Relations – outside Australia: Rev Stephen 't Hart [convenor],
Br Eric DeHaan, Rev Hendrik Alkema, Rev Axel Hagg, Br Pete Witten, Br Colin
25 Mulder, Rev Anthon Souman, Br Henk Terpstra, Br Bert Veenendaal, Br John Bruning
sr, Rev Kelvin Dekker, Br Roelf Groenewold, Rev Abel Pol, Alternate: Br Geoff Numan,
Alternate: Br Sam Groenewold
- 21.48 Deputies – Standing Committee for the Australian Book of Praise: Rev Carl Vermeulen
[convenor], Rev Richard Eikelboom, Br Rob Eikelboom, Sr Geraldine Plug, Br Harm
Van Dijk
- 30 21.49 Deputies – Training for the Ministry: Rev Dirk Poppe [convenor], Rev Wes Bredenhof,
Br Bruce Huizinga, Rev Reuben Bredenhof, Br Alwyn Terpstra, Br Wayne Pleiter,
Alternate: Br Rob Eikelboom
- 21.50 Deputies – Contact with the EPC/SPC: Rev Wes Bredenhof [convenor], FRC
Launceston, FRC Legana
- 35 21.51 Deputies – Article 48 CO Classis Central: Rev Dean Anderson, Alternate: Rev Richard
Eikelboom; Rev Axel Hagg, Alternate: Rev Hendrik Alkema; Rev Anthon Souman,
Alternate: Rev Stephen 't Hart
- 21.52 Deputies – Article 66 Days of Prayer: FRC Launceston
- 21.53 Deputies – Indexing Synod Decisions: Br J Numan, Br Warnar Spyker
- 40 21.54 Deputies – Synod Archive: FRC Mount Nasura
- 21.55 Deputies – Marriage Act: Br H Faas, Br W Spyker
- 21.56 Deputies – Synod Venue and Infrastructure: Br E 't Hart, Br Alan van der Wal,
Alternate: Br Adrian van der Wal, Alternate: Br Darren Brouwer
- 21.57 Deputies – Synod Treasurer: Br R Dekker, Alternate: Br A Bonker
- 45 21.58 Audit Deputies for the Training of the Ministry: FRC Southern River
- 21.59 Deputies – Inspection of Archives: FRC Darling Downs
- 21.60 Deputies – Audit Synod Treasurer: FRC Byford

Letters of Discharge/Thanks

- 21.61 Deputies – Website Committee: Br T Brown, Br G van Burgel
21.62 Deputies for Interchurch Relations: Rev Dean Anderson, Br Brian Bosveld, Rev Richard Pot, Br Eric Heerema
5 21.63 Convening Church Synod 2015: FRC Bunbury

Outgoing Letters

- 21.64 Letter to FRC Mount Nasura regarding:
• Overture re DGK & GKN
• Overture re OPC
10 • Appeal re application of Article 31 CO by Synod 2018 (Art 76,77,78)
• Appeal re adoption of certain hymns by Synod 2018
• Appeal re Classis North proposal re ICRC
• Overture re sister church relationship with RCNZ
• Overture re financing of Book of Praise
15 21.65 Letter to FRC Darling Downs regarding:
• Overture re OPC
• Appeal of the decision of Synod 2018 to declare appeals by 3 members inadmissible (Art. 76,77,78)
• Overture re EPC and SPC
20 • Overture re RCNZ
• Appeal re Increasing Number of Hymns
• Overture re Synod 2018 not interacting with concerns
21.66 Letter to FRC Armadale regarding:
• Overture re DGK & GKN
25 • Appeal of Articles 76,77, and 78 of Acts of Synod Bunbury 2018
21.67 Letter to FRC Mundijong regarding:
• Overture re: DGK & GKN
21.68 Letter to FRC Kelmscott regarding:
• Overture re DGK & GKN
30 • Overture re OPC
21.69 Letter to FRC Southern River regarding:
• Overture re OPC
21.70 Letter to FRC Launceston regarding:
• Overture re OPC
35 • Overture re FRC Mount Nasura Appeal re adoption of certain hymns
• Overture re FRC Mount Nasura Appeal re Classis North proposal re ICRC
• Overture re RCNZ and FRC Mount Nasura Overture re RCNZ
21.71 Letter to FRC Melville regarding:
• Overture re Training for the Ministry
40 • Overture re Overall Deputies' Report – Interchurch Relations
21.72 Letter to FRC Bunbury regarding:
• Overture re Training for the Ministry
• Overture re EPC and SPC
• Overture re Standing Committee for the Book of Praise
45 21.73 Letter to all deputies regarding Synod Albany Article 115

SYNOD 2021 CLOSED SESSION

Correspondence Inward

None.

Correspondence Outward

5 None.

GLOSSARY OF ECCLESIASTICAL ABBREVIATIONS USED IN INDEX

CanRC	Canadian Reformed Churches
DGK	Reformed Churches of the Netherlands
EPC	Evangelical Presbyterian Church
FERCS	First Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore
FRCA	Free Reformed Churches of Australia
FRCSA	Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
GGRC	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Calvin
GGRI	Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Di Indonesia
GKN	Reformed Churches Netherlands
ICRC	International Conference of Reformed Churches
KPCK	Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
RCN	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
RCNr	Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Restored)
RCNZ	Reformed Churches of New Zealand
SPC	Southern Presbyterian Church
URCNA	United Reformed Churches of North America

GLOSSARY OF OTHER ABBREVIATIONS USED IN INDEX

FRC	Free Reformed Church
CO	Church Order
BoP	Book of Praise

Nominating Authorities: Marriage Act 1961

4 December 2023

5 Synod 2024
C/- Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs
Attention: The Synod Coordinator
BY EMAIL: iversluis@wga.com.au

Esteemed brothers

10 Deputies' Report

Mandate

Synod Albany 2021 made the following decision with respect to Nominating Authorities (Article 116 – Deputies for Marriage Act – Nominating Authorities):

15 To appoint new deputies officially designated as the *Nominating Authorities* to discharge duties under the *Marriage Act 1961*.

Background

20 On 22 September 1999, the Governor-General first declared the Free Reformed Churches of Australia as a “recognised denomination”, such declaration having been made under section 26 of the *Marriage Act 1961 (Cth)*. This declaration has since been repeated, most recently under the *Marriage (Recognised Denominations) Proclamation 2018*.

The declaration of the FRCA as a “recognised denomination” entitles all ministers of religion within the bond of the FRCA, by virtue of that fact, to become registered as marriage celebrants (see section 29 of the *Marriage Act 1961*).

25 The Act requires that the “recognised denomination” nominate ministers of religion within that denomination for registration. To that end, deputies are required to be appointed by each Synod with the authority to nominate new ministers within the bond for registration.

The *Marriage Act* is administered by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department – Marriage Law and Celebrants Section. From time to time this Department issues information updates which deputies then circulate to the various ministers within the bond.

30 Helpful information as to the administration of the Act and related links can be found at

<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage>

35 It should finally be noted that, whilst the declaration of a “recognised denomination” is made by the relevant Commonwealth department (Attorney-General's Department), the registration of the individual minister is performed by the relevant State Department (Department of Justice in Western Australia, Department of Justice in Tasmania and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General in Queensland).

Execution of Mandate

Deputies have been able to execute their mandate over the past 3 years.

In summary, the following has been carried out:

- 5 • Incoming ministers have been nominated by deputies to the relevant State Registrar, and these ministers have become registered as marriage celebrants (Rev Dekker, Rev Witten, Rev den Boer and Rev van Delden);
- The relevant State Registrars have been advised of departing ministers from the bond of the FRCA (Rev Alkema, Rev Bredenhof);
- 10 • The records of the ministers within the FRCA kept at the relevant State Registrars have been kept up to date;
- Information disseminated by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, by the Western Australian Department of Justice, and by the Tasmanian Department of Justice has been forwarded to the relevant ministers within the FRCA.

15 There have been no further significant amendments to the *Marriage Act 1961* since the 2017 amendments which redefined marriage as the “union of 2 people to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life”.

Deputies remain of the view that it is administratively convenient that, for the purposes of marriage celebrancy within the FRCA, the FRCA remain a “recognised denomination”. We recommend that 2 deputies be appointed for the task of nominating ministers and circulating information.

20 **Recommendation**

Deputies recommend that Synod Darling Downs 2024 resolve:

To appoint new deputies officially designated as the *Nominating Authorities* to discharge duties under the *Marriage Act 1961*.

Respectfully submitted



25 Humphry Faas



Warnar Spyker

Inspection of Synod Archives

20th December 2023

5 **To:** denboerjack@gmail.com (via email)

Regarding Synod Darling Downs 2024

Dear Brothers,

10 Consistory hereby reports that on Monday the 18th of December 2023, two representatives (Peter Vandyke and Henk Eikelboom) from the Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs inspected the Synod Archives.

These have been found to be complete and in good order.

With Christian greetings

15

Jordan H. Swarts

Br. Jordan Hendrik Swarts
Correspondence clerk

20



Rev. R den Boer
Chairman

Deputies for Venue and Infrastructure

Report

5 As deputies, we are extremely thankful to our Father in heaven who has given us wisdom, endurance and the means to plan and provide for synod's IT, sound and venue infrastructure needs yet once again.

Convening Church

We contacted the appointed convening church 2 years prior to projected Synod 2024 requesting they give some time and thought into a synod coordinator.

10 We had a meeting with the coordinator and a member of DD COM 31/7/2023, to ascertain the suitability of the DD church building as a venue for Synod 2024.

Since then there has been little to no communication with them. Despite a number of requests for progress reports submitted to them, we received very scant information. So from the Venue Infrastructure perspective there is little more to report at this point in time; we trust that our supplementary report will have more detail.

15 At the time of writing this report, 15/12/2023, Deputies are not aware of the establishment of the various committees to prepare for Synod 2024. Deputies are following up with the coordinator to obtain this information to ensure synod preparations continue as required.

Synod Handbook

20 This has progressed well and has been standardised across all required tasks to ensure smooth preparation of Synod's requirements.

An Organisational Flow Chart was also designed and passed on to the coordinator enabling him to establish the committees.

As the various committees are setup, we will share the relevant section pertaining to their task with them.

25 Synod Table

Deputies were informed that the table is currently stored at the DD church.

Audio system

At our meeting at DD church 31/7/2023, we discussed the use of the venue audio system and our ability to incorporate this into our systems. We will endeavour to do this where possible.

30 We will provide and operate an audio system, which includes the ability for delegates and audience to follow the discussion, as we have done previously.

Computer system

Setup of an upgraded computer system is underway and will be ready for deployment when required. Adequate networking, data storage, internal email and data backup will be provided.

Printer

Printer supplier has been contacted and will supply suitable printer(s).

Projectors

- 5 Projectors are available for the audience to follow the discussion and to project the words of the Psalm/Hymn, if required.

Live Stream

Synod 2018 decided **not** to livestream Synod sessions (ACTS article 104 – Proposal 2).

However, since that time, we have experienced the Covid-19 pandemic, and livestreaming became common in our churches.

- 10 Because of the ongoing pandemic at the time of Synod 2021, foreign delegates were unable to enter the country and so deputies prepared a system to allow foreign delegates (and even our own deputies) to interact remotely with Synod, should Synod approve and require this facility.

- 15 Synod 2021 (ACTS article 13) decided not to use the remote access facility but did decided to livestream the evening public sessions.

The church community (local, metro and abroad) greatly appreciated the livestream, with a typical viewer base of around 300 viewers from around the world joining us each evening.

We received a lot of positive feedback; however, the church community did express some disappointment that closed sessions and committee work happened in the evenings.

- 20 Although on occasion short closed sessions may be unavoidable, historically these, where possible, were avoided for the evenings since it was recognised that church members are encouraged to attend and show interest in Synod proceedings. (Please refer Synod 2021 (ACTS article 13 section B)). Synod 2021 did schedule some closed sessions and committee work during the evenings.

- 25 We will have hardware available so that livestream can be activated at short notice. Synod will need to decide and instruct us which sessions will be livestreamed.

The deputies have reviewed the operational aspects of the livestream system implemented at Synod 2021 and are more confident that potential issues be mitigated at the Synod 2024.

Video Call facilities for overseas delegates unable to attend Synod in person will be available.

- 30 **Electronic copies of Reports**

Requests has been sent to the Synod coordinator to furnish us with digital copies of all agenda items, Deputy Reports and other relevant documents in a suitable format for inclusion on the computer system for delegate use.

Supplementary Report

- 35 We expect to provide a Supplementary Report during Synod 2024, providing up to date financial and operational aspects of Synod 2024 as per the mandate.

Provisional Proposal. (To be amended in supplementary report dependant on next hosting church)

1. To thank the deputies for the work done and discharge them.
2. To appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 - 5 a. liaise with the next convening church in a timely fashion regarding:
 - i. requirements for synod venue;
 - ii. updating the synod hosting handbook, and pass on the handbook to the convening church when it is appointed;
 - 10 iii. requesting that synod committees re-evaluate the handbook, and if necessary, pass any updates to deputies;
 - iv. maintaining contact with synod committees in their deliberations and preparations for synod;
 - v. being closely involved with the Venue Subcommittee and answering any logistical queries they may have; and
 - 15 vi. monitor the location and condition of synod table and associated hardware;
 - a. oversee replacement if required; and
 - b. oversee setup of synod table at next synod venue;
 - b. provide and operate an audio system which includes the ability for delegates and audience to follow the discussion clearly;
 - 20 c. provide and maintain a computer system for delegates which:
 - i. is easy to use with email and browsing capabilities;
 - ii. has central data storage;
 - iii. has convenient printing capability;
 - iv. has secure internal email facilities;
 - 25 v. has data and email backup;
 - vi. includes a data projector for the audience to follow the discussions and also project the Psalm or Hymn that will be sung if required; and
 - vii. investigate the implementation of a Microsoft Office 365 solution including Microsoft Teams;
 - 30 d. be prepared for the eventuality that synod may require the “live streaming” technology;
 - e. be prepared for the eventuality that synod may use “video call” meetings with overseas delegates not able to attend the next synod;

- f. work closely with convening committees and coordinate the audio-visual/computer matters of synod venue preparations;
- g. liaise with the convening church prior to synod for an electronic copy – not scanned – of all reports and agenda items so that the agenda can be setup with links to the relevant documents, and to make this available when delegates log on to the “Synod Server”;
- h. be available and able to assist at all synod sessions;
- i. provide full computer and sound support; and
- j. submit a report to the next synod 6 months in advance and a supplementary report during synod.

Grounds

1. Synod must be able to do its work smoothly through the provision of technical equipment that allows:
 - a. delegates to clearly understand each other;
 - b. the audience, local and remote, to follow the discussion;
 - c. flexibility to expand and contract as the number of delegates changes; and
 - d. the computer system to service synod with an enhanced method of distributing proposals and the like quickly and efficiently.
2. The role of the Deputies for Infrastructure and Venue has been of great benefit in enhancing the smooth preparation and operation of synod.
3. Synod deputies can use Microsoft Teams to enhance their deputy work between synods.
4. The Teams application lends itself to allow more collaboration between various deputies whether in the same location or more remote locations.
5. Due to changes in software licensing models, moving to a more permanent cloud based solution is a more viable approach.
6. It is highly likely that Microsoft will be discontinuing its on-premise exchange platform in the next 3 years.

Humbly Submitted

Deputies for Venue and Infrastructure

Alan van der Wal

Eric 'tHart