

AGENDA
for the Fifth Synod of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES in NORTH AMERICA
convening Tuesday, June 15, 2004, at 1:00 P.M., Mountain Daylight Time
at Bethel United Reformed Church, Calgary, Alberta
Ending Friday evening, June 18, 2004

Registration: 12:00 - 1:00 P.M. Meeting to begin at 1:00 P.M.

I. OPENING MATTERS

- A. Meeting called to order by the convening church, Bethel United Reformed Church, Calgary
- B. Presentation of the Credentials and roll call of delegates
- C. Credentials Committee reports
- D. Assent to the Form of Subscription by all the delegates
- E. Synod declared constituted

II. INITIAL BUSINESS

- A. Reception of new congregations and assent by their delegates to the Form of Subscription
- B. Welcome to delegates, visitors, and guests
- C. Adoption of a time schedule
(Suggested: Tuesday, 1:00 – 5:30, Evening inspirational meeting - 7:30 P.M.; Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday 8:30 - Noon, 1:30 - 5:30, 7:00 - 9:00. Fifteen minute breaks at 10 A.M. and 3 P.M. Sessions may be extended by vote, if necessary.)
- D. Election of officers for the meeting of the Fifth Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America
- E. Setting times for special orders of the day; for Ecumenical Observers and Delegates.

III. MATTERS BEFORE SYNOD

- A. Report of the Calling Church
- B. Stated Clerk's Report
- C. Treasurers' Reports (Trinity, St. Catharines, ON and Pompton Plains, NJ)..... **p.150**
- D. Overtures
 - 1. Revise article 3 of the Church Order [Classis Western Canada]..... **p.3**
 - 2. Amend appendix 1 of the Church Order [Classis Southwest U.S.]..... **p.3**
 - 3. Recommend standardized calling procedure [Classis Western Canada]..... **p.4**
 - 4. Approve republication of 1976 CRC Psalter Hymnal [Classis Southwest U.S.]..... **p.4**
 - 5. Appoint two churches for URCNA financial matters [Classis Southwest U.S.]..... **p.5**
 - 6. Authorize formation of Classis Pacific Northwest [Classis Southwest U.S.]..... **p.6**
 - 7. Adopt statement on admission to the Lord's Supper [Classis Western Canada].....**p.7**
 - 8. Affirm statement on creation [Classis Southern Ontario]..... **p.10**
 - 9. Affirm statement on human or animal death before the Fall [Classis Michigan]..... **p.15**
 - 10. Affirm statement on homosexuality [Classis Michigan]..... **p.15**
 - 11. Affirm statement on abortion [Classis Michigan]..... **p.16**
 - 12. Adopt changes to Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
[Classis Southern Ontario]..... **p.16**
 - 13. Amend phase three of Guidelines for Ecumenicity [Classis Southern Ontario].....**p.17**

E. Appeals NOTE: These appeals are not being made public due to their sensitive nature and references made to Executive sessions of Classis Meetings.

- 1. Grande Prairie Appeal, re: profession of faith**p.18**
- 2. Grande Prairie Appeal, re: extra-confessional statement **p.26**
- 3. Leduc Appeal, re: extra-confessional statement**p.31**
- 4. Trenev Appeal, re: text of New Testament**p.35**
- 5. Navis Appeal, re: orthodoxy of sermon..... **p.56**

F. Reports of Committees

- 1. Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity.. p.82
 - a. Church Order Committee..... **p.98**
 - b. Songbook Committee**p.108**
 - c. Theological Education Committee**p.111**
- 2. Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad **p.118**
- 3. Co-operative Savings Fund..... **p.133**
- 4. URCNA Web Site Report**p.137**
- 5. Report of the URCNA Corporation (Canada)..... **p.149**

IV. ELECTIONS

- A. Stated Clerk and Alternate
- B. Board of Directors
- C. Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Committee

V. CLOSING MATTERS

- A. Choosing the calling church, place, and date for the next meeting of Synod
- B. Reading of the Concept Minutes
- C. Acknowledgments and Adjournment
- D. Closing Devotions

Overture #1

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod 2004 of the URCNA to add the words “help him” to Article 3 of the Church Order such that the revised article will read as follows:

Competent men should be urged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man who is a member of a church of the federation and who aspires to the ministry must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, which shall assume supervision of all aspects of his training, including his licensure to exhort, and to assure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church should **help him** ensure that financial needs are met.

Grounds

1. The sentence in question currently states that “The council of his church should ensure that his financial needs are met.” This sentence can be interpreted to mean that a man who aspires to the ministry of the word can expect that the responsibility to provide financially for his education and family’s needs will be solely that of the council who supervises his training. This interpretation is not consistent with the cooperative covenantal nature that was intended when this last sentence was included in article 3.
2. As with any covenantal relationship, there are two parties with certain obligations. The council of his church is responsible to help ensure the financial needs of the student are met by assisting the student in arranging financial support through various sources, including, but not limited to, home church support, federative financial assistance, scholarships, free will offerings, personal savings, family members and the like. His church should also assist him with financial planning and budgeting where necessary. The student is responsible to ensure that his needs are made known to his church and that plans for his financial well-being are sound and sustainable. As much as possible, financial plans should be in place prior to the student beginning his training.

Rev. Bill DeJong, clerk
Classis Western Canada

Overture # 2

Classis Southwest U.S. of the URCNA overtures Synod Calgary 2004 to amend Appendix 1 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America as follows:

“2. PROCEDURE

- a. The prospective licentiate must apply to his Consistory for the exam, securing the required credentials. At least thirty days before the exam, the ~~council~~ Consistory is to announce publicly its intention to examine the prospective licentiate, providing opportunity for other ~~councils~~ Consistories to render observation and/or objections.
- b. The prospective licentiate must be examined by his ~~council~~ Consistory, and the successful completion of the exam will be certified to other ~~councils~~ Consistories within the federation.”

Grounds:

1. The present language of the Appendix seems to call for the material participation of the Deacons in examining prospective licentiates, a work that is properly restricted to Ministers of the Word and Elders.
2. All other examinations of men who aspire to serve as Ministers of the Word in the URCNA are conducted by Ministers and Elders.

- a. Articles 4 and 5 and Appendix 2: Ministers and Elders of the Classis in which his supervising Consistory is a participant conduct Candidacy examinations.
 - b. Article 6 and Appendix 3: Ministers and Elders of the Classis in which his supervising Consistory is a participant conduct Ordination examinations.
 - c. Article 8 and Appendix 4: Ministers and Elders of the Classis in which his supervising Consistory is a participant conduct Colloquia Docta.
 - d. Article 25: Only Ministers of the Word and Elders may be delegated to classis where all other examinations take place. All business conducted by classis originates with a Consistory (without Deacons) rather than the Council.
 - e. Article 26: The Consistory, not the Council, is answerable to the Classis with regard to whether “the Word of God is faithfully preached”.
3. The practices alluded to in ground 1 are properly the work of Ministers and Elders, but not of deacons.
 - a. Article 2: “The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word” include “assisting the elders in the shepherding and discipline of the congregation”.
 - b. Article 14: “The duties belonging to the office of elder” include maintaining “the purity of the Word and Sacraments” and exercising “discipline in the congregation.”
 - c. Article 15: “The duties belonging to the office of deacon” do not include duties mentioned above (a. and b.).

Should the prospective licentiate be licensed and “certified” to other congregations, it is the responsibility of the Consistories of these other congregations, not the Councils, to oversee his exhortation in their midst.

Overture # 3

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod 2004 Synod of the URCNA to recommend a standardized calling procedure

Grounds:

1. A standardized calling procedure will protect the relationship between the Minister and his council.
2. We believe that the office of Minister of the Word is a calling. The questionnaires that are now used by calling committees resemble secular job applications.
3. We believe that the initial contact by a calling committee should not be directed to the Minister.

Rev. Bill DeJong, clerk
Classis Western Canada

Overture # 4

Background:

The singing of psalms and hymns has a long history in the church. In 1999, at the Synod of Hudsonville, Michigan, a synodical committee was formed to begin working on a songbook for the United Reformed Churches, and that committee began their work. However, because the need for a songbook was so pressing, that same synod found it necessary to approve a republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal. Among other reasons, this was because of the scarcity of the Psalter Hymnal and the worn condition of the books in use.

Since that time, the federation has grown. Not only have the numbers of members increased in our churches, but also the number of churches has increased. Once again, it is becoming difficult to obtain a sufficient number of Psalter Hymnals for use in our churches.

Therefore, Classis Southwest U.S., overtures Synod 2004 in Calgary, Alberta:

That synod approve a republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal with a layout similar to that of its previous republication for the United Reformed Churches.

Grounds:

1. It has been almost 5 years since the last republication took place. Since then, several of our churches have grown, and several new churches have been organized, thereby increasing the number of books needed.
2. It appears that our own hymnal is still several years away from completion.
3. The 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal is known among us and satisfactory.

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Overture # 5

Background

Since our “birth” in 1996, the URCNA has sought to fund the work of its various standing and ad hoc committees by way of mandating two churches- one in the USA and one in Canada- to process requests for reimbursement of costs incurred. There is no quota, neither is there a budget amount set- funds that must be collected so that the various legitimate costs incurred can be paid. Neither, for that matter, are there any guidelines in place as to what may be spent, who may authorize committee and committee members’ expenditure, etc.

As we, under the blessing of the Lord, continue to grow- and, we trust and pray, the outreach and ministries of the federation grow apace- the desirability and even necessity of working with a clearly defined budget becomes ever more obvious. For example, the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad is receiving request for “Ecumenical Contact” and eventual “Ecumenical Relations” from various churches abroad (for example, sending United Reformed Church delegates to Seoul, Korea; South Africa; and perhaps Australia). Pursuing such Contact/Relations requires money. But who decides what monies may be expended?

Overture

In view of the above, Classis Southwest U.S. overtures Synod Calgary 2004, to appoint two churches (one in the USA and one in Canada) with the following mandate:

1. Contact all the current synodically-appointed committees and the federation treasurers (in the U.S. and Canada) to discover how these committee budgets are set and whether they have concerns about how these budgets are set.
2. After gathering information from these committees and treasurers, propose to synod a system which would assist these committees in setting their budgets, including, but not limited to:
 - whether or not these committee themselves should initiate setting their budgets,
 - whether or not synod or other assemblies should be involved in the setting or approval there budgets,
 - how the funds to meet their budget should be raised.
3. Report to the next synod.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Overture # 6

Classis Southwest U.S. overtures Synod Calgary 2004 to authorize the formation of Classis Pacific Northwest, consisting of the following congregations:

Abbotsford, British Columbia—Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church
Bellingham, WA—United Reformed Church of Bellingham, WA [unorganized]
Boise, ID—Cloverdale United Reformed Church
Jerome, ID—United Reformed Church of the Magic Valley [unorganized]
Kennewick, WA—Grace United Reformed Church
Lynden, WA—United Reformed Church of Lynden, WA
Nampa, ID—United Reformed Church of Nampa, ID
Salem, OR—Immanuel’s Reformed Church
Surrey, British Columbia—Surrey Covenant Reformed Church
Tacoma, WA—Evangelical Reformed Church

Grounds:

1. Since the meeting of Synod St. Catharines [1997] when most of the present URCNA classes were established, a number of congregations [excluding two unorganized congregations] from the Pacific Northwest have joined the federation, including:

Abbotsford, British Columbia—Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church
Belgrade, MT—Belgrade United Reformed Church
Kennewick, WA—Grace United Reformed Church
Nampa, ID—United Reformed Church of Nampa, ID
Surrey, British Columbia—Surrey Covenant Reformed Church
Tacoma, WA—Evangelical Reformed Church

2. The establishment of a new classis in the Pacific Northwest will help alleviate some of the formidable travel expenses for those congregations whose delegates must travel long distances to attend classis meetings. Most of the congregations listed in the overture are within one day’s drive of each other.

3. There is a strong desire among many of the congregations listed in the overture to create a classis that will allow them to work more closely together as members of a broader regional assembly. At the present time, the URCNA congregations in the Pacific Northwest are divided arbitrarily between Classis Southwest U.S. and Classis Western Canada. This configuration is not conducive to closer ecclesiastical cooperation with congregations in close geographic proximity to each other.

4. We urge the broader assemblies of the URCNA to include the Abbotsford, BC and Surrey, BC congregations as part of Classis Pacific Northwest in light of the fact that they are in close geographic proximity to the other congregations listed in the overture. In addition, it is our desire to express both our confessional and organizational unity in a manner that transcends national boundaries.

Note: The consistories of the Belgrade United Reformed Church of Belgrade, Montana, and the Calvary United Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado, have expressed their reasons for remaining in Classis Southwest U.S. These have been affirmed by classical action.

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk
Classis Southwest U.S.

Overture # 7

Background:

In recent years, a good deal of debate in the Reformed churches has centered around paedocommunion - the practice of admitting to the Lord's Supper all those who are baptized, solely by virtue of their baptism. The issue has been studied and debated in a number of denominations, including the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the US, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America.

The issue made its appearance among the United Reformed Churches during the June 2000 meeting of Classis Western Canada. At that time, a man being examined for candidacy requested clarification on the question of whether the Reformed Confessions teach that a profession of faith is a necessary prerequisite for partaking of the Lord's Supper. After consideration of the question, classis judged that the Confessions to which the URCNA subscribe - the Belgic Confession of Faith (BCF), Heidelberg Catechism (HC) and Canons of Dort (CD) - do require a public profession of faith as a prerequisite for participating in the Lord's Supper.

Since that time, the issue has continued to come before the churches, both formally at the classical level, and informally through discussions, debates, and published arguments. In all of these, a primary question centers on the Confessions of the Church: Do the Three Forms of Unity permit participation in the Lord's Supper by those who have not yet made profession of faith?

A careful examination of those Confessions reveals that, although the phrase "profession of faith" is never used, the substance of the practice - as set forth in our "Form for the Public Profession of Faith" - is presented as the necessary demand for those who would participate in the Lord's Supper. Such an examination must take into account the different goals of the Church's recognized sacraments; the different intended recipients of those sacraments; and the different manner of prescribed participation in the sacraments.

Our Confessions recognize a clear difference between the goals of the sacraments. In examining the goal of baptism, HC Ques. 69 presumes that this sacrament is *passive*, signifying and sealing that the recipient *has a part* in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The ensuing answer portrays the participant as being wholly passive: "I am washed." In contrast to this, Ques. 75 presumes a more *active* goal for the Lord's Supper, which is presumed to signify and seal that the recipient *partakes* of the sacrifice of Christ and His benefits. And again, the answer portrays an activity on the part of the participant: the believer eats, sees, receives and tastes.

Similarly, BCF Art. 34 teaches us that baptism is the sacrament "by which we are received into the Church of God, and separated from all other people and strange religions," and thus it "serves as a testimony to us that He will forever be our gracious God and Father." That is, baptism is the sacrament by which we are received into the Covenant community. This truth is emphasized when this article notes that baptism is to be received by "all those who are His" - that is, "every man who is earnestly studious of obtaining life eternal," as well as "infants of believers." We see here a distinction being made between those who consciously present themselves as desiring God's salvation, on the one hand, and their infant children, on the other. Both are presented as rightful recipients of the sign of the covenant, but on different bases.

Contrary to this, BCF Art. 35 teaches us that the Lord's Supper has been ordained and instituted "to nourish and support those whom He has already regenerated and incorporated into His family, which is His Church." Those so regenerated are described as having a two-fold life - one corporal and temporal, and the other spiritual and heavenly - with the spiritual life given in their second birth, "effected by the Word of the gospel, in the communion of the body of Christ." For those baptized as adults, this presents

no significantly different ground for participation, But concerning infants, this article would seem to point us toward a change normally worked in them after infancy - unless, that is, all children of believers are taken to be regenerated in this sense at the moment of their baptism, and the Word of the gospel here refers solely to the promises spoken during the baptismal ceremony.

That this latter is not the case is confirmed by HC Ans. 81. Addressing itself to the question, “For whom is the Lord’s Supper instituted?”, this answer sets forth three general qualifications for those who would come to the Lord’s Table:

Acknowledgment of and sorrow over their sins.
Trust that their sins are forgiven by and for the sake of Christ.
Earnest desire to have their faith strengthened and to experience growth in holiness.

Admittedly, some have complained that this answer of the Catechism addresses itself only to adult participants, speaking neither for nor against the participation of covenant youths. In support of this claim, they note that those described are contrasted with hypocrites on the one hand, as those who should not come; and the openly unbelieving and ungodly on the other hand, as those who should not be admitted. However, these contrasts are not exclusive, but reflect the most significant threats of profaning the Lord’s Table at the time the Catechism was written. If children partaking of the elements was not an issue at that time, it would make sense that the authors would not have included a prohibition against their participation. (Incidentally, co-author Zacharias Ursinus’ own remarks on p.425 of his commentary indicate that he was quite aware that Ans. 81 excluded children from participating from the Supper, and that he supported this conclusion.)

Concerning the manner of participation in the sacraments, we have already noted that recipients of baptism are utterly passive (cf. HC Ans. 69; BCF Art. 34). The same is not so, however, for recipients of the Lord’s Supper. HC Ans. 75 indicates that participants must receive the elements with discernment, receiving them in remembrance of Christ and of the promises granted by virtue of His sacrifice. Likewise, Ans. 76 teaches that eating the body and drinking the shed blood of Christ is to be for believers an embracing of Christ’s sufferings and death with a believing heart, as well as a means of becoming ever more united to His body by the Holy Spirit.

BCF Art. 35 expands on these teachings. Here we learn that participants in the Lord’s Supper ought to receive not merely bread and wine, but also to “receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls.” Later, we are told that the manner of this reception is “not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith,” and thus we must receive the Supper “with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior, with thanksgiving, making there confession of faith and of the Christian religion.” Indeed, our participation must move us “to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor.”

All of this points us toward the requirement of a higher level of understanding and spiritual maturity among those who partake of the holy Supper. While we must readily concur that children of believers are members of the covenant, whose salvation we ought not to doubt should the Lord take them from us in their infancy (CD I,17); yet we must see that they are immature members of that covenant, made holy by virtue of their parentage (1 Cor. 7:14), but not yet by their own apprehension of the faith. Such apprehension of the faith, along with a maturing in the Christian life seen in a growing desire to flee from sin and to delight in living according to God’s will (HC Lord’s Day 33), is required of all covenant children. Without faith that understands and grasps the essence of the Christian faith, they cannot enjoy the gospel comforts held out to them in baptism (HC Lord’s Days 1 and 7).

All of this demands a process of growth, instruction and admonition directed by parents and the Church, to the end that the infant recipient of baptism receives by faith the doctrine of salvation by grace alone

through faith alone in Christ alone. Without such personal apprehension of the faith, even those baptized as infants may ultimately reject the gospel and show themselves to have been reprobate (CD I, 15-16 and III/IV, 9). By God's grace, our elect children receive the working of the Spirit to create faith in their hearts, using the preaching of the holy gospel to work this faith in their hearts, and the sacraments to confirm it this faith (HC Ans. 65).

All of this presumes the practice we have come to term "Public Profession of Faith" as the means whereby baptized members of Christ's Church are admitted to full participation in the Church, including participation in the privilege of partaking of the Lord's Supper.

It is by this ceremony that our children stand before God's people to profess their belief in the doctrines of Scripture and the Christian faith, as described in HC Lord's Day 7. It is at this time that they express their acceptance of God's covenant promises, signified and sealed in baptism; their abhorrence and humbling of themselves before God because of their sins (HC Ans. 82); their desire to seek life not in themselves, but in Jesus Christ alone (HC Lord's Days 23-24); and their intent to mortify the old man as the new is quickened, serving God in true faith, according to His Law and to His glory (HC Lord's Day 33); while submitting willingly to the government of God's Church (HC Ans. 85). In all of this, they formally, willingly and knowingly take on themselves the name of "Christian," as members of Christ by faith, intent on sharing in His offices of prophet, priest and king (HC Ans. 32).

In light of the above background, the Council of the Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton submits the following overture:

Overture:

The Council of the Orthodox Reformed Church of Edmonton respectfully overtures Classis Western Canada to overture URCNA Synod Calgary, 2004, to adopt the following statement:

"The Confessions to which the URCNA subscribe - the Belgic Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort - require that the Lord's Supper be administered only to those who have publicly professed their faith, in the presence of God and His holy church."

Grounds:

1. The Validity of this statement:

1.1. In the Three Forms of Unity (particularly the BCF and HC), we confess the purpose, participants and manner of partaking of the Lord's Supper in such a way as to make clear that a personal and understanding faith is a prerequisite for coming to the Table of the Lord (BCF, Articles 33, 35; HC, LDs 25, 28, 30)

1.2. The presence of such faith must become evident for admission to the Lord's Supper by means of a public testimony or profession in the church. (BCF, Article 35; HC, LD 30)

2. The Value of adopting this statement:

2.1. A central point of debate over paedocommunion is whether the Confessions provide a definite standard on this issue.

2.2. Because this issue concerns the churches at large, it should be addressed by the collective wisdom of the federation's broadest assembly.

2.3. The adoption of a statement clarifying this matter would uphold the Confessional basis for our Profession of Faith, thereby promoting unity in Truth among the churches.

Classis Western Canada
Rev. Henry Van Olst

Overture #8

Background:

Synod Escondido 2001 made an excellent beginning in the affirmations of what the Bible teaches as summarized by the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity concerning our interpretation of Genesis 1&2 (cf. Footnote # 1 below). However in this regard, Synod did not fully resolve the issues that continue to face the churches. We maintain, that the final affirmation of Article XLIII 3d ought to be strengthened. Furthermore, the single rejection (contained within the affirmations), is incomplete and needs further expansion in order to clarify our federation's understanding, interpretation and submission to God's teaching in Genesis 1 & 2. Given the brevity of our Synodical deliberations, an expanded statement should be provided for the well-being of the churches.

Overture:

Classis Southern Ontario overtures Synod 2004 of the United Reformed Churches in North America,

To affirm the following: we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of earth and of all creatures. It furthermore means that we reject any teaching about the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 that would discount or call our confession of the perspicuity of Scripture into question; such as, teaching that speculates about the days of creation, to the effect that these days may constitute no more than a literary device, or an extended literary metaphor, having little or no meaningful correspondence to real, historical events which took place in creation; or, that these days may in fact be understood to represent epochs, or long periods of time, bearing no meaningful resemblance to days as we know them today; or, that the sequence of creation days and the activities of God on these days as presented in Scripture was not necessarily historical; or, an accurate record of the sequence of the events and acts of creation. (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 9). It also means that we would reject any teaching which includes speculation that there may have been death and/or sacrifice in the world before the fall into sin (Genesis 1:31; Romans 5:12, Romans 8:20,21), or that Scripture suggests that God limited Himself, or was bound to follow, the patterns of ordinary providence in His work of creating (Belgic Confession Articles 12 and 13).

Grounds:

1)

It is necessary as churches to give Scriptural direction to the churches when various unsettling non-Scriptural ideas/theories are being promulgated and propagated within the federation and in the broader conservative Reformed and Presbyterian world.

There is a fundamental danger in our understanding, respect and submission to the entire Scriptures when the supernatural events of the creation week are undermined by man's speculative thinking and/or interpretation. Our scholarship and our interpretation of Scripture must be submissive to the plain teaching of God's Word. Human imagination should not rule over Scripture nor, should theological-scholarly systems and terminology replace the living Word of God, nor should man's so called reasonable findings take the place of God's revelation in His Word.

Scripture warns us "not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other" (I Cor. 4:6). Furthermore, Scripture directs us to cast "down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5) and to "beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ" (Colossians 2:8).

2)

In discussing the interpretation of Scripture concerning creation at Synod Escondido 2001, the United Reformed Churches of North America maintained that, the "Three Forms of Unity adequately contain the parameters within which the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 can responsibly take place" (Minutes Synod Escondido 2001 Article XLIII p. 23). The Belgic Confession makes it clear that while creation is set before us as a most elegant book, God "makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word as far as is necessary for us in this life, to His glory and our salvation" (Belgic Confession Article 2).

3)

God is sovereign in all that He does. His sovereignty in creation includes both the ordering of creation and creation days and should not be subject to question (Psalm 33:6-9; Belgic Confession Article 1) (cf. Footnote # 2).

4)

When we say that Genesis is historical; we mean it relates and documents matters which actually occurred. This applies to the whole book of Genesis. Herman Bavink wrote: When God's Word "speaks about the origin of heaven and earth, it presents no saga or myth or poetical fantasy but even then, according to its clear intention, presents history, which deserves faith and trust (Herman Bavink: *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Tweede Deel, Kampen, 1928, p. 458).

5)

In our exegetical work, we must resist any conclusion that would suggest that God's revelation is in conflict with itself. One comes into conflict with Scripture when one believes that the Bible has to be rescued from appearing to be in conflict with the data of modern science. There is no warrant for assuming that God could not have told man in simple language just what God did in creating the heaven and the earth nor that the unknown could only be represented through symbolic forms (cf. E.J. Young: Studies in Genesis One (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975, pp. 49-50).

"His revelation in nature and that in Scripture are in perfect accord. Man, however, is a rational creature, and needs a revelation in words that he may properly understand himself and his relation to the world in which he lives. Even in his unfallen state, God gave to Adam a word-revelation, for by his very constitution as an intellectual being, man must have such. The word-revelation, therefore, must interpret revelation in nature. Fallen man must read general revelation in light of Scripture, else he will go basically astray. Of course the Bible is not a textbook of science, but the Bible is necessary properly to understand the purpose of science. ... And on whatever subject the Bible speaks, whether it be creation, the making of the sun, the fall, the flood, man's redemption, it is authoritative and true. We are to think God's thoughts after him, and his thoughts are expressed in the words of Scripture. When these thoughts have to do with the origin of man, we are to think them also. They alone must be our guide. "Therefore," says Calvin, "while it becomes man seriously to employ his eyes in considering the works of God, since a place has been assigned him in this most glorious theatre that he may be a spectator of them, his special duty is to give ear to the Word, that he may the better profit" (Young p.54) (cf. Footnote # 3).

6)

Our Form of Subscription outlines the parameters which is to guide our thinking and the method we are to follow with respect to difficulties we may have with the teaching of the Three Forms of Unity. Speculative teaching is not static; "ideas have legs" (cf. Footnote # 4).

7)

We contend that the creation week displayed God's super-natural and extraordinary providence. We may not presuppose that merely the normal means of providence were in effect during the creation week. We must maintain the distinction between creation and providence. Do we not believe ordinary providence

took effect after God had created? For instance, Psalm 104 was written as a song of praise to the Sovereign LORD for His creation and His providence. It distinguishes these two works of God. The Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 9 makes the same differentiation. Must we not hold, that the failure to separate creation as a distinct act from the acts of ordinary (day to day) providence to be a major theological error? (Belgic Confession Articles 12 & 13) (cf. Footnote # 5).

8)

Death entered the world through sin (Romans 5:12). One day "creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). Isaiah 65 depicts the glorious restoration of creation where the "wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (vs.25a cf. also Genesis 1:29-30). Sacrifices exist because sin exists. When Adam sinned God cursed the entire world (Genesis 3:18-19). When one alleges that animals devoured animals before the fall one does not acknowledge the perfection of God's work before sin. Death by means of shedding of blood before the fall implies imperfection within the creation contra Genesis 1:31. A zebra has never been happy when a lion put his paws on her back.

9)

Views outside our creedal standards undermine the believer's confidence in the clarity of Scripture. God's clear Word deserves faith and trust. (Hebrews 11:3; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 7) If what we historically understood as clear now becomes obscure, other clear passages will be subject to question and uncertainty.

10)

The allowance of speculative thinking and hypnotizing hypothesizes disrupts and threatens unity within the federation. It also restricts and impedes unity amongst those federations we are called to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:4). (cf. Footnote # 6)

Footnote # 1: The Synodical decision Synod Escondido 2001, (Article XLIII 3d) as found in the minutes on pp. 22-23, reads as follows: "Synod affirms that Scripture teaches, as summarized by the Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity:

- The authority and perspicuity of Scripture (Belgic Confession V; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VII).
- Necessity and sufficiency of Scripture (Belgic Confession VII; Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day VII).
- God the Father almighty created the heaven and the earth and all things visible and invisible (Apostle's and Nicene Creed).
- The Father created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day IX).
- God gave every creation its shape and being (Belgic XII).
- The creation and the fall of man. "God made man of the dust of the earth; man gave ear to the devil." (Belgic Confession XIV).
- The historicity of Adam (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VII.20; Canons of Dort III,IV.1).
- Man was created good, in a garden, and tempted by the devil, committed reckless disobedience (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day III and IV).
- God's words to the serpent in Paradise are noted as the first revelation of the Gospel (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day VI).

- Adam plunged himself and his offspring by his first transgression into perdition (Belgic Confession XVI).
- Adam's fall into sin and our connection to it (Canons of Dort 1.1).
- God came seeking man when he, trembling, fled from Him (Belgic Confession XVII).
- God created all things good in six day defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 & 2 and Exodus 20:11). This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and of all creatures (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day IX).

Footnote # 2:

The text of Genesis does not give a "single allusion to suggest that the days are to be regarded as a form or mere manner of representation and hence of no significance for the essential knowledge of the divine creative activity." Moreover in "Exodus 20:11 the activity of God is presented to man as a pattern, and this fact presupposes that there was a reality in the activity of God which man is to follow. How could man be held accountable for working six days if God Himself had not actually worked for six days?" E. J. Young: Studies in Genesis One (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975), p.47.

Footnote # 3:

"It is this remarkable fact of progression, both in method of statement and in actual content, which proves that the days of Genesis are to be understood as following one another chronologically. When to this there is added the plain chronological indications, day one, day two, etc., climaxing in *the* sixth day) all support for a non-chronological view is removed.

In this connection the question must be raised, "if a non-chronological view of the days be admitted, what is the purpose of mentioning six day?" For, once we reject the chronological sequence which Genesis gives, we are brought to the point where we can really say very little about the content of Genesis one. It is impossible to hold that there are two trios of days, each paralleling the other. Day four, as has already been pointed out, speaks of God's placing the light bearers in the firmament. The firmament, however, had been made on the second day. If the fourth and the first days are two aspects of the same thing, then the second day also (which speaks of the firmament) must precede days one and four. If this procedure be allowed, with its wholesale disregard of grammar, why may we not be consistent and equate all four of these days with the first verse of Genesis? There is no defense against such a procedure, if once we abandon the clear language of the text. In all seriousness it must be asked, Can we believe that the first chapter of Genesis intends to teach that day two preceded days one and four? To ask the question is to answer it.

There is, of course, a purpose in the mention of six days. It is to emphasize the great contrast between the unformed universe of verse two and the completed world of verse thirty-one. Step by step in majestic grandeur God worked to transform the unformed earth into a world upon which man might dwell and which man might rule for God's glory. How noble and beautiful is this purpose, a purpose which is obscured and even obliterated when once we deny that the six days are to be taken in sequence. If Moses had intended to teach a non-chronological view of the days, it is indeed strange that he went out of his way, as it were to emphasize chronology and sequence. We may recall the thought of Aalders that in the first chapter of Genesis there is not a hint that the days are to be taken as mere form or manner of representation. In other words, if Moses intended to teach something like the so-called "framework theory" of the days, why did he not give at least some indication that such was intention? This question demands an answer" (Young pp. 99-100).

Footnote # 4:

To illustrate the conviction that "ideas have legs":

One of the major proponents of the Framework Hypothesis view is Professor Meredith Kline. In his own article, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony" (From Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith <<http://www.calvin.edu/chemistry/ASA/PSCF.html>>) he indicates his intent for propounding this view to be as follows: "To rebut the literalist interpretation of the Genesis creation week propounded by the young-earth theorists is a central concern of this article. At the same time, the exegetical evidence adduced also refutes the harmonistic day-age view. The conclusion is that as far as the time frame is concerned, with respect to both the duration and sequence of events, the scientist is left free of biblical constraints in hypothesizing about cosmic origins."

In a concluding note in the same article, Dr. Kline writes, "In this article I have advocated an interpretation of biblical cosmogony according to which Scripture is open to the current scientific view of a very old universe and, in that respect, does not discountenance the theory of evolutionary origin of man". Moreover, he regards the "widespread insistence on a young earth to be a deplorable disservice to the cause of Biblical truth" (from footnote 47 in his paper).

These expressed views stand contrary to Scripture and are antithetical to what we have affirmed at Synod Escondido 2001.

The Framework Hypothesis has been defined in a number of ways. Two definitions are presented as follows:

a--"The Framework Hypothesis" is a view of Genesis 1:1-2:3 which claims that the Bible's use of the seven-day week in its narration of the creation is a literary (theological) framework and is not intended to indicate the chronology or duration of the acts of creation. ... The Framework Hypothesis argues, *on exegetical grounds*, that the organizing principle of the creation account is topical rather than chronological. It denies, *on exegetical grounds*, that the seven-day week is intended as a chronological unfolding of the separate acts of creation limited in duration to one calendar week. (Mark Ross: "The Framework Hypothesis: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3" an essay in "**DID GOD CREATE IN SIX DAYS?**" ed. by Joseph A. Pipa Jr. and David W. Hall Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999, pp. 113&114)

b--"The Framework Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 is the view which maintains that, while the six days of creation are normal solar days, the total picture of God's completing His creative work in a week of days is not to be taken literally, but functions as a literary framework for the creation narrative; and that the eight creative historical works of God have been arranged according to other than strictly sequential considerations, and that where there is sequential order it must be determined by factors other than the order of narration alone" (Majority Report of the Report of the Committee to Study the Framework Hypothesis Presbytery of Southern California (OPC), 1999).

Footnote # 5:

The argument that some make contending that Genesis 2:5 "provides evidence for ordinary providence in Genesis 1 contains a logical fallacy. Even if Gen. 2:5 applies to the circumstances in Genesis 1 (which is questionable), it does not follow that ordinary providence alone was operating during that period of time. The presence of ordinary providence does not disprove the possibility of extraordinary providence. The text tells us in fact just the opposite" Robert E. Grossman. "The Light He Called Day," Mid-America Journal of Theology 3/1 (1987), 28.

It should be clear to us and we should teach with clarity that Genesis 1 "teaches the operation of extraordinary providence during creation. Only if God created everything fully at once, would there be no place for supernatural preservation. The natural order of creation, through which the Spirit normally preserves and governs, is dependent on the whole ordered cosmos. Surely Genesis 1:2 assumes

extraordinary providence when Moses describes the Spirit hovering over the original fluid mass at creation--preserving, separating at the command of Christ, and perfecting. Moses relates in Genesis 1:4 that God caused the separation between light and darkness. Or take for example gravity, tides and the boundaries of water. Our providential system of gravity depends on the mass of the earth. Before the waters were separate on the second day, the ordinary factors involved in gravity would have been lacking. And tides depend on the moon. At the beginning, when the first created stuff was in existence, the Spirit held it together. Later, when the waters were separated from the waters, the Spirit would have held them in place. When the dry land was separated from the waters, the Spirit kept the water within its boundaries and controlled the tides until the moon was created. Thus, the text implies some acts of extraordinary providence, during the process of creation" (Joseph Pipa: "From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2:3" an essay in "**DID GOD CREATE IN SIX DAYS?**" ed. by Joseph A. Pipa Jr. and David W. Hall Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999, p.164).

Footnote # 6:

A hypothesis is something not proved, but assumed for the purpose of argument, a theory imagined or assumed to account for what is not understood.

Classis Southern Ontario
Mr. Robert Vanderhill

Overture #9

Classis Michigan overtures Synod to declare the following:

The teaching that there was any human death or animal death before the Fall in Paradise is a false doctrine condemned by the Word of God and the confessional standards of the URC.

Grounds:

A. This is an issue of doctrine and life in our contemporary culture. A culture in which immorality and rebellion against the truth are present. The churches of Jesus Christ must address these issues in order to maintain a faithful witness. False views of death permeate our culture such as death as the means of evolving from "lower" to "higher" forms of life.

B. The Word of God clearly speaks to the issue of death before sin: Genesis 3:14_19; Romans 5:12; Romans 8:20, 21.

C. The confessions implicitly address this issue in their explicit condemnation of related sin and their summary of a holy life and Biblical truth. Lord's Day 4, 5; Belgic Confession Article 14 and the Canons of Dort III & IV Articles 1, 2, 3 teach that death is the curse of God against sin and Lord's Day 3 contrasts a cursed world with Paradise.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture #10

Classis Michigan overtures Synod to declare the following:

All homosexual desires and actions are sins that are condemned by the Word of God and the confessional standards of the URC.

Grounds:

A. This is an issue of doctrine and life in our contemporary culture. A culture in which immorality and rebellion against the truth are present. The churches of Jesus Christ must address this issue in order

to maintain a faithful witness. Recent court decisions in Canada and the U.S. reflect the sinful views of homosexuality in our culture.

B. The Word of God clearly speaks to homosexuality: I Corinthians 6:9_11; Romans 1:26, 27; Matthew 5:27, 28

C. The confessions implicitly addresses homosexuality in their explicit condemnation of related sin and their summary of a holy life and Biblical truth. Lord's Day 41 condemns all forms of unchastity and homosexuality is one form of unchastity.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture #11

Classis Michigan overtures Synod to declare the following:

Abortion is sin condemned by the Word of God and the confessional standards of the URC.

Grounds:

A. This is an issue of doctrine and life in our contemporary culture. A culture in which immorality and rebellion against the truth are present. The churches of Jesus Christ must address this issue in order to maintain a faithful witness. Abortion remains legal and abortions are sought and performed by millions.

B. The Word of God clearly speaks to the issue of abortion: Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13; Psalm 106:31.

C. The confessions implicitly addresses abortion in their explicit condemnation of related sin and their summary of a holy life and Biblical truth. Lord's Day 40 makes it clear that all forms of murder are condemned by God and abortion is clearly one form of murder rooted in hatred.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture #12

Classis Michigan overtures the fifth Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America to adopt the following changes relating to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity:

That Synod approve the following method for the selection of members of the Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Committee and the Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad Committee:

1. The nominations be given by the churches to each classis which will elect one member per classis to each committee for a term of three years and then to be eligible for reelection of one more term of service, after which they retire for at least three years as members of each committee (a total of six members).

2. That Synod elect from names submitted by church councils three members at large for each committee to serve a term of three years and then to be eligible for the reelection of one more term of service, after which they retire.

3. This procedure shall be implemented by the following: All current members who are sole representatives from their classis shall be considered classical members. If members of a current committee has served between two to five years he will be eligible for reelection. Where there is more than one member of a committee from the same classis the member with the least amount of time served shall be the classical representative. All other current members shall fulfill their terms and be eligible for reelection as member at large position if they have served between two to five years.

Grounds:

- a. This procedure will facilitate improved communications between the committees and the churches of individual classis.
- b. This will broaden representatives of our federations in these committees.

Classis Michigan
Rev. Wybren Oord

Overture #13

Classis Southern Ontario overtures the 2004 Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America to amend Phase Three (Church Union) of the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, as follows: by adding the statement, "*Entering this phase requires ratification by a two-thirds majority of the consistories.*"

We recognize that since entering Phase Three would most likely involve changes to the Church Order, the decision would, in effect, require ratification by two-thirds of the consistories. However, for pastoral reasons, we believe it would be wise to include this requirement explicitly, and as part of the process of church unity.

Grounds:

1. While all of the work of ecumenical relations is done "with a view toward complete church unity" (Mandate, CERCU), it is clear that entering Phase Three represents a more significant commitment than entering Phases One and Two. Since consistorial ratification is required for entering Phase Two, it seems logical that it also be required for entering Phase Three.
2. If changes to the Church Order are judged to be so significant that they require ratification by a two-thirds majority of consistories, it seems wise and logical to require the same majority when the union of federations is in view.
3. While it is always desirable, and even expected, that issues being dealt with by the broader assemblies be fully discussed locally, we believe that the requirement of consistorial ratification increases the likelihood that issues surrounding ecumenical relations and church unity will in fact be fully discussed, and therefore better understood, by local consistories and congregations. This would surely be necessary and beneficial, to achieve a unity that is genuine, and that can be experienced and celebrated at the local level. The pastoral care of the local congregation should be considered of particular importance. A greater familiarity at the local level with the issues surrounding church unity may help to prevent misunderstandings and suspicions, which could lead to a splintering of the federations or congregations involved in the process toward federative union, when the decision to enter Phase Three is taken.

Done by Classis Southern Ontario on March 26th 2003

Rev. John A. Bouwers, Chairman

Elder John Veldhuizen, Clerk

Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Report

Esteemed brothers in Christ,

It is with gratitude to our covenant God for His faithfulness and the blessing He granted to the churches in the pursuit of ecumenicity, that the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity reports to synod and to the churches. The committee has taken to heart the reminder of Synod Escondido 2001, *to remain faithful to the mandate of the committee 'to correspond and dialogue on significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology.* In all of the ecumenical relations we have pursued on behalf of synod and all the United Reformed Churches with the ten assigned federations or denominations, the committee has sought to follow explicitly synod's mandate and its guidelines for our work.

1. INTRODUCTORY MATTERS

Each year in February we have sent a report of the committee's work for synod and the churches to all councils. The last two years we have included in that mailing the full annual reports of the Phase 2 committees, as instructed by Synod Escondido. In the committee's report we have urged the councils to communicate any concern they may have or any information they may wish in the realm of ecumenicity to the committee secretary. This year in particular and in light of the ongoing work of the three Phase 2 committees we have urged the churches to become better acquainted with the Canadian Reformed Churches and to participate in whatever measure possible in ecclesiastical fellowship with these churches. For your convenience we reproduce the mandate and guidelines as adopted by Synod Hudsonville 1999 and emended somewhat by Synod Escondido 2001.

Mandate

With a view toward complete church unity, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity shall pursue and make recommendations regarding the establishment of ecumenical relations with those Reformed and Presbyterian federations selected by synod and in keeping with Article 36 of the Church Order. The Committee shall execute its task and carry out its mandate by following synod's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. The committee shall keep the churches regularly informed of its work and the progress made, and shall publish its reports to synod in the agenda.

Guidelines For Ecumenicity And Church Unity

Phase One - Corresponding Relations

The first phase of ecumenicity is one of exploration, with the intent that by correspondence and dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation may develop in the following areas of the two churches' lives:

- a. View and place of the Holy Scriptures
- b. Creeds and confessions
- c. Formula of subscription to the confessions
- d. Significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology
- e. Church order and polity
- f. Liturgy and liturgical forms
- g. Preaching, sacraments, and discipline
- h. Theological education for ministers

Ecumenical observers are to be invited to all broader assemblies with a regular exchange of the minutes of these assemblies and of other publications that may facilitate ecumenical relations.

Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship

The second phase of ecumenicity is one of recognition and is entered into only when the broadest assemblies of both federations agree this is desirable. The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, and in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity, by establishing ecclesiastical fellowship entailing the following:

- a. The churches shall assist each other as much as possible in the maintenance, defense, and promotion of Reformed doctrine, liturgy, church polity, and discipline
- b. The churches shall consult each other when entering into ecumenical relations with other federations
- c. The churches shall accept each other's certificates of membership, admitting such members to the Lord's Table
- d. The churches shall open the pulpits to each other's ministers, observing the rules of the respective churches

- e. The churches shall consult each other before major changes to the confessions, church government, or liturgy are adopted
- f. The churches shall invite and receive each other's ecclesiastical delegates who shall participate in the broader assemblies with an advisory voice

Entering this phase requires ratification by a majority of the consistories as required in Church Order, Art.36.

Phase Three - Church Union

The third phase of ecumenicity is one of integration with the intent that the two federations, being *united in true faith*, and where contiguous geography permits, shall proceed to complete church unity, that is, ecclesiastical union. This final phase shall only be embarked upon when the broadest assemblies of both federations give their endorsement and approval to a plan of union, which shall outline the timing, coordination, and/or integration of the following:

- a. The broader assemblies
- b. The liturgies and liturgical forms
- c. The translations of the Bible and the confessions
- d. The song books for worship
- e. The church polity and order
- f. The missions abroad

Synod St.Catharines 1997 selected ten federations and assigned them to the committee for the pursuit of ecumenicity. For ease of visualization and as an index in this report, we present them here in the ecumenical relationship Synod Escondido 2001 determined for these churches. The committee notes that the official name of the CanRC is Canadian Reformed Churches, as used in their Acts of Synod, but in their Yearbook as well as on their website the name used is "Canadian and American Reformed Churches." That federation does have a number of churches in the United States and therefore the more informal designation is helpful. In this report we add "and American" when it is pertinent and useful, and employ the official name when appropriate or the reporting pertains exclusively to the Canadian setting, thus using the designations interchangeably.

A. Churches in Phase 2 – Ecclesiastical Fellowship

Canadian Reformed and American Churches (CanRC)

B. Churches in Phase 1 – Corresponding Relations

- 1. Free Reformed Churches (FRC)
- 2. Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
- 3. Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC)
- 4. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

C. Churches in Ecumenical Relations

- 1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
- 2. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
- 3. Protestant Reformed Church in America (PRC)
- 4. Reformed Church of Quebec / L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ)
- 5. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

When reporting on these churches, and following the sequence presented above, we plan to recommend these three matters: 1.That synod enter into Phase 2 with the RCUS. 2.That synod enter into Phase 1 with the ERQ and with the RPCNA. 3.That synod discontinue Ecumenical Relations with the PRC.

The committee also recommends that synod provide the churches with a clear interpretation of Art.36 of the Church Order. We raise the matter now in connection with the recommendation to enter into Phase 2 with the RCUS. The precedent has been set with the interpretation of the Stated Clerk with the concurrence of the convening consistory, that *a majority of the consistories* means the majority of all the eligible consistories in the federation. A considerable number of consistories did not vote in the 2001 ratification process for the Canadian Reformed Churches. In order to encourage all consistories to participate in such a significant activity, the committee recommends that synod determine that the wording of Art.36 means **the majority of the consistories voting**. Should synod adopt this recommendation, consistories that fail to participate would not actively determine the potential outcome.

Finally, in the last recommendation the committee requests synod to approve its ecumenical pursuit with the churches assigned to us. We have added the clause *without adopting every formulation in its dialogue* since it is neither feasible nor desirable that synod should adopt the committee's working papers or its reported exchanges. In recommending this defining clause the committee follows the precise decisions of Synod Hudsonville 1999 and Synod Escondido 2001.

2. COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

The committee continues to function well. The recording clerk Rev. Pontier drafts detailed minutes of the committee meetings, which are kept in the committee archives. The method of communication is mainly by email. The opportunity has availed itself to have online meetings, when one of the churches offered its website for this purpose. We are grateful for the offer and are considering the many advantages of such meetings. Although the clustering of committee members remains helpful when dealing with concentrations of other federations in the same geographical area, in general disparate locations of members are not a hindrance to the effective pursuit of ecumenical relations.

Most of the committee members have served synod in this capacity now for the maximum two three-year terms, a pattern adopted by Synod Hudsonville 1999. Two of the present members have served three years beyond that terminus as an exception adopted by Synod Escondido 2001. The result is that every member is scheduled to retire at Synod Calgary 2004. Rev. Bill De Jong has replaced Rev. Julien as Stated Clerk, and in this capacity he serves as *ex officio* committee member. His years of tenure are not listed below since the synodically appointed Stated Clerk functions separately from the committee. We note that Rev. T. Joling has replaced the originally elected Rev. D. Piers who had moved to New Zealand.

The experience we have gained in the pursuit of ecumenicity with the committees of various assigned federations is that it generally takes a three-year term of office to become sufficiently conversant with other federations' practices in order to participate in productive dialogue with them. We have also noticed that most of the other committees retain their personnel longer than is our synod's practice. The committee believes that for the good progress we have experienced to date to continue, synod should consider altering the present retirement schedule.

Having observed that Synod Escondido employed a different format in assigning the added term of service of the stated clerk, as well as those of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad, we present recommendations continuing that altered and improved approach. The first recommendation is that synod discontinues the past practice of limiting service on the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity to two terms. The second recommendation is that synod decide that one term of service constitutes the time period between three consecutive synods, at which time the retiring member is eligible for further service at synod's pleasure. If the projected date of the sixth synod is 2007, and of the seventh synod 2010, one full term of service for a member, beginning at Synod Calgary in 2004 would mean that he retires in 2010. Should synod adopt these recommendations we present the following staggered schedule of retirement.

<i>Names</i>	<i>First Elected</i>	<i>Scheduled Date</i>	<i>Proposed Date</i>
Elder R. Clausing	1996	2003	5 th Synod 2004
Rev. R. Stienstra	1996	2004	5 th Synod 2004
Rev. P. Vellenga	1996	2003	5 th Synod 2004
Elder C. Dykstra	1999	2004	6 th Synod 2007
Rev. R. Pontier	1996	2004	6 th Synod 2007
Rev. J. Bouwers	1997	2004	7 th Synod 2010
Rev. T. Joling	2001	2004	7 th Synod 2010
Rev. H. Zekveld	1997	2004	7 th Synod 2010
Rev. B. De Jong, Stated Clerk			

3. CANADIAN AND AMERICAN REFORMED CHURCHES (CANRC)

In the three years since Synod Escondido entered into Phase 2 or *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches, a good beginning has been made in the functioning of the relationship. In reality, little more than two years have past since the majority of churches ratified Synod Escondido's decision. Many churches have experienced the proclamation of each other's ministers, and consistories have had joint meetings to discuss some

pertinent facets of the differences and commonalities between the two churches. These exchanges have occurred much more frequently in Canada than in the United States, due to the location of the churches. We add that in some regions unity meetings were organized, at which speakers from both federations set forth related issues for the audience's interaction. The classes of both federations in Canada continue to send fraternal delegates to each other's meetings.

The committee also reports that in some localities, the consistories regretfully have not had the freedom to engage in 'pulpit exchanges', or in mutual dialogue. If in any way the committee could provide assistance, we would gladly do so if requested. The committee also reports that in a number of churches in both federations local opposition, initially rather vocal, is subsiding especially when consistories give wise leadership in these matters. The challenge in many URC churches in the United States is to overcome unfamiliarity with the Canadian Reformed history and practices, so that this does not impede the development of closer relations.

General Synod Chatham 2004 of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches met in February and Rev. H. Zekveld addressed them, representing the committee on behalf of the United Reformed Churches. In his very well received speech our delegate spoke sensitively, directly, and pertinently. We include here a few of his paragraphs.

Brothers, it may be that our welcome to you is not as warm and wholehearted as yours. You know very well that the ratification vote among our consistories was far from unanimous. We might suggest some reasons for this – we are very young and still uneasy about our own identity, many if not most in our 80 congregations have never met someone who belongs to a Canadian Reformed Church, offenses and misconceptions have created barriers, other issues vie for our attention – but the fact remains the same: there is some opposition within our churches and the pathway of fellowship will have to be traveled slowly.

We ask for your patience and understanding in this matter. It is our hope that under God's blessing ecumenism that is given time to develop organically will build greater trust between our churches and develop a stronger, lasting bond. Even as we look ahead to the goal of ever-increasing unity, may the Lord Jesus give us grace to be grateful for and enjoy the fellowship we have already attained between the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches.

The committee alerts the churches that much may be learned about the Canadian Reformed Synod and their churches from their website <http://www.canrc.org/resources/govdocs/gs2004/index.html>. The entire address of Rev. Zekveld is appended there to the Acts of Synod. Since the work of the three Phase 2 committees also has a broader application than in this section, their reports are presented later.

4. FREE REFORMED CHURCHES (FRC)

Some four years ago the synod of the Free Reformed Churches entered into *Limited Contact* with the United Reformed Churches, the first level of what they call *Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship*. The External Relations Committee subsequently wrote that *Limited Contact* is primarily a *communicatory level in an official and brotherly manner*. The committee notes that Synod Hudsonville 1999 had entered into Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Free Reformed Churches.

The committee reports that the United Reformed Churches were represented at every Free Reformed Synod, with our representatives bringing greetings, but also updating the synod on the developments in the United Reformed Churches. The delegations have continually pointed out our common heritage and the desirability to seek continued and further ecumenical relations. The addresses by the delegates are available from the committee secretary. The committee requested Rev. B. Schouwstra to represent us at a special October 2003 Synod, called by five churches who appealed their June 2003 decision to give the churches the freedom to choose between the KJV or the NKJV of the Bible for congregational use. A committee was appointed to study the matter further.

The committee reports with regret that in spite of continued efforts on our part no dialogue has taken place with the External Relations Committee of the Free Reformed Churches since 2001. We are grateful to note that a lack of official committee interaction notwithstanding, considerable local and regional cooperation in Christian schools involving United and Free Reformed members is experienced. The Lord is also using some ministerial interactions as a means of furthering ecumenical relations at an informal level.

5. **REFORMED CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES (RCUS)**

In 1995 the first correspondence was exchanged between the committee and the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCUS. Since then numerous issues have been discussed in many meetings with delegated representatives. Gratefully we recall for synod that the RCUS sponsored the URC application to join the ICRC. In reviewing all these matters prayerfully and carefully the committee decided at its November 2003 meeting to recommend to Synod Calgary that the United Reformed Churches enter into Phase 2 – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Reformed Church in the United States. The ingredients of Phase 2 are clearly set forth in the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.

Should synod adopt the committee's recommendation, provision will need to be made for the process of ratification according to Church Order Art.36. The committee is aware that in the ratification process for Synod Escondido's decision to enter into Phase 2 with the Canadian Reformed Churches a considerable number of consistories did not vote. In order to prevent a recurrence of those dynamics the committee recommends that synod determine the interpretation of Art.36, *Such decision must be ratified by a majority of the Consistories*, to mean the majority of the consistories who voted, in order to encourage all to participate actively.

The RCUS ecumenical relationship comparable to the URC Phase 2 is called ***Fraternal Relations***. At present the RCUS is in this relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. The RCUS describes this relationship in the following ingredients.

- 1) Agree to take heed to one another's doctrine, liturgy and church government, that there be no deviations from the Holy Scriptures or from the Reformed confessions
- 2) Will exchange delegates at one another's assemblies or general synods and invite them to participate as advisors
- 3) Will inform one another of the decisions taken at their assemblies or general synods by exchanging minutes or at least by forwarding decisions, which are relevant to the churches concerned
- 4) Will inform one another in case of changes in or additions to confessions, church order or liturgical forms, if these are of a doctrinal nature. The denomination concerned will notify the other denomination of these changes so that consultations can take place if considered necessary
- 5) Will inform one another regarding new relationships with third parties and membership in ecumenical organizations

The committee reports to synod that the RCUS understands that entering into *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the United Reformed Churches implies a commitment to work toward organic union. They are committed to the principle of organic union with like-minded, faithful Reformed federations as evidenced by their membership in NAPARC and the ICRC, both of whose constitutions speak of the need for church union. The RCUS (as yet unsuccessful) negotiations over several years with the OPC again demonstrate a willingness to work toward organic union with other like-minded Reformed bodies.

The path to eventual organic union or merger will not be speedy or easy. Though the URC is relatively young, both the URC and the RCUS have long histories and deeply entrenched traditions that will make organic union a major emotional hurdle as well as the hurdle of negotiating any differences in polity or practice. Another difficult obstacle will be the fact that the RCUS owes its very existence to resisting a church union in which it saw many former sister congregations ruined by unbiblical compromise. It is clear that many United Reformed churches do not know much if anything about the RCUS, nor are their churches in Canada. We note that as a bi-national federation there are many challenges to overcome in obedience to the Lord's mandate for church unity.

However, by the grace of God we must make every effort *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . till we all come to the unity of the faith* (Eph. 4:4,13). Even as Jesus prayed, *that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that you sent Me* (John 17:21).

For the benefit of synod in considering the committee's recommendation we present some information gathered in the meetings with their Interchurch Relations Committee, noting that such interaction was done by a delegation of the committee. We list the eight subjects of Phase 1 and record the RCUS views and practices, and report the RCUS Sunday worship services as an added point. In order to provide complete information the committee appends Rev. Pontier's report of the 2003 RCUS Synod.

a. View and place of the Holy Scriptures – In addition to their creedal subscription to Articles 2,3,5, and 7 of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21, the RCUS declares in its Constitution, *Art.176, The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, which are called canonical, being recognized as genuine and inspired, are received as the true and proper Word of God, infallible and inerrant, and the ultimate rule and measure of the whole Christian faith and doctrine.* The ordination vow for all officers also includes the question, *Do you believe that the Holy Scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are the Word of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and therefore are infallible and inerrant, and the only and perfect rule of our Christian faith and life?* (The Directory for Worship, p. 30).

Recent evidence of their high view of Scripture is their special report, *The Days of Creation*, adopted in 1999 and upholding an historical view of Genesis 1 and six day creation. The majority of RCUS congregations use the NKJV translation of the Scriptures. A few use the KJV, the NASB, or the NIV. There is no officially approved translation for use in public worship.

b. Creeds and confessions – The RCUS holds to the Three Forms of Unity as its confessional basis. It seeks to be a confessionally Reformed federation of churches. They have their own translation of the Heidelberg Catechism made from the German. The latest edition was approved in 1978. In 1994 the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort were officially adopted, however 15 changes were made. All of the changes can be considered editorial in nature such as adding Lamentations to the list of canonical books, not attributing Hebrews to Pauline authorship and substituting “chastening” for “punishing” and “innate understanding” for “light of nature.” However two changes appear to be an attempt to avoid a possible wrong inference, which the original words might imply. The committee intends to continue the discussion on these changes, should synod enter in the Phase 2 relationship.

Catechism preaching is not a regular feature in most RCUS congregations although some ministers will occasionally preach a series on the Heidelberg. However, it is the practice in many churches for the minister to read and comment on a portion of the Heidelberg Catechism in addition to the sermon. Catechetical instruction is emphasized in preparing the youth of the church for confirmation. Art.192 of the Constitution states, *Every pastor shall carefully prepare the youth in his pastoral charge for communicant membership in the Church by diligently instructing them in the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion. The period of instruction shall, if possible, be so extended that the pupils memorize and are able to recite the entire Heidelberg Catechism before confirmation. The course of instruction shall include catechetical explanation and memorization, Bible history, Bible reading and memorizations, and the study of the books and contents of the Bible, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dort, church history, also the singing and memorization of Psalms, hymns, and Scripture song.*

c. Formula of subscription to the confessions – Subscription to the Three Forms of Unity is made orally by all officers of the RCUS as part of their ordination vows. The vow is repeated at each subsequent installation of a minister in a new charge. The vows includes the question, *Do you honestly and in good conscience before the Lord declare that you believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine in the confession of this Church, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort, are in complete and accurate agreement with the Word of God; and do you promise to teach (deacons 'promote') and defend the same in good faith and reject all doctrines conflicting with them* (Directory of Worship, p. 30-31). Applicants for licensure must vow, *I hereby testify that I honestly and truly accept the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession of Faith, and the Canons of Dort as in accordance with the teaching of the Holy Scriptures, and promise faithfully to preach and defend the same* (Constitution, Art. 22, p. 7).

d. Significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology – The RCUS finds its roots in the large number of German immigrants coming to the American colonies in the early 1700's and the formation among those immigrants of Reformed congregations, most without pastors. In 1747 several of those congregations in the

Philadelphia area were organized into a synod, called a “Coetus” with help from a minister sent to America by the Synods of North and South Holland of the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands. The Dutch supplied the churches with many ministers and with financial assistance. From 1748-1791 the German Reformed Church was under the authority of the Synod of Holland, which had to approve the reception and ordination of all new ministers, an inconvenient and irksome situation because of the great distance. In 1791 the German ministers declared themselves independent of the Synod of Holland and drew up a constitution which was adopted April 27, 1793 under the name of “Synod of the High German Reformed Church in the United States of North America,” later changed to the Reformed Church in the United States. At that time the confessional basis of the RCUS were the Three Forms of Unity. In 1793 there were 22 ministers, 178 congregations and 15,000 members. In 1800 there were 31 ministers and in 1820 there were 60 ministers.

At some point in the early history of the denomination the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort were dropped from the confessional basis of the churches for reasons that are not clearly known today. However, the two confessions were re-adopted in 1994 so that again, the Three Forms of Unity form the confessional basis of the churches.

Throughout the 19th century the number of congregations grew rapidly through new waves of German immigration. However, the church was subject to several unhealthy theological influences of its American context resulting in many theological and liturgical controversies and the founding of alternative seminaries. By 1900 the leadership of the RCUS had become quite liberal and had begun to push for union with other denominations. In 1934 a plan of union with the Evangelical Synod of North America (an immigrant church from the united Lutheran and Reformed Church of Germany) was approved. The new constitution stated that there was to be “liberty of conscience” concerning doctrine and the doctrinal statements (confessions) were advisory, not binding statements. One classis, the Eureka Classis, which had been formed in 1911 in South Dakota of primarily German Russian immigrants of the previous 30 years, declined to participate in the merger with its confessional compromise, and continues to this day as the Reformed Church in the United States. It has since divided into four classes covering the United States. The RCUS counted 4,369 members in 48 congregations in AD 2003.

The experience of seeing a once large and prospering church ruined by compromise and merger has created a mindset in the RCUS generally (with some exceptions) opposed to all thought of organic union with other denominations. Rather, for the last 60 years the majority has been content to live with “fraternal relations” and not attempt organic union with sister denominations. However a recent position paper, “The Biblical Principles of Church Unity” (1999) states, *Organic union with other denominations is desirable if the denominations are separated by unessential differences, and when unity may be accomplished without surrendering biblical creedal convictions.*

e. Church Government - RCUS church government is presbyterial (the church is ruled by presbyters/elders) with local, regional, and national assemblies. A comprehensive and detailed constitution sets forth this polity, which is the result of several historical events and influences, including association with the Church Order of the Synod of Dort. RCUS polity might be described as a hybrid of Reformed and Presbyterian polities, with the addition or substitution of several unique elements

In RCUS polity, the local congregations are “churches,” and the broader communion is viewed as a single “church” (the Reformed *Church* in the U.S.). Three offices are recognized in the local church: minister, elder, and deacon. The duties assigned to each office (Art 44, 45) are similar to the duties assigned in the URC CO. “A person once ordained,” in the RCUS, “whether as a minister of the Gospel, an elder, or a deacon, is set apart to that particular office for life . . .” (Art. 194); however their “term of office” or length of active status is determined by the local congregation (Art. 46). Thus, ordination occurs only once, but once an elder or deacon has completed his active term, he has to stand for re-election. A few churches hold strictly to lifetime eldership, never requiring re-election.

The office of minister and elder function at every level of government in the RCUS. Ministers are members of classis (Art. 31), (but are not precluded from also having membership in the local church). Classis meetings are opened with religious services, including preaching, but Classis does not celebrate the sacraments. In the case of a church closure, Classis has jurisdiction over the members and transfers them to a church they select (Art. 14).

Five ecclesiastical assemblies may be noted, although there are distinguishing categories or groupings among these five. The congregational meeting is different from the other four assemblies in that it is not one of the church's "judicatories." It is, however, a ruling assembly of the church and therefore women are not permitted to vote. The congregational meeting does not have the power to discipline, but does decide matters submitted to it, including the election of officers and property matters.

The RCUS Constitution refers to the other four ecclesiastical assemblies (Consistory, Spiritual Council, Classis, and Synod) as "judicatories" (Art. 49). Each judicatory has specific functions and authority limited by the constitution. "Cases over which a lower judicatory has original jurisdiction can be brought before a higher judicatory only by reference, complaint, or appeal" (Art. 50).

Judicatories:

(1) "*The Consistory* is composed of the pastor or pastors, and elders and deacons, and has oversight and government of the congregation and of all its organizations." However, Consistories are distinguished from the other three Judicatories in that they "do not adjudicate or have a judicial capacity" (Art. 49), meaning that they do not exercise discipline.

(2) The *Spiritual Council*, consisting of the pastor and active elders of a congregation, has duties equivalent to those assigned our Consistory in the URC. The Spiritual Council "has original jurisdiction in matters of discipline except in the case of a Minister of the Word" (Art. 70). In regard to ministers, however, it should be noted that they are amenable to both local elders and their classis (Art. 30 & 121).

(3) "A *Classis* consists of the ministers residing within a district designated by the Synod and of the elders delegated by the pastoral charges situated within these limits, and has jurisdiction over said ministers and pastoral charges" (Art. 76). In the RCUS, the Classis is more involved and possesses more authority over local congregations than in the URCNA. For example, the consent of Classis is required when a minister accepts a call (Art. 28), or when he wishes to serve a vacant congregation as regular supply (Art. 31). Classis has authority to license and ordain to the ministry, to dissolve pastoral relations, and to depose "a member of its own body" (Art. 82). Each congregation must submit its local constitution and by-laws to Classis for approval (Art. 10).

(4) The *Synod* is made up of all the denomination's ministers and one elder from each congregation. "It is the highest judicatory and the last resort in all cases respecting the government of the Church" (Art. 95). Although we have much in common with the RCUS in the area of church polity, noteworthy differences exist. This area may prove to be one of the more difficult to negotiate as we attempt to move toward Phase Three, Church Union.

f. Liturgy and liturgical forms – The RCUS seeks to adhere to the regulative principle of worship. The order of worship reflects the dialogical nature of worship and the centrality of the Word. The RCUS *Directory of Worship* presents a "Suggested Order of Public Worship" which is generally followed: Call to Worship, Salutation, Invocation, Psalm or Hymn, Scripture, Prayer, Psalm or Hymn, Sermon, Prayer, Offering, Psalm or Hymn, Benediction, and Doxology. Although a congregation might vary this order, these elements are essential parts of public worship to be used in the regular Lord's Day service, according to the Constitution (Art. 178). In addition, *The Directory of Worship* says the following may also be used "when desired": the reading of the Law, the Apostles' Creed, reading from the Heidelberg Catechism, the Lord's Prayer, the Gloria Patri and congregational readings from the Holy Scriptures.

The RCUS does not have a standard songbook, although the Constitution allows Synod to choose one (Art. 104), and a committee was appointed recently to investigate the availability of songbooks and publishing possibilities. The Trinity Hymnal is used fairly pervasively in the churches. Some use the blue Psalter Hymnal, and a few supplement the Trinity with the "Psalms from the Bible" of the RPCNA, since the Trinity Hymnal is weak in the area of the Psalms. *The Directory of Worship* insists that Psalms "ought to be used frequently in public worship," and that all songs which are sung must be in complete agreement with Scripture (p.18).

The RCUS has liturgical forms for baptism (infant and adult), the Lord's Supper, the ordination and installation of ministers, elders and deacons, confirmation (of catechumens), public profession of faith (of new members received), excommunication, restoration, marriage, the burial of the dead and thanksgiving for a church building. The forms reflect a mature, Reformed understanding of each subject. In the preface to *The Directory of Worship*, the RCUS acknowledges its gratefulness in borrowing liturgical language and forms from the OPC, CanRC, and CRC.

g. Preaching, the sacraments and discipline – Preaching, the sacraments, and discipline hold the same level of importance in the RCUS as in the URC. Their understanding of each, like ours, is shaped by the Three Forms of Unity.

Preaching is carefully guarded as to who may preach. RCUS preaching may be characterized generally as expository and redemptive historical (or biblical theological). The Constitution insists that, “Every sermon based upon Scripture must necessarily conform to the spiritual meaning of the Lord’s Supper” (Art. 188). Some catechism preaching is performed in the RCUS, but it is not required and is rarely a regular practice (although the catechism is often read in worship services).

The RCUS Constitution requires that the Lord’s Supper be administered at least twice a year (Art. 187); but presently every congregation celebrates the sacrament more frequently, anywhere from four to twelve times a year, according to statistics reported. Most RCUS congregations have the worshippers come forward to the table. In addition to RCUS members, the table is open to faithful members of denominations holding “the essential doctrines of the Gospel” (Art. 189). Prior to being admitted to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, visitors to RCUS worship services are usually interviewed by the elders.

A section of 64 articles in the RCUS constitution provides detailed rules for discipline. The provisions, processes, and language of a court system are present, including higher and lower judicatories, charges, right to counsel, trials, appeals, etc. Special stipulations are included for erring or accused office-bearers.

When a member is living in sin, he is admonished by the Spiritual Council (or the judiciary that found him guilty). If he rejects this admonition, or if he has committed a public act of scandal, he is suspended. If repentance is not produced through this suspension and subsequent admonitions, the member is excommunicated. “A suspension may or may not be announced publicly, at the discretion of the Church judicatory that tried the case; a sentence of excommunication, however, shall always be publicly announced” (Art. 118). If a person continues in sin after having been suspended for neglect of the Lord’s Supper, or public worship, or giving, his name is erased (Art. 119).

h. Theological education for ministers – Students for the ministry are taken under the care of Classis, which exercises supervision of their studies and deportment. The approved list of seminaries includes four schools: Greenville, Mid-America, New Geneva (Colorado Springs), and Westminster East. Only students attending these seminaries are eligible for classical financial aid; students may attend a non-approved seminary only by exception (Art. 17). Two additional seminaries are closely connected to the RCUS and are applying for approved status; they are, City Seminary in Sacramento, CA, and Heidelberg Theological Seminary in Vermillion, SD.

The ministers of the RCUS are generally graduates of Reformed seminaries. Westminster Seminary has trained a number of their ministers in the past; in recent years, Mid-America Reformed Seminary has trained several of their younger ministers with a few also coming from Westminster in California. There are also some ministers who graduated from non-Reformed seminaries and came to the Reformed faith later.

Licensure requires a rigorous exam by the Classis. The RCUS constitution states that the applicant “is to be examined by the Classis in English Bible, theology, ecclesiastical history, hermeneutics, the original languages of the Scriptures, historical philosophy, apologetics, all matters relevant to our standards and his personal ability to serve the Church as a pastor” (Art. 20). The applicant also must preach a sermon before Classis, and present a written sermon and theological papers.

Before being ordained, a licentiate must submit to “trials.” Trials include testimony about the man’s gifts, a re-examination of areas of weakness, and, at the discretion of Classis, an examination “in the Confession and Constitution of the Church and the presentation of written discourses” (Art. 24). The RCUS will, “for good reasons,” license a man who does not have a seminary degree (Art 21). A minister coming from another denomination must be examined “as to his orthodoxy and the purity of his intentions” (Art. 35).

i. Lord's Day Observance and the RCUS – It is generally known among those who are familiar with the RCUS that a number of their churches have only one worship service on the Lord's Day. Regarding this aspect of their church life we note the following:

There is diversity among the members and pastors, varying from the more strict sabbatarian view of the Westminster Confession to a more relaxed view. Though some churches have an afternoon or evening service, having only one service per Sunday has been a long-standing tradition within the RCUS and is not the result of any recent liberalizing trend. All churches have activities besides worship on Sundays, such as Sunday school and Bible study. Since the Bible does not explicitly demand two worship services on the Lord's Day, it is difficult for those who recognize the advantages of two worship services to bring about a change that goes against their history.

The RCUS has an article against the profanation of the Lord's Day in its constitution. Art.180 reads: "The Lord's Day (Sunday) shall be kept a holy day, devoted to the public worship of the Lord, to reading the Holy Scriptures, to private devotions, and to works of love and mercy..." The newer churches in the RCUS tend to be stricter in the observance of the Lord's Day than the older, more established congregations. In the newer churches the emphasis is that the whole day should be kept holy. The day should be reserved for ecclesiastical worship and for family worship, with only a modest amount of recreation. In the older churches there would be more of a tendency to do other things on Sunday, e.g. going out for a meal. However, a number of RCUS ministers discourage, for example, watching TV and shopping on Sundays. Art.113 of the RCUS constitution lists "profanation of the Lord's Day" among the sins that "especially merit discipline."

There is a strong and growing awareness in the RCUS that there cannot be complacency concerning the observance of the Lord's Day. Overall the RCUS is less strict on this point than the United Reformed Churches, but in teaching and preaching the matters of worship and rest are strongly emphasized. Therefore this issue should not be allowed to hinder our recognition of the RCUS as a federation of true churches of Christ. Since the RCUS entered into Fraternal Relations with the CanRC, our Canadian brethren have encouraged the RCUS to a more consistent and faithful observance of the Lord's Day.

In response to concerns raised by the CanRC, the RCUS Interchurch Relations Committee recommended to their 2003 synod, *That Synod erect a committee to study and report on the application of Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 103, i.e., the Lord's Day and how it should be observed in our churches.* However, the 2003 synod rejected this proposal. Several delegates expressed fear that regardless of what the report might recommend, it would prove divisive. Patient pastoral instruction at the local level was seen as a more effective way to bring people into conformity with the constitution.

6. ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

The pursuit of ecumenical relations with the OCRC has not progressed much beyond the committee's report to Synod Escondido. The October 1999 OCRC Synod responded to the invitation of Synod Hudsonville 1999 *to unite with the URCNA in federative union on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity* in this way:

We wholeheartedly express the unity which we have already in Christ, and regard the members of the United Reformed Churches as our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. We also sincerely desire and pray that our spiritual unity be expressed in federational unity. In pursuing this goal, however, we request that your local and broader assemblies respond to our deep concern regarding the issue of the Doctrine of Creation. We are concerned that some of your office bearers hold to a framework hypothesis as compared with a literal six-day reading of Genesis 1, as expressed in our Position Paper on Creation.

Committee member Rev. Bouwers represented the committee at the OCRC Synod in Everson WA November 1-2, 2001. In his address to the synod he conveyed: *We share your desire and prayer for federational unity.* He also noted, *Given that at your Synod Cambridge 1999 your churches expressed the conviction that they were not of a mind to unite with us federationally at that time, we are especially encouraged in the efforts that are being made on your part to continue working together at our ecumenical responsibilities.* Rev. Bouwers further urged the synod for more productive ecumenicity and consider appointing a consistory or a committee with which our committee could communicate between synods.

The committee reports that although the 2001 OCRC Synod did appoint a consistory to arrange for an ecumenical committee, no progress can be noted since we have not yet been able to arrange any correspondence or dialogue with the OCRC. We note that the same synod also recorded the following statement about Synod Escondido's position on creation: *The statement made at the URCNA 2001 Synod fails to address the Framework Hypothesis as publicly expressed by certain members of the URCNA.* The OCRC further adopted, *"In view of our expressed desire and goal of federative unity with the URCNA, the OCR churches need an explicit statement from the URCNA of affirmation of six literal days of creation and rejection of the Framework Hypothesis.*

On our part we continue to contact the appointed OCRC consistory, noting however that progress is very slow. We also seek to have an observer at their classes, and at the OCRC synod. The committee intends to carry out synod's mandate to us to pursue ecumenical relations with this federation that is in Phase 1 with the United Reformed Churches, in the expectation that the King of the Church will bless the work done in His name.

7. *ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (OPC)*

After Synod Escondido referred the URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report to the churches for further study, and to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity for fulfilling its mandate, the committee had three substantive and productive meetings with the OPC ecumenical committee.

The first meeting with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) took place at their offices on April 4, 2002. Rev. Bouwers had prepared a nine-page *Working Paper for Discussion* providing some background, dealing with items a-d of Phase 1, and interacting with the points raised in Part I of the URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report, *A Comparison of the Confessional Standards*, received by synod Escondido 2001. The daylong discussion was fraternal and productive, and both committees agreed that the resultant encouraging conclusions of our dialogue should be articulated in four Statements of Agreement. We reproduce them here.

1. *The Holy Scriptures*

The Bible is God's Word received by His people for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of their faith. We agree that the Scriptures are inspired by the Holy Spirit, that they are infallible and inerrant, and that no one may add to or detract from the Word of God. We further agree that in the Bible the LORD reveals the whole counsel of God for His glory, our salvation, and a life of service for believers that comprises both preservation and propagation of the truth.

2. *The Confessions*

The Church's confessions and catechisms are its approved formulations of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort) display a broad, reflective, and pastoral quality. The Westminster Standards (Westminster Confession of Faith, Larger Catechism, and Shorter Catechism) depict a careful and more detailed articulation of the same Reformed faith. We agree that while each confession reflects its own era, the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity both express a faithful outworking and application of God's Word, are in substantial agreement, and do not conflict on basic tenets.

3. *Subscription to the Confessions*

The Church's requirement to subscribe to its confessions seeks to preserve its purity. While the United Reformed Churches insist on a recorded signature to a prescribed Form of Subscription by all office bearers, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church registers a verbal consent upon ordination, and does not allow exceptions by office bearers. We agree that both fellowships require strict confessional adherence and that both approaches to subscription prohibit deviations from the confessions.

4. *Church History*

God's gathering of His holy catholic Church from and in the midst of a sinful humanity also entails reformations. We agree that the secessions of the 1930s and the 1990s in producing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the United Reformed Churches were reformations used by the Lord of the Church to retain for Himself a faithful people. We confess that while both secessions were imperfect and defiled by sin, the resultant Churches give evidence of being true and faithful Churches of the Lord in striving for the pure preaching of His Word, for the pure celebration of the sacraments, and for the faithful application of discipline.

The two committees met again, first in Ontario on April 16, 2003, and later in Pittsburgh on November 13, 2003. In both meetings the focus of discussion was on the URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report, referred to the CERCU for

use in fulfilling its mandate by Synod Escondido 2001. The committees dealt with Part II, *A Comparison of the Polities*. Rev. Bouwers had produced a paper entitled, *An Introductory Discussion of Ecclesiastical Polities*. Ruling Elder Mark Bube of the OPC had provided all members with his paper, *Discussion Notes on Presbyterian Church Polity*, a compilation of the significant decisions taken by past Presbyterian bodies. The discussion at both meetings was helpful in understanding more clearly the differences between Presbyterian and Continental Reformed church polity. Rev. G.I. Williamson had prepared a guideline for discussing some of the features of the Study Committee Report.

The committee was encouraged to work out for the two sides articulations of the unity in the subjects in which apparent agreement had been reached. We were able to produce two Statements of Agreement that were sent to the OPC brothers. They are entitled *Church Designations and Distinctions* and *Church Offices and Authority*. The CEIR is still considering the statements. We are grateful to our heavenly Father that He has given as much church unity as was achieved at the meetings of the past years.

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church holds annual General Assemblies, and for the past several years the committee has had a representative of the URC federation present. In 2002 Rev. Bouwers attended the 69th Assembly when it was held near Boston Mass. In his address to the body he stated:

We have always appreciated the desire we have seen in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to be more than merely fundamentalistic, or broadly evangelical but to be Reformed. We have appreciated learning that your office bearers subscribe to the Westminster Standards not because they contain the system of doctrine taught in Scripture in some Barthian sense, but because these standards are the system of doctrine taught in Scripture. We are also impressed and intrigued with your emphasis on missions, both at home and abroad. It is an emphasis you appear to have taken with you from your earliest days when struggles over missions were part of the impetus for your formation. We believe there is much we can learn from you in that regard and look forward to more and more fruitful interchange with you.

Rev. Bouwers noted that the OPC has a history of seeking to *meld the best of American and Scottish Presbyterianism with a healthy dose of influence from the Continental and Dutch Reformed tradition*. He painted clearly the great challenge in the area of church government, as the 2001 URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report is discussed in subsequent committee meetings.

The committee asked Rev. Pontier to attend the 70th General Assembly of the OPC at Dordt College in June 2003. Although he could not attend all of the Assembly meetings, he did have opportunity to bring the greetings and best wishes of the United Reformed Churches. In his address he sketched the process of the pursuit of ecumenical relations with the OPC and with other soundly Reformed churches as well as objective of such ecumenicity. He said: *We have as our goal church union—and not just with you. That is our goal wherever contiguous geography permits. We have that as our goal with the Canadian Reformed and the RCUS as well.* Rev. Pontier also noted:

We can also note that in Australia, the Dutch Reformed and Presbyterians have successfully melded their traditions. Its not easy but it can be done. It takes a will to ecumenicity—a will that does not exist universally among us, including among the URC. But this will can be formed and strengthened by an awareness of, and by obedience to, the ecumenical imperatives of Scripture. It will also take the kind of humility, gentleness, longsuffering and bearing with one another spoken of in the opening sermon of this assembly—virtues which were powerfully evident in a man like Dr. Cornelius Van Til.

The committee is planning to continue the dialogue that has been very productive up to this point some time later this fall. May the King of the Church grant His blessing to this pursuit.

8. ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (ARP)

The committee had opportunity to meet with the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church following the NAPARC meeting in Pittsburgh on November 12, 2003. This was the first meeting of the committees following some intermittent correspondence. Four ARP brothers were present while our committee

representation was eight members. The two committees exchanged an account of their churches' history. We learned that the ARP was founded in 1782 as a combination of the American portions of two Scottish presbyteries, the Associate Presbytery and the Reformed Presbytery both of which had left the Church of Scotland because they were "pro-marrow men."

Most of the ARP churches are located in the Southeast of the United States, with some newer congregations organized in Canada. They also have a Korean Presbytery in California. The ARP committee had previously provided the committee with a ten-page description of their history and their distinctives as a denomination for NAPARC, of which it is a member. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church holds to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Westminster Catechisms. In 1991 the ARP noted that the Three Forms of Unity are a good expression of the Reformed Faith.

The first meeting proved to be a good beginning for further dialogue, and the committee intends to pursue this in a suitable manner. We commit this labor to the Head of the Church.

9. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN AMERICA (PCA)

Communication with the PCA has been limited to some correspondence over the years. In 2000 Rev. Vander Pol represented us at the General Assembly held in Tampa FL. In 2001 the committee sent several letters to the Interchurch Relations Committee of the PCA, enclosing the URC "Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity." The PCA committee graciously responded and sent a copy of their 1978 "Report of the Ad Interim Committee to Study the Biblical Basis of Church Union," and the 1989 "Guiding Principles for Ecumenical Relations."

The doctrinal standards of the PCA are The Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechism. The denomination has two categories of ecumenical relations, their Stated Clerk wrote, *Fraternal Relations with other Presbyterian/Reformed denominations that are voting members of NAPARC and other churches with whom the General Assembly wishes to establish fraternal relations unilaterally, and Corresponding Relations with other evangelical churches in North America and other continents.*

The Stated Clerk Rev. De Jong has invited the PCA to send an observer to Synod Calgary 2004. The committee notes that the PCA 32nd General Assembly will be in Pittsburgh for June 15-18, 2004, DV. We intend to send them a letter of greetings. It is the intention of the committee to continue the correspondence with the PCA Interchurch Relations Committee in the hope that the King of the Church will add His indispensable blessing to such pursuit.

10. PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA (PRC)

On April 24, 2002 the committee met for the last time with the Committee for Contact with Other Churches of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Professor Dykstra read the paper, *Unity, the Truth, and the Confessions*. Rev. Pontier read his paper, *Unity in Christ*. The reason for the meeting was our request to have one more dialogue following the notice from the PRC committee earlier in the year that they would recommend to the 2002 PRC Synod to discontinue contact with the United Reformed Churches. A brotherly, candid, and clear dialogue engaged the two committees the entire morning.

In August of 2002 the committee received the notice from the PRC committee that their synod had decided to discontinue discussions with the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URC. While the committee does not necessarily subscribe to all that is assigned to us in the formulation of the grounds, we reproduce the decision and its grounds as adopted by the PRC Synod 2002.

That synod approve the recommendation of the Contact Committee to discontinue discussions with the CERCU of the URC. Grounds:

- a. The actions of the URC synod in 1999 effectively stopped the process toward unity.
 - 1) The purpose of the meetings is to work toward church unity in the way of the two committees resolving differences and submitting the agreements of the committees to the major assemblies for approval.
 - 2) Although the CERCU came to a basic agreement with the PRC position on common grace and the well-meant offer, when the CERCU presented its work to the synod of the URC in 1999, the URC synod endorsed the work of the CERCU, but not the doctrinal positions taken by the committee.

- b. Discussions between the Contact Committee and the CERCU have come to an impasse on such matters as the extent of the teaching and authority of the creeds, the binding character of ecclesiastical decisions, and the proper viewpoint of church unity.
- 1) As regards the creeds, the PRC are convinced that the creeds address such matters as common grace, the well-meant offer, and a conditional covenant, and in fact that the creeds condemn these errors. The CERCU insists that these matters are not confessional, and thus one may maintain or condemn them and still be within the bounds of the Reformed confessions. For the PRC to accept that position would not only be a compromising of all that we stand for, but would also deny the work of the Spirit of truth who has continued to guide Christ's church into the truth. This we are emphatically unwilling to do.
 - 2) With regard to church unity, their position is that if they consider a church to be a true church, then they are obligated to seek unity with that church, regardless of the differences in doctrine and practice, and even regardless of whether the two churches are moving in opposite directions. This means that the CERCU is willing to continue discussions with our committee on any number of topics for the foreseeable future. However, whatever agreement we may or may not arrive at as committee is of no official consequence for the URC, for the positions remain merely the views of the men on the committee. Therefore, continued discussions will not reach the goal of ecclesiastical unity, which is the mandate of the Contact Committee (cf. Constitution, V, A).
- c. Since discussions began in 1999, the URC has moved farther away from the PRC. Specifically, the URC:
- 1) Approved of divorce and remarriage, by accepting into their denomination a minister who was known to be divorced and remarried.
 - 2) Showed that they are willing to tolerate the error of the framework theory, by not disciplining URC men who came out publicly in favor of it, and by refusing to condemn it in the decision on creation and evolution passed by the synod of 2001.
 - 3) Proved that they are willing to tolerate, if not officially approve, the error of the conditional covenant, by the decision to move towards full ecclesiastical union with the Canadian Reformed Churches (synod 2001).
 - 4) Showed its willingness to tolerate the teaching of postmillennialism and theonomy, by admitting into their denomination a minister holding to these convictions. **Carried."**

On December 12, 2002 the committee sent the PRC brothers a final communication once more indicating the call to further church unity. We included the following.

As we have indicated a number of times, it is our committee's conviction that the Scripture and the Reformed Confessions direct our two federations with such a similar history and with a great many Reformed doctrinal conformities, to benefit from continued mutual dialogue. Thus we regret that you have found it necessary to discontinue our discussions. Our committee members have profited from interacting with you, and we too are thankful to have had opportunity to bear witness of the great truths of God's revelation and the Church's Confessions. We again thank you for your hospitality.

On the basis of the decision of the Protestant Reformed Churches to discontinue contact with the URC, the committee recommends that synod remove the Protestant Reformed Churches from the churches with whom the committee is mandated to pursue ecumenical relations.

II. REFORMED CHURCH OF QUEBEC / L'EGLISE REFORMEE DU QUEBEC (ERQ)

The ministry of the ERQ is rather unique in that it takes place in the predominantly Roman Catholic province of Quebec where French is the official language. The six small churches totaling some 400 members are seeking to be faithful to the Reformed faith. Their history is colorful and quite different from the typical Canadian and Reformed federations. Seemingly they are unique in their confessional stance also. The ERQ accept beside the ecumenical creeds, the Confession de la Rochelle, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. However, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession *constitute the official expression of our beliefs, which all office bearers must adhere to.* The *Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline of the Reformed Churches of Quebec* resembles the Church Order of Dort somewhat and has a multitude of Scriptural references.

The committee has met twice with the ERQ representatives since Synod Escondido. Because of their small size each minister bears a heavy responsibility, and progress in ecumenical relations proceeds slowly. The ERQ Synod 2002 mandated their Interchurch Relations Committee to *pursue correspondence relations with the United Reformed Churches.* The committee met with their delegates to NAPARC of which the ERQ is a member. We had a fraternal

dialogue and informative luncheon with the two members. Later the committee decided that because of their synod's decision, and the eagerness to pursue dialogue, to recommend that synod entered into Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ).

12. REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NORTH AMERICA (RPCNA)

For a number of years representatives of the United Reformed Churches have attended the synods of the RPCNA as observers. In 2001 the secretary of the committee was delegated to go, and reported that their Interchurch Relations Committee provided him with a copy of “The Book of Psalms for Singing” and “The Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian and Reformed Church of North America.” The latter contains The Westminster Confession of Faith and The Testimony the RPCNA in parallel columns, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechism. All are referred to as “Subordinate Standards.” The constitution is also comprised of the Directory for Church Government, the Book of Discipline, the Directory for the Worship of God, and the official vows and forms.

In 2003 the RPCNA, consisting of 75 congregations and some 6,156 members, convened its 172nd Synod. The URC had been invited to send representatives. This time Rev. Bouwers and Rev. Stienstra attended. In his address Rev. Bouwers noted: *We thank God for the way you have also sought to stand beside us and for how you have encouraged us in word and example in our stand for the inerrancy of Scripture, the gospel of grace and confessional integrity. It is in that sense that we share with you a common commitment and parallel, though not at all identical history that is old and venerable yet true and relevant for today.*

He noted that whereas the URCNA could not be characterized as *exclusive* psalmodists, we could be called *dominant* psalmodists, since Church Order Article 39 states *The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches.* Our observer said: *What is remarkable to us, noteworthy, is the devotional character of this assembly with its attention to preaching and prayer. Your meeting is clearly more than a business meeting and your fellowship and concern for one another as members of the family of faith are evident and commendable. We also appreciate, from the reports of the churches, that there is in the midst of your churches a strong and timely emphasis on the importance of the covenant family, and on the prayerful development of strong fathers and leaders.*

The committee representatives met over lunch with their Interchurch Relations Committee. We distributed the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, and discussed with the IRC the possibility of entering into the first Phase with the RPCNA. The brothers were eager to engage us in informative dialogue and welcome the more formal relationship. Thus it is that the committee recommends to Synod Calgary that synod enters into Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. Because of this and the informative nature of the report, Rev. Bouwers' Report of the RPCNA 172nd Synod is appended.

13. NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL (NAPARC)

On November 11-13 the entire committee with the exception of the URC Stated Clerk, its *ex officio* member, attended the NAPARC meeting and was able to have several meetings with some of the member churches afterward. It was also at that time that we were able to have our annual committee meeting.

From Tuesday noon until Wednesday noon the committee members observed NAPARC in order to evaluate its purpose and functioning. NAPARC is a group of conservative, confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America whose stated purpose is to promote communication and cooperation between member denominations in promoting the Reformed faith and to *hold before one another the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.* Several member churches of NAPARC are among those that CERCU has been mandated to contact and being present at NAPARC allowed the committee to have both formal and informal meetings with them.

Current member churches are the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), the Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). The RPCNA served as host for this year's meeting. In addition to the member churches, observers were present from the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, and the URCNA. Up until a few years ago the Christian Reformed Church had also been a member denomination.

They were one of the charter members who helped organize NAPARC in 1975. However their membership was first suspended and then terminated because of their endorsement of women elders and ministers on the basis that the Biblical prohibitions against women rulers no longer apply.

Rev. Pontier addressed the assembly reminding the body of their original intention to *hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice*. He also stressed the need for seeking such unity in the present fractured ecclesiastical world, and noted the need to observe the distinction between confessions and theology. We reproduce some of the speaker's words.

As you are well aware, our respective confessions are not exhaustive. They do not address every theological issue. And there is within the family of confessionally Reformed denominations a good deal of theological diversity even though confessionally, the theology of the Westminster standards and the Three Forms of Unity are nearly identical. This theological diversity is perhaps one of the greatest hindrances to organic union between our several groups. We each want to guard and protect our distinctives and fear they would be lost if we united organically even though we are confessionally the same.

Where such fear exists, we must make an honest evaluation of our own respective communions. Is there complete theological unity within our own houses in those areas not covered by the confessions? Is every theological issue that comes up at our respective synods or general assemblies always decided quickly, easily and unanimously? Is there never any heated debate? Obviously, we have all learned to live with theological diversity within our own fellowships in those areas not covered directly by the confessions. If we can do that in our respective denominations, should we not be more open to greater expression of unity than that which has characterized this body for the 28 years of its existence?

We must affirm that it is Christ who makes us one, and that it is through the confessions that we recognize our spiritual unity. In the context and the boundaries of those confessions, we must dialogue as full brothers regarding that about which we may yet disagree. If we are indeed one in Christ and committed to living by His Word, as summarized in our confessions, we should not fear such dialogue but welcome it as our duty to encourage and admonish one another.

The committee decided to recommend to Synod Calgary 2004 that the United Reformed Churches apply for membership in NAPARC. The procedure entails a two-year process requiring approval at one of their annual meetings followed by approval of the major assemblies of the member churches. The grounds or reasons that convinced the committee in recommending that the URCNA should join NAPARC are three-fold:

1. There is renewed interest and effort in NAPARC to work for organic union among churches of like faith and practice.
2. Although NAPARC itself may not be the vehicle to unit member churches, it provides an opportunity for meaningful communication. It holds before the members the need to work for unity and helps motivate member churches to engage in dialogue, one on one, with other denominations.
3. The URCNA can make a meaningful contribution to NAPARC discussion, better representing the continental Reformed traditions and distinctives than is presently done in a group that is predominantly Presbyterian.

14. PHASE 2 COMMITTEE REPORTS

Synod Escondido decided that the committee should produce a joint report with the Canadian Reformed committee about the work of the three Phase 2 committees. We report that this was impossible when the committee convener, Dr. J. De Jong, became seriously ill and retired from his committee. It also happened that the Canadian Reformed Synod met in February 2004. The result was that each committee presented its report to its own synod. For the sake of clarity we note Synod Escondido's decision recorded in the 2001 Minutes, page 24.

Recommended that the three committees should report annually to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity, which will in turn make full annual reports to the churches concerning this work. The CERCU shall produce a single comprehensive report jointly with the Canadian Reformed Committee for the

Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. This report will be presented to the next synods of the two federations by public distribution. Adopted

Below the committee presents the three Phase 2 committee reports in the order Synod Escondido listed them in the Minutes. The committee recommends that when each of these reports is presented for discussion or information, a member of that committee be given the privilege of the floor to respond.

A. CHURCH ORDER COMMITTEE REPORT

Esteemed Brothers,

In accordance with the requirement set forth in Article XLV.B.4, which stipulates that, the URCNA Church Order Committee “report annually to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity”, (cf. Minutes of the 4th Synod of the URCNA, p.24) we present this “progress” report. It is our understanding that you will forward this report as received to Synod Calgary. Since this report will then in effect also be our report to Synod, we will begin with a brief review of the work of the committee to date.

The Preparatory Work of the Committee

The members of the URCNA Church Order Committee – Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Elder Harry Van Gorp – met for the first time at Mid America Reformed Seminary, in Dyer, Indiana on May 30, 2002. At this meeting Dr. Kloosterman was elected to serve as the chairman of our committee and Rev. Sikkema as its secretary. We discussed at some length the Mandate assigned to our committee as recorded on p.24 of the Minutes of Synod Escondido, as follows:

- a. That the current Church Orders of the two federations be evaluated in the light of the scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Dort CO. (and)
- b. That the CO committee work together with a Canadian Reformed CO committee to develop suitable and agreeable adaptations of the Church Order of Dort, retaining and maintaining its principles, structure and essential provisions.

We paid careful attention to the exegesis of point a., noting that one could understand it either as requiring that we do three things *vi-a-vis* the current Church Orders of the two federations, namely: that we evaluate them, a) in light of Scriptural principles, b) in light of confessional principles, and c) in light of the CO of Dort; or that we, having taken careful note of the Scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of the CO of Dort, evaluate how and to what extent our current Church Orders reflect Dort’s pattern. We left the matter unresolved.

We noted that point b, though requiring that the “principles, structure and essential provisions” of the CO of Dort are to be maintained, does not in fact require a slavish copying of Dort. We understand our mandate to require of us that we develop a CO that can effectively serve the church of the 21st Century.

The committee gave careful attention to the 17 Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government, (cf. pp. 33-35 of the second edition of the URCNA-CO). We confirmed that those Foundational Principles, though they could and should in some instances be reformulated, are non-negotiable and we affirmed that these Principles must constitute the basis on which we will conduct our discussions with the members of the CanRC CO committee.

Dr Kloosterman had requested, several months before our May 30 meeting date, that each member of the CO committee compare and contrast an assigned portion of the two Church Orders. At our May meeting we not only reviewed that work, we also produced a complete re-write of our (the URCNA) Church Order, as well as a “mapping” of the three church orders, that of Dort, that of the CanRC and that of the URCNA.

The Joint Work of the Two CO Committees

To date the two CO committees have met four times: in December of 2002, and in February, August, and November of 2003. Dr Kloosterman was asked to serve the JCO (Joint Church Order) committee as chairman, Rev. Sikkema as secretary and Mr. Nordeman as the writer of a Press Release of each meeting – the four thus far published are available from the committee. Though at times our discussions were intense, we have had a most wonderful working

relationship with the brothers of the CanRC CO committee: Dr Jack de Jong, Mr. Gerard Nordeman, Rev. John Van Woudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten. (Because his health had deteriorated to a point that he could no longer function on the committee, Dr. De Jong requested that he be relieved of committee responsibilities. With sadness the committee acquiesced with his request; Dr. Gijbert Nederveen was subsequently appointed by the CanRC to take his place on the JCO committee. Dr. De Jong was heartily thanked for his interest in and contributions to the work of the JCO committee and commended to the love and care of our heavenly Father by the chairman.)

At our first meeting the joint committee reviewed the mandates assigned by our respective churches. It soon became clear that the two mandates were very similar. Both require that the differences between the current church orders of the federations be examined in light of the Scriptural and confessional principles, and that a common church order be proposed which maintains the principles, structure, and essential provisions of the Church Order of Dort. Significantly, both committees – in their preparatory work – had done extensive work in “mapping” the three Church Orders to facilitate this evaluation. Additionally, both committees had prepared a draft proposal for a common church order. We agreed to use the 1914 CRC edition of the CO of Dort as our basis; therefore, the draft proposals of the two committees are being evaluated against that template. It was, however, also agreed that though our respective mandates speak of “maintaining the principles, structure and essential provisions of the CO of Dort”, this must not be interpreted to mean a slavish following of either the wording or of the sequence of the Dort articles in the new JCO.

Considerable time was spent on the need for and the place of an Introduction in the new JCO. In the CanRC CO the Introduction provides an overview of the history of its Church Order. The Introduction to the URCNA CO, on the other hand, focuses on the function of and the need for a church order. Moreover, it includes 17 “Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government” which, we made clear to the Can RC brothers, are fundamental. That is, while specific wording could indeed be revised/improved, the Principles must remain. We eventually agreed to an Introduction with four components: 1) Biblical and Confessional Basis, 2) Historical Background, 3) Foundational Principles and 4) Broad Divisions.

After having come to agreement on the wording of Article 1: “Purpose of the Church Order” and Article 2: “The Three Offices” we agreed that all subsequent articles would remain unnumbered until such a time that all articles for the new JCO have been formulated. Once the work of writing the various CO articles is completed the committee will discuss, and propose for adoption to the churches, the proper order of the articles in the new JCO.

Since the work thus far completed by the committee – all of a provisional nature, to be sure – will be included as a separate part of this report, we will not comment on all of the discussions engaged in by the JCO committee in coming to our present wording of the articles completed to date. We will, however, comment on matters, which occasioned lengthy discussions because of differences in the history and/or practice of our federations.

Questions relating to the calling to and the preparation for the ministry received much attention. We agreed that a man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and that he must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory. Articles have been formulated which stipulate that it is the responsibility of the *consistory* to ensure that a student receives a thoroughly reformed education and that his financial needs are met, and that it is the responsibility of the *classis* to examine a student who requests licensure to exhort (or to speak an edifying word) in the churches – since such licensure permits the student to function beyond the local congregation and affects all the churches of the federation. We also decided to send the JCO article entitled: “Preparation for the Ministry” to the Committee on Theological Education for its input and reaction.

We debated at length the question: Whose responsibility is it to declare a man a candidate for the ministry? Does that responsibility rest upon a consistory, as practiced by the URCNA, or is that the responsibility of the classis, as practiced by the CanRC? Considering the fact that the office of the minister extends beyond the local congregation and that he is eligible for call among all the churches of the federation we agreed that the responsibility to declare a man a candidate for the ministry more properly belongs to the classis.

Much time was also devoted to the question of jurisdiction. We agree that Christ rules the church via authority, which He gives to the office bearers of the local church. The question that we discussed at length, however, was: What is the authority of the “broader” assemblies *vis-a-vis* the authority of the consistory? There are distinct differences of

opinion on that question between the two federations, no doubt colored by our traditions as well as by our recent histories. The matter was resolved with the adoption of a simple statement, as follows: “The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction only and exclusively relating to matters properly before them.”

We decided that an article re “Exceptional Gifts” (cf. Art.8 CO Dort) not be included in the new JCO. Though it is recognized that in times of calamity or distress such an article could be helpful, we also agreed that at this time in the history of our churches, considering the agreed upon requirement that every minister be thoroughly trained for the ministry – a training that is readily available – and in view of the fact that such an article all too easily is/can be abused, the churches will be better served if such an article is omitted. We also agreed that “The Office of Teachers of Theology” (cf. Art.2 CO Dort) not be recognized as one of the offices in the church of Christ.

Several articles dealing with the calling and task of ministers of the Word, as well as articles stipulating their relationship to the church (es) and the churches responsibility for the care and retirement of ministers have been formulated. The Dort provision for “recent converts wishing to enter the ministry” is, we believe, adequately covered in the article entitled: “An Ordained Minister Without a Congregation Entering the Federation” wherein the requirement of an examination by classis and “an adequate period of consistorial supervision” is stipulated. The article entitled: “Exceptional Release of a Minister” (cf. our present Art.11 as well as CanRC Art.11: “Dismissal”) gave rise to much discussion and agonizing. How could we formulate such an article so that it would not (automatically?) put the onus on the minister? We trust that the article we propose will not lend itself to such interpretation.

Our proposed articles re the calling, task and function of elders and deacons begin with the *proviso* that “the council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office,” something not heretofore stipulated in our church orders, but a matter we deem to be very important for a proper functioning of elders and deacons in the government and care of the church of Jesus Christ.

Our proposed “Ecclesiastical Assemblies” article delineates a number of specific points re the make-up and function(ing) of the broader assemblies. In agreement with the CO of Dort, (cf. Art.29) as well as with the current practice of the CanRC, the new JCO will call for the recognition of four assemblies, to wit: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod and the general synod. It is to be understood that the terms *classis* and *synod* designate either ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions; as *assemblies* these bodies exist only for the duration of their meetings. Moreover, since they are deliberative in nature, the delegates to these bodies must not be seen, nor are they to conduct themselves as representatives of their churches. Rather, they are members of the body/assembly to which they were delegated.

Appropriate articles were formulated which prescribe that the classes shall choose the delegates to both the regional and the general synod – thereby assuring a better distribution of delegates from among the churches; that those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body – thereby assigning them authority to deal with all matters properly placed before that assembly; and that in all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted and only in an ecclesiastical manner. Moreover, the broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. All matters must originate with a consistory and must be considered by a classis and a regional synod before they may be considered by a general synod. Only those matters may be acted upon by a broader assembly that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies. Each broader assembly will be required to approve for publication a press release of its proceedings.

Proposed wording of articles relating to the specific function and make-up of the broader assemblies is also included. We propose that the classes be required to meet once every four months unless the convening church of a classis, in consultation with a neighboring church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of classis. However, the cancellation of a meeting of a classis may not occur twice in succession. Each classis must appoint some of its most experienced and competent ministers and elders to visit all the churches of the classis. The task and function of the church visitors is also spelled out.

We propose that a regional synod, consisting of three or more classes in a region, shall ordinarily meet once per year. A regional synod may deal only with such matters as are placed on its agenda by the member classes, and with appeals

from consistories or church members who have previously processed their appeals through their consistory and classis. The task and function of Deputies of Regional Synod is also delineated.

The general synod is to meet once every three years. It was noted that our churches, though typically making use of “Rules for Classical Procedure”, do not have any “Guidelines (or Rules) for General Synod” as do the CanRC. We respectfully inform Synod that it is our considered opinion that Synod will be well served with the adoption of such Guidelines and request that Synod mandate our committee to write an appropriate “Guidelines for Synodical Procedure” document. Moreover, the question of the number of men to be delegated to the general synod cannot be finalized until the question of Rules for Synodical Procedure is settled since such Guidelines ipso facto proceed from a certain understanding of what a synod is, and how this body will/must conduct its business.

The Work on the JCO Accomplished to Date

What follows below is the Introduction to the new JCO with its four parts: Biblical and Confessional Basis, Historical Background, Foundational Principles and Broad Divisions, and the articles for the new JCO thus far – provisionally – adopted by our committee. We want to underscore that the reason for including this accounting of the work thus far accomplished by the JCO committee is not to invite a discussion or debate on the floor of Synod this year re either the wording or the pros and cons of any item. Rather, we include this section in order to inform Synod of the progress and direction of our work, and to request of Synod that it encourages the churches to study and respond – positively and negatively – to our work to us. We will then seek to incorporate, as much as possible, the concerns raised, and the suggestions made for approval. When our draft of the new JCO is completed we plan to present it to Synod, with a proposal that Synod give it to the churches for two years of study, reaction, discussion – before we present our final product to Synod for adoption.

Introduction

Biblical and Confessional Basis

We Reformed believers maintain that the standard for personal, public, and ecclesiastical life is God's Word, the inspired, infallible, and inerrant book of Holy Scripture. As a federation of churches we declare our complete subjection and obedience to that Word of God. We also declare that we are confessional churches, in that we believe and are fully persuaded that the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, summarize and do fully agree with the Word of God. Therefore, we unitedly subscribe to these Reformed Confessions.

Both the Word of God and these Reformed Confessions demand that in our ecclesiastical structure and rule we openly acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the supreme and only Head of the church. Christ exercises His headship in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the ordained offices, for the sake of purity of doctrine, holiness of life and order in the churches. The churches of our federation, although distinct, willingly display their unity and accountability, both to each other and especially to Christ, by means of our common Confessions and this Church Order. Congregations manifest this unity when their delegates meet together in the broader assemblies.

Historical Background

Our Church Order has its roots in the continental European background of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformed churches desired to be faithful to God's Word in practice and life as well as in doctrine. Therefore, as early as the mid-sixteenth century, and even in the midst of persecution, the Reformed churches set down the foundation of the Church Order at various synods beginning in 1563, including those in Wezel, the Netherlands (1568), and in Emden, Germany (1571). For the most part, the decisions of the assemblies in this period leaned heavily on the church orders already in place and used by the Reformed churches in France and Geneva.

The Church Order adopted at Emden was revised at the Synods of Dordrecht (1574 and 1578), Middelburg (1581), and the Hague (1586), before being adopted by the well-known Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619). Our Church Order follows the principles and structure of the Church Order of Dordrecht.

Foundational Principles

The following list of foundational principles, though not exhaustive, provides a clear Biblical foundation for, and source of our Church Order.

1. The church is the possession of Christ, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant.
Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27
2. As Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ is the Head of the church.
Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18
3. Because the church is Christ's possession and He is its Head, the principles governing the church are determined not by human preference, but by biblical teaching.
Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 1:18, II Timothy 3:16, 17
4. The catholic or universal church possesses a spiritual unity in Christ and in the Holy Scriptures.
Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; I Timothy 3:15; II John 9
5. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national or regional offices to His church. The offices of minister, elder and deacon are local in authority and function. Therefore, a broader assembly governs the church only by way of delegation, and exists only when it is in session.
Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Ephesians 4:11-16; Titus 1:5
6. In its subjection to its Heavenly Head, the church is governed by Christ from heaven by means of His Word and Spirit with the keys of the kingdom, which He has given to the local church for that purpose. Therefore, no church may lord it over another church, nor may one office bearer lord it over another office bearer.
Matthew 16:19; 23:8; John 20:22, 23; Acts 20:28-32; Titus 1:5
7. Although churches exist in certain circumstances without formal federative relationships, the well-being of the church requires that such relationships be entered wherever possible. Entering into or remaining in such relationships should be voluntary; there is however a spiritual obligation to seek and maintain the federative unity of the churches by formal bonds of fellowship and cooperation.
Acts 11:22, 27-30; 15:22-35; Romans 15:25-27; 1 Corinthians 16: 1-3; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 4: 9-10; Revelation 1:11, 20
8. The exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the basis of unity in faith and in confession.
I Corinthians 10:14-22; Galatians 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:16-17
9. Member churches meet together in broader assemblies to manifest ecclesiastical unity, to guard against human imperfections and to benefit from the wisdom of many counselors. The decisions of such assemblies derive their authority from their conformity to the Word of God.
Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17
10. In order to manifest our spiritual unity, churches should seek contact with other faithful, confessionally Reformed churches for their mutual edification and as an effective witness to the world.
John 17:21-23; Ephesians 4:1-6
11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth.
Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; II Corinthians 5:18-21
12. Christ cares for and governs His church through the office bearers, whom He chooses through the congregation.
Acts 1:23-26; 6:2-3; 14:23; I Timothy 3:1,8; 5:17
13. The Scriptures require that ministers, elders and deacons be thoroughly equipped for the suitable discharge of their respective offices.
I Timothy 3:2-9; 4:16; II Timothy 2:14-16; 3:14; 4:1-5
14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, the church, under the supervision of the Consistory, is called to worship Him according to the Scriptural principles governing worship.
Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1,2,6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24;
I Peter 2:9
15. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is called through its teaching ministry to build up the people of God in faith.
Deuteronomy 11:19; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 2:2; 3:16-17

16. Christian discipline, arising from God's love for His people, is exercised in the church to correct and strengthen the people of God, to maintain the unity and the purity of the church of Christ, and thereby to bring honor and glory to God's name.

I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; Hebrews 12:7-11

17. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every church member, but when official discipline by the church becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the Consistory of the church, to whom the keys of the kingdom are entrusted.

Matthew 18:15-20; John 20:22-23; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

Broad Divisions

Since we desire to honor the apostolic command that in the churches all things are to be done decently and in good order (I Corinthians 14:40), we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities under the following divisions:

- I. Offices (Articles 1-)
- II. Assemblies (Articles -)
- III. Worship, Sacraments and Ceremonies (Articles -)
- IV. Discipline (Articles -)

Article 1 JCO: Purpose of the Church Order

For the purpose of maintaining good order in the Church of Christ, it is necessary that there be: Offices; Assemblies; Supervision of Doctrine, Worship, Sacraments and Ceremonies; and Christian Discipline.

ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICES

Article 2 JCO: The Three Offices

Christ has instituted three distinct offices in the church: the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. No one shall exercise an office without having been lawfully called to it.

The Minister of the Word

Article re: The Duties of the Minister

The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word consist of continuing in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, administering the sacraments, catechizing the youth, watching over his fellow office bearers, and finally, together with the elders shepherding the congregation, exercising church discipline, and ensuring that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article re: The Calling of an Ordained Minister Within the Federation

A minister already ordained within the federation who is called to another congregation shall be called in the lawful manner by the council. The classis shall ensure the good order of the calling process, including the issuance of written testimonies of his good standing and of his release from the church and classis he last served.

Upon receipt of these documents, the church shall install him with the use of the appropriate liturgical form and he shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

The approval of classis shall be required for a second call to the same minister regarding the same vacancy.

Article re: An Ordained Minister Without a Congregation Entering the Federation

A minister who has been ordained in a church outside the federation shall be admitted to serve a church within the federation only after an adequate period of consistorial supervision and only after sustaining an examination conducted to the satisfaction of classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation, whereupon he may be declared eligible for call.

Article re: Bound to a Particular Church

No one shall serve in the ministry of the Word unless he is bound to a particular church, either as a minister of the congregation or as one charged with some other ministerial task. All ministers shall remain subject to the Church Order.

Article re: Bound for Life

A minister of the Word once lawfully called is bound to the service of the churches for life and shall at all times remain subject to the call of the congregation. He may leave this vocation only for weighty reasons, upon the approval of his council and with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod.

Article re: The Support and Emeritation of Ministers

- A. Each church shall provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and shall contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. In the event of the minister's death, adequate provision shall be made for the support of his surviving dependents.
- B. A minister who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness or otherwise, shall retain the honor and title of a minister, and shall retain his official bond with the church which he served last, which shall provide honorably for his support.
- C. The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the council, and with the concurring advice of classis and of the deputies of regional synod.

Article re: The Calling of a Candidate

The lawful calling to the office of minister of those who have not previously been in that office shall consist of:

First, the election by the council of one who has been declared a candidate according to the regulations prescribed herein, after having prayed and having received the advice of the congregation and of the counselor appointed by classis.

Second, the examination necessary for ordination, which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the classis to which the calling church belongs, in accordance with the regulations adopted by the federation as set forth in Appendix "X".

Finally, the public ordination before the congregation, which shall take place with proper instructions, admonitions, prayers and subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, followed by the laying on of hands by the ministers who are present and by the elders of the congregation, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

Article re: Preparation for the Ministry

- A. Competent men shall be encouraged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man aspiring to the ministry must be a member of a church in the federation and must evidence genuine godliness to his consistory, who shall ensure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church shall see to it that his financial needs are met.
- B. Anyone aspiring to the ministry shall seek licensure to exhort in the churches. Such licensure shall be granted only after the student has completed at least one year of theological education, and has sustained a licensure examination conducted by his classis as required by Appendix "X". Classis shall give license only to one who is preparing for the ministry, and only for the duration of his theological training. All the work of the licentiate shall be conducted under consistorial supervision.
- C. At the conclusion of his training a student shall ask his consistory to request classis to conduct a candidacy examination, as required in Appendix "X". Upon sustaining this examination, the classis, with the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, shall declare him eligible for call among the churches of the federation.

Article re: Exceptional Release of a Minister

When for weighty reasons and exceptional circumstances a pastoral relationship has been irreconcilably broken, a minister may be released from his duties in the congregation only under the following conditions:

- a. This release shall not occur for delinquency in doctrine or life, which would warrant church discipline;
- b. This release shall take place only when attempted reconciliation, with the involvement of classis, has been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation;
- c. This release shall occur only with the approval of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, which approval shall include provisions for the proper support of the minister and his family for up to two years.
- d. The council from whose service he has been released shall announce his eligibility for call. This eligibility shall be valid for no more than two years, where after he shall be honorably discharged from office.

B. The Offices of Elder and Deacon

Article re: Nomination and Eligibility for Office

The council shall provide adequate preparation of elders and deacons by means of instruction and training regarding the duties of each office. The procedure for the lawful calling of elders and deacons shall consist of the following:

First, the council shall nominate only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office, and who indicate their agreement with the Form of Subscription. Prior to nominating, the council may invite the congregation to direct attention to suitable men. The number of nominees shall be at least equal to, or at most twice the number of vacancies.

Second, after public prayer, elders and deacons shall be elected by the congregation according to the regulations adopted for that purpose to a term specified by the consistory.

Third, the council shall appoint the elders and deacons, and shall announce their names to the congregation two weeks prior to entering office, in order that the congregation may have opportunity to bring lawful objections to the attention of the consistory. They shall be publicly ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form, and shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

Article re: Term and Installation of Elders and Deacons

Elders and deacons, having been elected in accordance with local regulations to a term specified by the consistory, and having been appointed by the council, shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, and shall be ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form before entering upon their work.

Article re: The Duties of Elders

The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of shepherding and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. They shall see to it that their fellow-elders, the minister(s) and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, persist in praying for the congregation, assist in catechizing the youth in the congregation, and promote confessionally Reformed schooling at all levels. Moreover, they shall visit the members of the congregation according to need, engage in family visiting, preserve and promote concord and unity among the members and between the congregation and its office bearers, exercise discipline in the congregation, promote the work of evangelism and missions, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order.

II. ASSEMBLIES

Article re Ecclesiastical Assemblies

- A. Among the churches of the federation, four assemblies shall be recognized: the consistory, the classis, the regional synod, and the general synod. The terms *classis* and *synod* designate either ecclesiastical assemblies or ecclesiastical regions. As assemblies, classes and synods are deliberative in nature, and exist only for the duration of their meetings.
- B. Those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be issued proper credentials by their delegating body as required in Appendix “X”, thereby receiving authorization to deliberate and decide upon all the matters properly placed before them.
- C. In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, and only in an ecclesiastical manner. Matters once decided on may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds. The broader assemblies shall exercise jurisdiction exclusively relating to matters properly before them. Only those matters shall be considered in the broader assemblies that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches in common. All such matters must originate with a consistory and must first be considered by a classis and a regional synod before they may be considered by a general synod.
- D. The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer. In every assembly there shall be a chairman, assisted by a vice-chairman. It is the chairman’s duty to state and explain clearly the business to be transacted, to ensure that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed, and to ensure that every member observes due order and decorum. In all broader assemblies these functions shall cease when the assembly adjourns.
- E. In every assembly a clerk shall keep an accurate record of the proceedings. Regulations for broader assemblies shall delineate the function of the convening church and/or of the designated clerk serving the convening churches.
- F. At the close of broader assemblies, admonition shall be given to those who demonstrated unworthy behavior, either during the meeting or regarding a decision of a narrower assembly.
- G. Each broader assembly shall approve for publication a press release regarding its proceedings.

Article re: The Classis

A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose consistories shall delegate two members, ordinarily a minister and an elder, with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis. Ordinarily a classis shall consist of between eight and twelve churches.

A classis shall be held every four months, unless the convening church, in consultation with the neighboring church, concludes that no matters have been sent in by the churches that would warrant the convening of a classis. Cancellation of a classis shall not be permitted to occur twice in succession.

The churches shall take turns providing a chairman from their delegation, and convening classis. The same person shall not function as chairman twice in succession.

The classis shall inquire of each church whether consistory, council and diaconal meetings are regularly held, the Word of God is purely preached, the sacraments are faithfully administered, church discipline is diligently exercised, the poor are adequately cared for and confessionally Reformed schooling is wholeheartedly promoted. The classis shall also inquire whether the consistory needs the advice or the assistance of classis for the proper government of the church, and whether the decisions of the broader assemblies are being honored.

Each classis shall appoint a convening church and determine the time and place of the next classis.

The last classis before regional synod shall choose delegates to that synod. If the regional synod consists of three classes, each classis shall delegate three ministers and three elders. If the regional synod consists of four or more classes, each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders.

The second last classis before general synod shall choose delegates to that synod.

Article re: Church Visitors

Every two years classis shall appoint a number of its most experienced and competent men to visit all the churches of the classis once during that period. At each church visit at least one of the visitors shall be a minister. These visitors shall inquire whether the office-bearers perform their duties in harmony with the Word of God, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the Church Order, and properly promote, by word and deed, the edification of the whole

congregation. Moreover, they shall fraternally encourage the office-bearers to fulfill their offices faithfully that by their advice and assistance the visitors may help direct all things unto the peace, edification and profit of the churches.

The church visitors shall submit a written report of their work to the next classis.

Article re: Archives

The consistories and the broader assemblies shall ensure the proper care of their archives.

Article re: Counselors

The consistory of a vacant church shall request classis to appoint as counselor the minister it requests. His task is to assist the consistory in maintaining good order, particularly in the matter of calling a minister. Along with the council members, he also shall sign the letter of call.

Article re: The Regional Synod

A regional synod, consisting of three or more classes, shall ordinarily meet once per year. If it appears necessary to convene a regional synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its classis.

The regional synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes and with lawful appeals of decisions of a classis.

The chairman, vice chairman and clerk shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

In addition to hearing and acting on the reports of its deputies, it shall determine the time and place for the next regional synod, and designate a convening church.

Article re: Deputies of Regional Synod

Each regional synod shall appoint two deputies, along with an alternate, who shall assist the classes in all cases provided for in the Church Order. Upon the request of the classes, they may also be called to assist in cases of special difficulty.

The regional deputies shall keep a proper record of their actions. They shall submit a written report of their actions to the regional synod and, if so required, they shall further explain those actions. The deputies shall serve until they are discharged from their duties by their regional synod.

Article re: The General Synod

A general synod shall consist of delegates chosen by the classes. A general synod shall meet at least once every three years at a time and place set by the previous synod, which shall also designate a convening church. If it appears necessary to convene a general synod before the appointed time, the convening church shall determine the time and place with the advice of its regional synod.

The chairman, vice chairman and clerk(s) shall be chosen at the meeting to facilitate the work of the synod.

In addition to acting on reports, which were mandated by the previous synod, a general synod shall deal only with matters properly placed on its agenda by the churches via the classes and the regional synods.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We wish to express our gratitude to the Lord for the wonderful spirit of harmony and brotherly affection, which we were privileged to experience as we worked with the members of the CanRC committee. It is our prayer that our work may contribute to a greater awareness of and understanding between our churches and federations – so that, under the blessing of the Lord, we may in due time become one federation of churches in a sin-torn world that needs so much to see and to experience concretely “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” To God be the glory.

We recommend that Synod Calgary 2004

1. Receive this report as a progress report; that therefore the details of this JCO not be opened for discussion or debate on the floor of Synod, but that all concerns from the churches be sent in writing to the JCO CO committee (in care of its secretary, Rev. R.J. Sikkema) for its consideration; (and that Synod)
2. Decide to forward the draft of the new JCO, once it is completed, to the churches for two years of study, reaction and discussion whereupon the committee is to present a final JCO draft to Synod for adoption.

Additionally, we request

3. That Synod authorize the URCNA members of the JCO committee to write Guidelines for Synodical Procedure, for final adoption by Synod,
4. That Synod encourage our committee to fulfill its assigned mandate, and
5. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following members of the URCNA CO committee to answer Synod's questions re the report: Rev. Wm Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers and Rev. Raymond Sikkema.

Humbly submitted,

Dr. Nelson D. Kloosterman, Chairman

Rev. William Pols

Rev. Ronald Scheuers

Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, Secretary

Mr. Harry Van Gorp

B. SONGBOOK (PSALTER HYMNAL) COMMITTEE REPORT

Synod 1997 (St. Catharines, ON) appointed a Psalter Hymnal committee "to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal." The grounds for this mandate were:

1. A common Psalter Hymnal would promote unity among the churches of our federation;
2. The *Psalter Hymnal* used in the majority of our churches is presently out of print;
3. Because the process of producing a Psalter Hymnal is lengthy it would be wise to begin the process as soon as possible.

(Minutes of Synod, October 1997, Article LXII.C. [pp.33-34])

This committee explored the options of producing, reproducing, or obtaining a Psalter Hymnal and reported its finding to Synod 1999 (Hudsonville, MI). Synod Hudsonville approved the republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal, added members to the committee, and gave us the following mandate:

1. "...To begin the work of producing for publication a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal." (Minutes, Article XLI.b)
2. To provide "a recommendation of songs to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal" (Article XLI.c. (a))
3. To provide "a recommendation of other materials (Liturgical forms, the 3 forms of Unity, Creeds, Prayers, etc.) to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal." (Article XLI.c.(b))
4. "That the committee consult with those churches with whom we have entered into corresponding relations." (Article XLI.c.(c).i.(d))
5. "That the Psalter Hymnal Committee report to the next meeting of synod with a proposal for funding the new songbook." (Article XLIX.C)

Having begun this work, our committee reported our progress to Synod 2001 (Escondido, CA). Synod Escondido approved entering into "Phase Two" of ecumenicity with the Canadian Reformed Churches (which has since been ratified by a majority of URC churches), and made the following decisions regarding our committee:

1. Approved the establishment of a fund to finance the cost of the new Psalter Hymnal and requested the churches to collect free-will offerings for this cause. (Minutes, Article XXXV,D,2,3)
2. Reaffirmed our mandate of Synod 1999 and requested that we present the guiding principles for study by the churches and for adoption by the next synod. (Minutes, Article XXXV,D,4)
3. Added the following to our mandate: "That the present 'Psalter Hymnal Committee' work together with the Canadian Reformed 'Book of Praise Committee' to consider for inclusion in this song book the 150 Psalms in metrical settings (one note for each syllable) from an English translation of the Genevan Psalter, as well as other non-Genevan settings for the Psalms, and also hymns that meet the standard of faithfulness to the

Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions. The two song books primarily in use need not be included in their totality." (Minutes, Article XLV,B,2,c)

Since our last Synod the Psalter Hymnal committee has met on eight occasions, three of which were with the CanRC Book of Praise committee. Also, in keeping with Synod Escondido's instruction, we have presented annual reports to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (Minutes, Article XLV.B.4).

Most of our labors involved developing a common set of principles to be submitted to the churches of each federation for approval and evaluating hymns based on these principles and guidelines. While we have made good progress, there is much yet to be done.

As a result of this work, we humbly present to Synod 2004 the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1 - That Synod 2004 approve the "Principles and Guidelines for the Selection of Music in the Church" (*appended to the Report*).

Grounds:

- A. This will provide direction for our committee(s) in the selection of music;
- B. The CanRC Synod 2004 has approved these "Principles and Guidelines";
- C. Synod 2001 instructed our committee to "present the principles listed for the churches to study, and adoption by the next synod." (Minutes: Article XXXV.D.4.)

Recommendation #2 - That Synod 2004 recommend the Book of Praise for use in our churches.

Ground: this will familiarize our churches with the Anglo-Genevan Psalter.

Recommendation #3 - That Synod 2004 relieve our committee of the non-musical section (liturgical forms, creeds and confessions, prayers, etc.) of the new book and appoint another committee to accomplish this task.

Grounds:

- A. We make this recommendation in view of the particular skills which are required to responsibly prepare such recommendations;
- B. We make this recommendation in view of the time that will be required to responsibly prepare such recommendations.

Note: If this recommendation is adopted, Dr. Michael Horton has requested to serve on this new committee rather than on our present committee.

Recommendation #4 - That Synod 2004 add members to our committee who are theologically and musically qualified and available to serve.

Grounds:

- A. More members will allow us to delegate work to subcommittees and expedite our work;
- B. Some present members are not always available for meetings;
- C. Dr. Rob Watson was requested to serve as an adjunct member of our committee since he has transferred his membership to a PCA congregation. Dr. Horton wishes to serve on the "prose" section of the new book. Mr. Glen De Jong has requested to be excused from our committee.

Respectfully submitted,

The Psalter Hymnal Committee:

Dr. Michael Horton
Rev. Ed Knott, Chairman
Rev. Rand Lankheet
Mr. Henry Nuiver
Rev. Dennis Royall
Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen, Reporter
Dr. Rob Watson, adjunct member

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF MUSIC IN THE CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian Reformed Churches and United Reformed Churches entered into “Phase Two” of ecumenical relations, effective January 1, 2002, with the goal of eventual federative unity. The synods of those two federations mandated their respective committees to labor together to recommend to the churches a common songbook, which would be faithful to the Scriptures and our Reformed confessions.

PREFACE

The Bible is filled with references to singing. From the very beginning God’s people have responded to His grace, almighty power and presence with song. The songs of the Church are, essentially, prayers to God. They are filled with praise and thanksgiving, sorrow for sin and petition for forgiveness, and prayers for intercession on behalf of others in Christ. They also include instruction and exhortation. Thus the songs of the Church express the entire spectrum of the Christian’s experience. While every believer may find personal expression of praise, thanksgiving, petitions, and repentance in song, and while we encourage the families of our churches to make use of the songbook in family devotions, the principle purpose for which this songbook is being developed is for congregational singing. The Psalms and hymns are being selected with the prayer that they may express and enrich our congregational worship of God.

Psalm 66:2 - “Sing out the honor of His name; make His praise glorious.”

Ephesians 5:19 – “. . .Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

PRINCIPLES

THE SONG OF THE CHURCH IS TO BE SUITABLE FOR THE CHURCH’S WORSHIP TO THE GLORY OF GOD

1. *The songs of the Church are to be Scriptural*

In content, form, and spirit the Church’s songs must express the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

Augustine, referring to the singing of Psalms, said, “No one can sing anything worthy of God which he has not received from Him . . . then we are assured that God puts the words in our mouth.”

2. *The songs of the Church are to be a sacrifice of praise¹*

Singing is an important element of the congregation’s response to God’s redeeming work in Christ Jesus and the Word proclaimed in the worship service.

John Calvin wrote, “Singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men that they may call upon God and praise Him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. This singing should not be light or frivolous, but it ought to have weight and majesty.”

3. *The songs of the Church are to be aesthetically pleasing*

The songs for worship are to be a beautiful blend of God-honoring poetry and music.²

¹ Hebrews 13:15

² Psalm 92:1-4

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING SONGS:

1. The songs of the Church must be thoroughly biblical. They are to represent the full range of the revelation of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³
2. The Book of Psalms is foundational for the Church's songs. Therefore, all of these Psalms, in their entirety, ought to be included in the Church's songbook
3. When Psalms or other portions of Scripture are set to music, the words must be faithful to the content and form of the inspired text.⁴
4. In the case of songs other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teaching of Scripture⁵ as summarized by our Reformed confessions.
5. The songs of the Church must be intelligible⁶ and edifying to the body of Christ.⁷
6. The songs of the Church must reflect and preserve the language of the Church of all ages rather than accommodating current secular trends.⁸
7. In content and form, the songs of the Church must be free from artificiality, sentimentality, and individualism.
8. The music of the song should suit the text.
9. The music of the Church should be expressive of the Reformed tradition. Where possible, use is to be made of music developed in the tradition of this rich heritage (e.g., the Genevan psalm tunes and the Scottish Psalter).
10. The music of the Church should not be borrowed from music that suggests places and occasions other than the Church and the worship of God.⁹
11. The melodies and harmonies of church music must be suitable for congregational singing, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.

C. THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Dear members of the CERCU,

At the request of the Rev. Richard Stienstra, our committee is sending to you a progress report on our work as the URCNA's committee dealing with theological education as mandated by the URCNA's Synod that met in Escondido, California, in June 2001.

Since our last report to you (19 December 2002), our committee met by conference call again on 26 June 2003. We had received from the Theological Education Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches a 12-plus-page document entitled, "Why do the Canadian Reformed Churches have their own seminary?" The document was divided into two parts, the first part dealing with exegetical arguments, and the second part tracing the history of church control of ministerial training. Our committee discussed this document but came to the conclusion that synodically controlled seminary education was not the only kind of education that has existed historically among Reformed churches. In other words, the argumentation provided in the Canadian Reformed document was not conclusive to us.

Our position paper that set forth our committee's point of view was sent to the Canadian Reformed committee.

Furthermore, our respective committees were able to arrange a joint meeting on 13 January 2004, at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. All the Canadian Reformed committee members were present, except for Rev. Clarence Stam. Three of our committee members were unable to attend this meeting. Present for the URCNA were Rev. Bradd Nymeyer, Rev. Calvin Tuininga, and Rev. Mark Vander Hart.

³ Psalm 147:1

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:16

⁵ Proverbs 30:6

⁶ I Corinthians 14:15

⁷ Colossians 3:16

⁸ Romans 12:2a

⁹ Ephesians 5:18-21

Rev. Nymeyer formally chaired this meeting. The URCNA committee was warmly and graciously received by the members of the Canadian Reformed committee. The meeting was cordial and brotherly in tone throughout.

Both committees reported on their respective activities. Both position papers were discussed, with areas of agreement and disagreement noted. Specifically, it has to be recognized that the Canadian Reformed Churches came into existence before they decided in the 1960s to establish their theological college. The history that led to the formation of the URC includes the fact that at least two seminaries, Mid-America Reformed Seminary and Westminster Seminary in California, existed prior to the URC's formation. Both denominations have thus a different history and relationship with these theological schools. The Canadian Reformed Churches enjoy a close relationship with college in Hamilton, and therefore have few immediate concerns about having a Synodical-controlled seminary. On the other hand, many in the URC are very wary of synodically controlled seminaries, given their earlier history in the CRC.

The discussion was fairly wide-ranging, giving consideration to the education programs at the several seminaries under review, and how a united church might exercise some representation on the respective boards of the several schools, if there were not outright synodical control. Both denominations' methods of preparing men for the ordained ministry have certain strengths and weaknesses. For example, in the Canadian Reformed arrangement the church assemblies have a strong voice in the control of the theological college, while the United Reformed arrangement stresses much local church and local office-bearers' involvement in a theological student's education and training.

At the conclusion of the meeting those present agreed on the following points:

It is the task of the churches to train ministers;

Ministers of the churches must receive sound reformed theological training;

As a principle, the training of ministers should be done by ministers;

Such training is best accomplished in the context of institutional theological education;

It is acknowledged that active involvement of the churches is required for the training of ministers and to protect the confessional integrity of such training; and

The churches, i.e., the URCNA and the CanRC, should work towards theological education that is properly accountable to the churches.

Our URCNA committee discussed these points during a telephone conference call on 23 January 2004 and approved them. We anticipate further discussion in April (after the Canadian Reformed synod has met). It is also our intention to meet with the Canadian Reformed committee again on 15 June 2004 in Calgary, Alberta, just prior to the meeting of the URCNA Synod.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Vander Hart, Secretary
Theological Education Committee

15. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That synod alter its existent practice of a three year term and decide that one term of service for a committee member constitutes the time period between three consecutive synods, at which time the retiring member is eligible for further service at that synod's pleasure.
2. That synod consider the committee's proposed schedule of retirement in establishing its continuing membership.
3. That when Art.36 of the Church Order needs implementing in the establishing of an ecumenical relationship, synod declares that *ratified by a majority of the churches* is to be interpreted as meaning the majority of the churches that voted in the particular ratification process.
4. That synod establish Phase 2 – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), and make arrangements for the ratification process according to Art.36 of the Church Order.
5. That synod establish Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ).
6. That synod establish Phase 1 – *Corresponding Relations* with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA).

7. That synod remove the name of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) from the federations with whom the committee is mandated to pursue ecumenical relations.
8. That synod apply for membership in the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).
9. That synod consider Phase 2 committee reports and recommendations, and request those committees to provide representatives to answer questions.
10. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the secretary when committee matters are being considered.
11. That synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. P. Vellenga, chairman
Rev. R. Stienstra, secretary

APPENDIX

1. *Report of RCUS Synod, June 2003*

The 257th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) was held May 19-22, 2003 at the Eureka Reformed Church in Eureka, South Dakota. The RCUS finds its roots in the German Reformed Church in the United States (later called Reformed Church in the United States) that merged with the Evangelical Synod of North America in 1934, in what was known as the Evangelical and Reformed merger. One classis, the Eureka Classis, declined to participate in the merger with its confessional compromise, and continues to this day as the Reformed Church in the United States. Her doctrinal standards are the Three Forms of Unity. The RCUS counted 4,369 members in 48 congregations this year.

The Synod began with a worship service on Monday evening and also included a worship service on Wednesday evening. Business began on Tuesday morning with the election of officers: President - Rev. Vernon Pollema; Vice-President - Rev. Robert Grossmann; Stated Clerk - Rev. Paul Treick, and Treasurer - Elder Ted Griess. The Synod welcomed three new ministers: Rev. Michael McGee, Rev. Kyle Sorensen, and Rev. Guillermo Baloy. Two new congregations were received: Covenant RCUS in Chico, CA and Providence RCUS in Vermillion, SD. The roll call on Tuesday morning showed 42 ministers and 31 elder delegates present.

Many visitors to the Synod were acknowledged. Among those given permission to address the synod briefly were: Dr. Carl Zylstra of Dordt College, Keith LeMahieu, Director of Development from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Dr. R. Scott Clark of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, Marlow Van Ginkel of Hope Haven and the undersigned from the URCNA.

Missions: The RCUS supports home mission works in: Watertown, SD; Minneapolis, MN; Chico, CA; Los Angeles, CA; Greeley, CO; Vermillion, SD, San Ramon CA, Calhan CO and Bentonville Ark. Their foreign mission efforts include support for the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo and the Free Reformed Church of Kenya. They also support the Reformed Radio Administration, which seeks to reach French-speaking Africa with the gospel.

The RCUS approved their first foreign missionary since 1934. Although they have helped support two OPC foreign missionaries in recent history, they have never had one of their own ministers serve as a foreign missionary. The missionary candidate is Mr. Kurt Schimke presently an elder in the Blue Cliff, Colorado RCUS congregation. His appointment is contingent on passing his licensure and ordination exams. The cost of sending him is estimated at \$60,000 per year of which the RCUS has committed to raise half. He is scheduled to go before the OPC Foreign Missions Committee this fall to seek the other half of his support since the position he seeks to fill is under their administration. If approved, it is planned that he will teach in a seminary in Uganda and spend four months each year helping establish local congregations in Kenya. One URC congregation has also indicated a desire to support Mr. Schimke at the rate of \$5,000 per year.

Interchurch Relations: The RCUS is presently in fraternal relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Reformed

Confessing Church of the Congo, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands - Liberated (GKN-Lib). In 1999 the RCUS suspended relations with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPCM) because of a lack of communication from them. Synod decided this year to finalized the termination of relations with the IPCM. The RCUS is also a member of NAPARC and the ICRC. Fraternal delegates from three sister churches were present, the CanRC, the GKN-Lib. and the OPC.

The synod ratified the action of NAPARC to receive into its membership the L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (Reformed Church of Quebec) a small, French speaking denomination in Canada. The NAPARC constitution requires member denominations to ratify in their respective synods or general assemblies any membership changes.

The Permanent Inter-Church Relations Committee of the RCUS (IRC) recommended to the synod the formation of a special committee "to study and report on the application of Heidelberg Catechism, Q/A 103, i.e., the Lord's Day and how it should be observed in our churches." The IRC made the request as a result of meetings with representatives of the CanRC who expressed their synod's desire for ongoing discussions "about different practices relative to the observance of the Lord's Day." The proposal sparked heated debate and was defeated on a vote of 26 "Yes" and 42 "No." Some who spoke against the proposal said that the catechism was clear enough and needed no further study. Some thought that if the RCUS asked for the position of the CanRC on the Lord's Day, they would respond by pointing only to the confessions. Perhaps the most persuasive argument was the thought that regardless of which side of the issue the committee report might come down on (the continental view verses the Westminster or Puritan view) there will be an uproar in the RCUS since there is no unanimity on the Lord's Day issue in the RCUS.

Another recommendation from the IRC, again sparked by discussions with the CanRC, concerned the paper, "Biblical Principles of Church Unity" adopted by the RCUS in 1999. The paper contained five principles that were adopted as the position of the RCUS on church unity. However, the body of the paper was not adopted. The IRC recommended that the body of the report, which acts as unofficial groups for the five enumerated principles be edited so that its language be brought more in line with the language of the Three Forms of Unity. It was said that currently the language reflects more the language of the Westminster standards. Although there was some opposition voiced, the proposal passed by a clear majority and the task of bringing the language of the paper more in line with the Three Forms of Unity was given to the IRC.

The synod also "recommended to the churches the desirability of fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, via pulpit exchange, visiting Can Ref Churches and invitations to youth camps/conferences held by the various Classes." In 2000, groundwork was laid to form a classis of deaf congregations. Three congregations are necessary for the formation of a classis but presently there are only two deaf congregations. They presently participate in an existing classis (Covenant East) with signing provided for the deaf delegates. Signing translation was also provided at synod.

Publications and Christian Education: The RCUS is in the midst of an ambitious project to produce Sunday School material for use in their churches. Rev. Howard Hart and Elder Harvey De Groot have been working on the project for several years and the first year of all four levels (spanning pre-school to junior high) will soon be available. The material is based on, and to be used in conjunction with, *Promise and Deliverance* by S. G. De Graaf. Approval was given to first produce it on a CD in pdf format and sell it for about \$49.00 so that churches can produce as many copies as they need, although not for resale or distribution to other churches since the material and the CD are copyrighted. The price includes an answer key and teachers' manual. For the present, sale of the CD is limited to RCUS congregations.

Rev. Paul Treick was re-elected editor of the denominational magazine, the *Reformed Herald*. The Web Site Committee of the RCUS was instructed to research, establish, and implement guidelines for participation on the RCUS Internet discussion group.

In 2000 a great deal of attention was given to whether the RCUS should continue to provide financial support to RCUS students at Westminster Theological Seminary in California (WTSCA). At that time WTSCA was taken off the list of approved seminaries but the issue came up again this year with a majority and minority committee report from a committee appointed by last year's synod to investigate the matter again. The majority recommended the

reinstatement of WTSCA to the list of approved seminaries and the minority the continuation of the current policy of not recommending it. The minority report was rejected because it implied that WTSCA was a “heterodox” institution, language that the majority of delegates thought was far too strong even among those who didn’t want to reinstate the seminary. The objections to WTSCA focused especially on the teaching of the Framework Hypothesis with regard to the creation days of Genesis 1. WTSCA does not endorse any one interpretation of Genesis 1 but presents several different interpretations as possibly correct interpretations although some professors have strongly advocated the Framework Hypothesis.

In favor of reinstating the seminary to the approved list was the fact the two professors who had strongly advocated the Framework Hypotheses are no longer teaching there (Futato and Kline) and therefore the influence of that view is less than what it used to be. Those in favor of not reinstating argued that creation in six normal days is the official position of the RCUS and is an extremely important matter dealing with hermeneutics and how the rest of the Bible will be interpreted. Therefore, it was argued, RCUS students should only be educated at schools, which teach six normal day creation as the correct interpretation of Genesis 1. The matter was not resolved at this synod. After lengthy and heated debate the majority report of the special committee was referred to the Permanent Christian Education Committee, which is charged to report periodically on all the approved seminaries. That committee is now charged to visit WTSCA and evaluate them using the same criteria used to evaluate other seminaries. It appeared that the delegates were happy to hear that there have been good changes at WTSCA but wanted a more thorough report from another committee before reinstating the seminary to the list approved for student financial support.

The synod confirmed and recommended for use in all the churches a special committee report warning against the theological errors of Mr. Harold Camping of Family Radio. In response to an overture, the synod formed a special committee to study the doctrine of justification by faith in light of the current controversy surrounding the relationship of good works to justification. Appointed to the committee were Revs. Tracy Grugett, Norman Jones, David Faygrey and C.W. Powell and Elder David McPherson.

The RCUS currently supports its retired ministers and their widows with benevolent (thus non taxable) grants. Each grant is individually approved by the whole synod each year. There has been some discussion over the years of setting up a pension plan through a paid provider. This year the synod voted to investigate setting up a pension plan for its ministers.

In response to an appeal regarding a church that asked its classis to dissolve the pastoral relationship between it and its pastor, the synod upheld the right of the classis to ask for the reasons for the separation prior to approving it. The synod appointed a committee to study the matter of biennial synods. To finance all RCUS ministries, the synod asked the churches for an average contribution of \$193.25 per communicant member. Part of that money is used to reimburse the delegates for their travel expenses to synod, which amounted to about \$22,116 this year for about 75 delegates. All requests for reimbursement are approved individually, by name, by the whole synod.

Late Thursday evening as the synod was winding down and moving toward adjournment a motion was made to limit the speeches of visitors and fraternal delegates to 10 minutes. The motion was then amended to 5 minutes. The amendment to limit speeches to 5 minutes was rejected and the 10 minutes rule was passed. In the course of the debate the idea of limiting fraternal delegates received more attention and opposition than limiting visitors. It was noted that one of the fraternal delegates (who had left earlier in the day – from the GKN-Lib) had traveled all the way from the Netherlands to be at this synod. It was asked, “Should we tell him he can only speak for five minutes?” Another delegate speaking against limiting the fraternal delegates warned his brothers, “These men take fraternal relations seriously.” Indeed we do.

Respectfully submitted,
Ralph A. Pontier

2. Report of PRCNA 172nd Synod, July 2003

On June 30 and July 1, Rev. Richard Stienstra and I attended the annual synod of the RPCNA, their 172nd. It was hosted, as it usually is, at their denominationally affiliated Geneva College in Beaver Falls, PA. The agenda for this

synod was relatively light. There was ample opportunity for our delegates to get to know a number of our Reformed Presbyterian brethren and to enjoy their fellowship.

One of the remarkable features, in our estimation, of their synodical assembly is the attention to devotion and piety. At the beginning of each new day, the deliberations are preceded by a full-length sermon as a portion of their devotional exercises. As well, before each meal there is a significant time of prayer, conducted in various ways (sometimes with silent individual portions, sometimes lead by a team of assigned persons who prayed, and at other times with the assembly pairing up two by two for a time of “one on one” intercession). Always these times of prayer would be followed with the singing of a psalm sung a cappella. This is for them, of course, a principled matter of their interpretation of the regulative principle of worship. The singing of the body, comprised of some 120 or so men, was also a beautiful highlight of the synod. A good number of the tunes were also familiar to us.

During our time there, the majority of the synod’s time was spent going over the Worship Committee Study Report. This was a report that had been written over the course of a couple of years in response to a letter written to the synod by one of the pastors having some difficulty with the RPCNA positions on the Regulative Principle of Worship. This synod has now adopted this paper not only as an answer to this pastor’s concerns but also with the intention of having it published as an official position paper of the synod.

What was also notable about the process of this paper’s adoption, as became evident in the synods dealings with other matters as well, is the amount of responsibility entrusted to their standing committees. Matters such as the reports when on the floor were open to comment from the body, and only somewhat open to revision from the floor. The preferred method was always to hear the concerns of the body, recommit the matter for the committee’s further consideration, and then wait for the committee to come back with its revisions (during the same synod), because it was the committee’s report.

On Tuesday, July 1st the court recessed for a period of about one and a half hours for the purposes of having the brother ministers (teaching elders) addressed by a Christian financial management consultant and motivational speaker. This was in our minds a somewhat strange insertion into the context of a much more devotional setting. Apparently the reason for this kind of thing finding its place had to do with the recent closing down of the denominational pension fund.

From our discussions with many delegates, we determined that this old and established denomination had for many years, almost a century been quite isolationist and was a church in constant decline. Providentially that began to change in the latter part of the twentieth century and the recent years have seen quite a revival of biblical and reformed Christianity in their midst. They are actively planting churches in many locales, and yet, in God’s providence there are not many locations where the RPCNA witness overlaps significantly with ours in the URCNA. The most recent statistics available listed their denomination at 75 churches with 6,156 souls. In comparison the URC are comprised of about 85 churches made up of a little over 19,300 souls.

Despite their relatively small size the RPCNA has a disproportionately large influence through its institutions. Geneva College, which is a liberal arts Christian college which could be described as broadly evangelical and no longer in every way thoroughly or distinctively Reformed, is still loosely connected governmentally to the RPCNA. Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary of Pittsburgh, on the other hand is under the strict control of the denomination remains quite distinctively Reformed Presbyterian. The seminary has about 100 students, only fifteen of which are RPCNA men. In both institutions the influence extended is far beyond the reaches of the small federation.

Their Church is currently in *ecclesiastical fellowship* (full intercommunion) with other RP churches in Australia, Ireland, Scotland, and Cyprus. They have *fraternal relations* with the American Presbyterian Church, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Free Church of Scotland (Synod of N. America), the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Reformed Church in the United States. All of these are for the most part being churches of NAPARC (the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council).

In all we appreciated our time among the RPCNA brethren very much. They are a warm fellowship with obvious desire to be faithful to their inheritance and covenants. In our face-to-face discussions with their IRC (Interchurch Relations Committee) we informed them of our willingness to recommend to our committee that we propose to our Synod 2004 that we enter into Phase 1, corresponding relations with this body. They were pleased with this development, as they themselves had in fact already at their previous synod been encouraged to *take steps toward establishing fraternal relations with the URCNA*. Fraternal relations, which may be as far as we can come with them for quite some time, humanly speaking, because of their unique commitments concerning worship, would be more parallel with our phase 2 (*Ecclesiastical Fellowship*). Their committee was pleased, as a result of our contact to inform the body that we are establishing corresponding relations and are happy to keep working together in the way of getting to know one another in the context of our phase 1.

Following our address to the body, one brother on the floor of synod spoke of wishing to maintain what he considered a very important “Dutch connection” and spoke of how it was the Dutch already more than three hundred years ago that helped to provide for their survival as churches in Scotland in the early years. This denomination also once had a strong connection with the CRC but that came to an end officially in 2001. It was the sense of many that our federation ought to fill the void left by the CRC.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. John A. Bouwers

COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL CONTACT WITH CHURCHES ABROAD (CECCA) REPORT

To: Synod Calgary, 2004
From: CECCA
Re: Report of Committee Activity

February, 2004

Esteemed Brothers,

Since reporting to Synod Escondido in June of 2001, your committee met per telephone conferencing on three occasions; additionally, we met once at a face-to-face meeting – in January of 2004. Herewith a brief summary of those meetings – and request for action on recommendations proposed.

The September 27, 2001 meeting of CECCA

At our September 27, 2001 meeting the first order of business was the re-organizing of our committee. Dr. M. Horton assumed the chairmanship and Rev. R.J. Sikkema the duties of secretary. The chairman confirmed that contact with most of the churches referred to in the July 9, 2001 ICRC report, (cf. Appendix 1), is dependant on such churches contacting us. To date, some of those churches have contacted us – (as will become evident) – while others have not. Two such contacts – with Mr. Prabhath De Silva of the Lanka Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, and with Rev. L. Kiemlo Pulamte of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North India – were discussed. The correspondence with Br. De Silva, who was primarily interested in obtaining financial support/sponsorship of a school being planned and of outreach ministries being contemplated by this very small federation, eventually stopped when the brother – (no doubt disappointed by the fact that the deacons of the Trinity ORC of St Catharines, whom we had contacted, decided that they would not/could not support this request for lack of accountability) – discontinued responding to our letters. The correspondence with Rev. Pulamte, after an initial letter from this brother wherein he inquired about “closer and better relationships” with us and requesting information re magazines/newsletters/brochures – to which we had duly responded – also had no further follow up. At this meeting of the committee we also briefly discussed the question of funding for our – and other URCNA – committees, a matter that was raised again at a subsequent meeting of the committee.

The February 22, 2002 meeting of CECCA

At our February 2002 meeting we adopted, what proved to a first draft of, our Terminology/Mandate paper. The final draft, which we present to Synod for adoption, is attached, (cf. Appendix 2). It should be noted that, in our correspondence with churches to date, it was that first draft which was sent to them. Upon the approval/adoption of a (final ?) Terminology Document, your committee will correspond with the churches with whom we have contact, informing them of the fact and explaining the meaning/significance of the decision of Synod. It is also the understanding of the committee that this document spells out the mandate of the CECCA in pursuing ecumenical relations with churches abroad.

We discussed the contact we have with Dr. Acheniku of the NKST whom we met at the ICRC meeting in Philadelphia. Dr. Acheniku is eager to have the NKST establish ecumenical relations with the URCNA – in lieu of such relations with the CRCNA. However, to date his efforts to have the NKST pursue such a relationship with us have been thwarted by the General Secretary of the NKST who favors maintaining/retaining their present relationship with the CRC – a relationship he believes will be threatened should the NKST pursue a relationship with the URCNA. Your committee has asked our Stated Clerk to send an invitation to the NKST, encouraging them to send (an) Observer(s) to our synod – with a copy to Br. Acheniku.

In regard to the Synod of the GKSA and our expectation that an invitation to attend its meetings would be forthcoming, we discussed a letter of invitation received by our chairman from a businessman in So. Africa who funds speakers who are asked to address various audiences in So. Africa. Dr. Horton was indeed invited, however, the dates of the meetings where he would be speaking did not mesh with the dates of the GKSA Synod. Since an invitation was

received that we send (an) Observer(s) to attend, it was decided that Rev. Sikkema be delegated to attend all the meetings, and that Dr. Horton attend the closing session(s), if possible. This decision was subsequently acted upon. We received word from Rev. Van Spronsen of the Canadian Reformed Churches that he had become the new secretary of the ICRC, replacing Rev. Van Beveren. He requested that we send updated information to him for the new ICRC Directory. The requested information was sent, noting that the URCNA has appointed two committees for Interchurch Relations, to wit: our CERCU and CECCA committees.

We discussed (again) the funding for CECCA – and other URCNA committees. We discussed at some length the question, Is there not a need for an established/agreed upon budget for such committees? This question was discussed in the context of such questions as: What determines how (the limited) funds are presently distributed? Is it first come, first served? Who decides? On what basis? How may/must a committee decide whether expenditures expected can be/will be authorized? Is the present URCNA modus operandi vis a vis the distribution of funds for committee expenses not (potentially ?) a serious hindrance to the work of our committees? We decided that this concern should, if at all possible, be placed before the Churches. Since that is, however, a matter that should be placed before Synod via a Church/Classis, we requested, and found the URC of Walnut Creek willing to process an Overture re this matter to Synod.

The April 3, 2003 meeting of CECCA

Rev. Sikkema reported on his attendance at the GKSA. (Since the Synod finished its business one day earlier than anticipated, Dr. Horton arrive too late to attend the closing sessions). Rev. Sikkema submitted a copy of both his address to that Synod, (cf. Appendix 3) and a report on the meetings of the Synod, (cf. Appendix 4). It was decided that, if we were to have a meaningful discussion on that Synod report, a face-to-face meeting of our committee would be most beneficial. We discussed also the Protocol followed by the GKSA re the hosting of foreign Delegates/Observers. We found that the protocol of the GKSA was good, worthy of imitation. We have, therefore, written a similar Protocol document which we request Synod to discuss/adopt, (cf. Appendix 5).

In response to a letter from Dr. Leen Joosse, Secretary of the ICRC Missions Committee, who informed us that the Missions Committee would be asked to meet in Zwolle, the Netherlands in June of 2003, it was decided that we encourage/mandate Rev. Sikkema to attend, since he was elected by the ICRC to membership on that committee. It was, however, also decided that we should request that the ICRC fund the expenses re this (such) meeting(s), since it is (a committee of) the ICRC that is calling the meeting. The Missions Committee agreed with our request; the travel expenses were funded by the ICRC. A brief report of this meeting is also included with this report, (cf. Appendix 6). We discussed which “foreign” churches should be invited to send Observers to Synod Calgary, recognizing that there would be some expenses involved – as per our proposed Protocol document. This matter was finalized at our January 2004 meeting. It was decided to invite, on behalf of Synod via the Stated Clerk, delegates from four federations, to wit: the GKSA of So. Africa, the RCN-L of the Netherlands, the RCNZ of New Zealand and the NKST of Nigeria. A letter was sent to the convening church of Synod requesting that it – pro-actively – act on the Protocol document (which our committee is placing before Synod for adoption) by assuring that the hospitality it proposes be extended to such delegates.

We briefly discussed the question: Do we propose to Synod that it send (a) delegate(s) to the next ICRC meeting, scheduled for 2005? At our January 2004 meeting we decided as follows: With a view to the importance of establishing a familiar, informed presence at the ICRC, and in consideration of the fact that the members of the ICRC Missions Committee are expected to conduct committee meetings at the venue of the ICRC meeting, we propose to Synod Calgary that Rev. R.J. Sikkema serve as the regular delegate of the URCNA to the meetings of the ICRC, and that, additionally, one other member of the CECCA, the Rev. Dennis Royall, be delegated to attend the next meeting of the ICRC in So. Africa in 2005.

The January 20, 2004 meeting of CECCA

In addition to finalizing some matters initiated at earlier meetings of the committee (reported on above), the committee spent considerable time at its face-to-face meeting in January discussing the GKSA Synod meeting report. Especially troubling was the decision of that Synod to open the office of deacon to women. What, if any, consequence will/must that decision have on the future of our relationship? In the context of that discussion we reviewed and revised our position paper re: Terminology to be used by/Mandate of the CECCA, (cf. Appendix 2). We agreed that we propose to Synod that the GKSA remain in phase one as per the revised formulation proposed. We also decided that – upon the

approval of Synod – a letter be addressed to the GKSA which expresses the concern of the URCNA on the women in the diaconate issue as well as concerns re the Sabbath/Sunday issue. A draft of such a letter will be prepared by the committee for approval by Synod, should Synod agree to the sending of a letter.

In response to a request from Faith URC of Beecher, Illinois that our committee “pursue a relationship with the Independent Church of Mexico (IPC)” and its question, “Is the IPC a member of the ICRC? we explained that the modus operandi of the committee is twofold. We pursue contact with a number of churches who are members of the ICRC; and we respond to/correspond with churches, not members of the ICRC, who seek contact with us. Since the IPC falls in neither of those two categories, responsibility for initiating contact, with a view to possibly engaging in mission work in Mexico, is the responsibility of the local church – which may indeed encourage that a church (the IPC, in this case) take up contact with us, (CECCA).

We received and responded to several letters from the Chairman of the Contact Committee, the Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, of the URC in Myanmar, (cf. Appendix 7). Rev. Thang requests that we (the URCNA) endorse the application of the URC in Myanmar for membership in the ICRC. We decided to lay this matter before Synod, advising Synod to endorse this request once Synod is satisfied that it has sufficient information on hand to make a decision. The secretary of CECCA has been instructed to contact the RCNZ, the other church asked to endorse the Myanmar request, inquiring of them concerning their proposed course of action re this matter. We trust that we will be able to provide additional information at the meeting of Synod. (NOTE: Two information documents, to wit: BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN MYANMAR , and THE CHURCH ORDER OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN MYANMAR have been submitted to the Stated Clerk).

A request from Dr. C.E. Mbayi-Kabamba requesting financial support for Relief Work in the Republic of Congo was denied by the CECCA since such a request is beyond the mandate of our committee. We informed the brother of relief agencies that may be in a position to offer the help he seeks.

An initial contact with the Indonesian Reformed Churches will be pursued.

We discussed the need for one additional member on the CECCA committee, possibly someone from the Mid-West. It was decided to recommend to Synod that one additional member be elected to serve on CECCA. We have not, to date, discussed the terms of office of the presently serving committee members. We have, however, agreed with Dr. Horton that he, because of the press of other commitments – both at home, to support his wife in the nurture and care of the triplets with which the Lord blessed the Horton family, and responsibilities at the Seminary – he be relieved of his responsibilities as chairman of CECCA. Rev. Royall will assume the responsibilities of the chairmanship.

Matters requiring Synodical action

1. Approval/adoption of the Terminology/Mandate paper, (cf. Appendix 2).
2. Adoption of the Protocol Document, (cf. Appendix 5).
3. Electing delegates, one regular and one additional, to the next meeting of the ICRC in So. Africa.
4. The status of the GKSA, that it remain in phase 1.
5. Letter of concern to the GKSA, a draft to be provided by CECCA.
6. Action re the URC in Myanmar, additional info to be provided by CECCA.
7. Election of one additional member for the CECCA committee.

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Joghinda S. Gangar, member

Dr. Michael S. Horton, member

Rev. Dennis W. Royall, chairman

Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, secretary of CECCA

APPENDIX 1: July 9,2001

SUBJECT: REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL CONTACT WITH CHURCHES ABROAD (CECCA) RE CONTACTS MADE AT THE RECENT ICRC MEETING:

While in attendance at the meetings of the ICRC in Philadelphia, June20- 27,2001, we (Dr. M. S. Horton and Rev. R. J. Sikkema) availed ourselves of the opportunity to meet with delegations from a number of churches. The daily schedule, 9 am - 9 pm, included specific time slots for such “interchurch meetings” of which we made thankful use and which allowed us to establish initial contact with various Reformed and Presbyterian churches worldwide.

It became apparent that such contact(s) serve—and are sought—primarily for one of two reasons. Some churches, e.g. The GKNV, look for ecumenical relations because they are eager to serve others with their “products”, e.g. mission methods/tools/preparation. Other churches seek ecumenical relations because they are “needy”. They look for churches that can/will support them in their ministry on their home front. Their “need” may be occasioned because of small numbers, financial poverty, limited gifts, persecutions, etc. Our own position is such that we may be requiring help in some areas, whereas we can offer assistance/support in others.

The churches with which we had contact include the following:

1. The GKNV—the “Liberated” churches in the Netherlands). The delegates of this church, Rev. A. de Jager and Rev. Dr. L. J. Joosse, informed us
 - a. That they had a mandate to pursue ecumenical relations with us;
 - b. That they had waited with contacting us until such a time that the Canadian Reformed Church/United Reformed Church relation would be more clearly defined;
 - c. That they are looking for a “sister church” relationship with us; and
 - d. That they have only one level/step in their ecumenical relations with “churches abroad”—the sister church relationship.

2. The GKSA—the “Dopper Kerk” of South Africa). We spoke at some length with the Rev. Dr. Neels Smit and Rev. Ben Fourie re the “breakdown” in communication with the Rev. Dr. M. J. (Thinus) Du Plessis who was a fraternal delegate of the GKSA at Synod Escondido. We apologized for any misunderstanding and assured the brothers that we surely did not intend to offend and asked that no offence be taken. Brothers Smit and Fourie in turn assured us that it was/is their desire to establish ecumenical relations with us of the “inner circle” variety.

NOTE: They differentiate three types of relationships, to wit:

 - Ecumenical contact, “for contact in a broad spectre for the sake of study or contacts in international organisations on matters of general concern.”
 - Ecumenical ties, “for more specific contacts and collaboration with unity in view.
 - Ecumenical unity, “for the relationships where churches are one beyond geographical boundaries (also known as correspondence).

The brothers also assured us that an invitation will be sent to us requesting that (a) delegate(s) attend their 2003 Synod.

3. The RCNZ—the Free Reformed Churches of new Zealand). Rev. John Goris and Rev. Bruce Hoyt informed us that they are looking for some form of ecumenical relations with us—especially with a view to opening the way for them to call pastors from the URCNA and to send their students to study with “us” at MARS. We may expect to hear from them in the near future re such a relationship.

4. The CRCN—the Free Reformed Church of the Netherlands). Professor Dr. Mans and the Revs. De Graaf and Kater were more cautious, less forthcoming in expressing a desire for ecumenical~relations with the URC. We were informed that, at present, the CRCN has “not finalized” its position vis a vis the URCNA—whether it should be “closer” or “more distant.” Once they have determined that, we may expect them to inform us of their decision.
5. The GGRM—the Reformed Pilgrim Churches of Indonesia in Timor). Rev. Yonson Dethan and his “partner”, Rev. Madah Biha of the GSRI (the Reformed Churches in Indonesia) pleaded with the body (the ICRC) in general and with us in particular to remember them in our prayers and support them in their struggles against the onslaught of Islam and the terrible persecution their churches experience.

In addition to the above—contact with member churches of the ICRC—we also had contact with a number of observers/visitors at the ICRC meeting.

6. The NKST—the Church of Jesus Christ Among the Tiv.) The Rev. Dr. I. Achineku, who had just recently received his doctorate and was waiting for the proper paper work before returning to Nigeria, expressed the hope and desire that Dr. Horton
 1. teach a two week course at RTCN,
 2. speak at the graduation of RTCN,
 3. attend the Synod of the NKST.

We may expect some communication from the NKST re this matter and re a possible ecumenical relationship with the NKST.

7. PCU—the Presbyterian Church of Uganda). Edward Kasaija, a visitor representing the PCU, spoke of the great need for workers in Uganda. “The Bible doesn’t speak of retirement”, he said. If, therefore, you have the energy and look for a place to minister, come over and help us.
8. The IRCK—the Independent Reformed Church of Korea). This small federation of three churches was represented at the ICRC by Rev. Keon-Soo Kim. He spoke to us about his work of translating the Heidelberg Catechism and of their struggle to maintain purity of doctrine. The IRCK is looking for churches that will offer help/support in their efforts to remain a faithful church.
9. The RCEA—the Reformed Church in East Africa). Rev. Mathayo (Matthew) Koech, a Visitor, spoke for the RCEA. He explained the history of the RCEA—going back to 1944 “when the consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church at Eldoret, a church of South African origin, in obedience to the Word of God and mindful of the needs of the African Labourers on the farms of its members, established a mission committee to organize a Christian Mission among the workers. The name of the mission was ‘Bwana Loubser Sending Mission’.” Brother Keoch provided the ICRC delegates a glimpse into the life and wellbeing of this Reformed Church in Kenya from 1944 on, explaining the “Ministry Focus” of the RCEA for the next five years.
10. The Lanka RC—the Reformed Church in Sri Lanka). The Lanka RC, represented by Prabhath de Silva, its non-ordained leader, is surely the smallest “federation.” It consists of one congregation made up of 20 confession members and 7 baptized members. The GKNV supports the ministry of brother de Silva by sending him tapes of sermons, which he translates and reads, and by periodically sending a pastor to administer the sacraments. It also sponsored brother de Silva’s trip to Philadelphia.

11. The MYEPC—(the Compassion of Jesus Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Eritrea). Rev. Zecharias Abraham gave a brief sketch of this young church in a young nation (recently independent from Ethiopia with whom a lengthy civil war had been fought).
12. The RPCCEE—(The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Easter Europe). Brother Imre Szoke provided a brief, informative look into the origin of this Reformed Presbyterian Church ministering “in the Hungarian lands of Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine.” He expressed the desire “to have spiritual connection with an organization abroad which is very faithful to the Word of God and to the Reformed Confessions. We are alone in Hungary”, he said, “and need encouragement. We hope that in the future we can be a part of this bigger Reformed family. Please pray for us.”

We should also report on extensive discussions with the Rev. Dr. L. J. Joesse, Mr.

Ben v.d.Lugt and Rev. C. Haak, all of whom are involved with the mission outreach of the GKNV. Ben and Cees are personnel of the IRTT (Institute of Reformed Theological Training). They are eager to help others (us) gain insight into Reformed Mission work in the 21st century. A conference to that end is planned for August 16-18 in Toronto—sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Church of Toronto. They also provided us with info re how they came to have a mission committee (deputation)—after first attempting to have the work of missions done solely under the auspices of a local consistory.

In closing, it should be stated that several churches (delegates) said to us that they had (attempted to) contact us—whether via our chairman, our secretary, or the Stated Clerk. We, however, had no knowledge of such communication and, in some cases, were met with incredulous stares. As committee we need to have more contact with each other than the one conference call we had since being appointed.

Humbly submitted,

Rev. R. J. Sikkema

APPENDIX 2: Terminology Document (Mandate of the CECCA)

The CECCA committee proposes to Synod Calgary a Terminology document – which at the same time spells out the Mandate of the committee. We recommend a two step/two phase approach, as follows:

- I. The first step, Ecumenical Contact, will focus on studying matters of general concern between the URCNA and the “foreign” federation. This step will be implemented, where possible and desirable, by:
 - a. Exchange of official observers at major assemblies.
 - b. Consultation on issues of joint concern, including:
 1. view and place of the Scriptures;
 2. creeds and confessions;
 3. formula of subscription to the confessions;
 4. significant factors in the two federations’ history, theology and ecclesiology;
 5. church order and polity;
 6. liturgy and liturgical forms;
 7. preaching, sacraments and discipline;
 8. theological education for ministers.
 - c. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies.
 - d. Exchange of denominational Church Directories (Yearbooks).
 - e. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the Confessional Standards.
 - f. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order.
 - g. Exchange of the most recently denominationally published editions of Psalters/Hymnals.

- II. The second step, Ecumenical Recognition, will focus on the oneness of the URCNA with the “foreign” federation, even though we are separated by geographical boundaries. This step will be implemented, where possible and desirable, (in addition to the points listed under step one above) by:
- a. Occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option).
 - b. Intercommunion, including ready reception of each other’s members at the Lord’s Supper – but not excluding suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership – as regulated by each consistory (session).
 - c. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian (Church) unity.
 - d. Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another.
 - e. Joint action in areas of common responsibility.
 - f. Agreement that, before changes in polity, doctrine or practice are instituted, the churches will consult with each other – understanding that the adoption of such changes may jeopardise the established ecumenical relationship.

APPENDIX 3: Rev. R.J. Sikkema’s address to the GKSA

Greetings:

Thank you, Mr Chairman

Beloved Brothers,

It is indeed a wonderful privilege to meet with you here in Potchefstroom.

- It is my privilege also (and my joy) to greet you in the name of our risen Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.
- I invite you to listen to these words — written by John in addressing the seven Churches:

“Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

- We thank you for the letter of invitation — sent to the URCNA, inviting us to send observers to attend your Synod. However, dr. Michael Horton, the Chairman of our Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad, will (I’m afraid) be arriving too late! He had hoped to attend your sessions next Friday and Saturday.
- Now the responsibility falls on me to extend to you the greetings of the URCNA and our prayer for the blessing of the Lord on your churches and on the important work of this Synod.
- When I look at your Agenda — which I have sought diligently to read, but have not as yet finished reading — I am struck by the many important issues that fill that Agenda. I find it significant that many issues on your Agenda have been and are being discussed also by Reformed Churches in NA. You indeed require the blessing of the Lord — which you may only expect when you yield yourself in humble obedience to His Word. Of that Word, we confess, that it is the lamp for our feet, the light upon our path. Its attributes include that it is perspicuous, doorzichtig.

CRCNA History

- Allow me to say just a few words about the URCNA. Our federation, made up as it is primarily of Churches which at one time were members of the CRC, was born in 1995 — after having met for several years as the ARC, the Alliance of Reformed Churches.
- We left, (some would say: we were removed from the CRC) because of a growing rift between Churches and Church members on questions relating to:
 - a) the issue of women in office
 - b) the question of origins — and how to read and understand the opening chapters of Genesis
 - c) the question of inclusive language, expressing itself also in how one may address the Lord

- d) and the concern that the New Hermeneutic, which underlies many of the above mentioned issues, would continue to undermine the integrity and the faithfulness to the Word of the Churches' confession — as can now be seen in the expressed desire of at least one congregation of the CRC that it means to ordain to office practicing homosexuals because it wants to be an “inclusive congregation”.

Because of such concerns, Mr Chairman, and because the CRC steadfastly and ever more vehemently refused to heed the warning cries expressed in countless Overtures calling her back to the Word, the URCNA was born — I may say: under the blessing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the King of the Church.

- We presently number approximately 80 congregations — 30 in Canada, 50 in the US and we number upwards of 18 000 souls! No doubt, small as man counts, but not necessarily small as the Lord counts.

Contact with the GKSA

- Our official contact with the GKSA goes back to June of 2000. Your delegates to the CRC, the brothers Du Plessis and Du Plooy, requested a meeting with members of our committee.
- Our Minutes state that “the discussion was friendly and frank ...“ Let me quote:

The brothers from the GKSA were clear and absolute in the declaration of the supreme authority of scripture. “Inspired by the Holy Spirit;” “to disobey scripture is to disobey God.” Their expressed view of the Truth as summarized in our Three Forms of Unity was uncompromised and unqualified.

Throughout our wide-ranging discussions we as delegates found ourselves experiencing a wonderful sense of unity and fraternity in the faith with these brothers. In our discussions on topics such as worship, catechising, evangelism, missions, the view of the Church, the nature of the Covenant and preaching we were encouraged and heartened by the brothers' responses which are clearly in line with the views commonly held among us in the URC. We discovered that the GKSA requires “Attestation” for admittance to the Lord's Supper in the manner practised by the brothers of the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken and the Canadian Reformed Churches. This is not a “contentious” issue with them, however.

Rev's Sikkema and Royal expressed concern about the reinstatement of ecumenical relations with the CRC on the part of the GKSA. We were assured that while the GKSA passionately pursues unity in the Church, they would not ignore serious declension of the faith in any federation. The brothers pleaded with us as delegates and representatives of our federation: “Please don't put pressure on us to first break ties with the CRC” as a prerequisite to seeking ecumenical relations with the GKSA.
- It should also be noted that brothers Du Plessis and Du Plooy assured us that the GKSA did not and would not consider ordaining women to Ecclesiastical Office matter of great importance to us, a matter also that, should the GKSA move in that direction, would effectively put an end to our relationship.
- Because of some breakdown in communication, no meaningful contact took place, thereafter, until the meeting of our Synod in June of 2001, a full year after our initial meeting.
- That Synod, Synod Escondido, had before it only the report of the June 2000 meeting — and the person of dr Du Plessis — with whom we then met and consulted on several occasions.

- Synod Escondido “voted to enter into “corresponding relations” with your churches” — as we happily announced to your Ecum. Rel. Corn. per letter dated July 4, 2001.
- We have also communicated to your Ecum. Rel. Corn. a decision of our Committee that we will propose to our Synod, 2004, that we use a two-step or two phase approach in relating to churches beyond the boundaries of NA.
 - ❖ the first (what you speak of as “the widest”) we will speak of as “Ecumenical Contact”. It will include:
 - (a) exchange of official representatives at major assemblies;
 - (b) joint action in areas of common responsibility;
 - (c) consultation on issues of joint concern;
 - (plus five more)
 - ❖ the second (what you speak of as “the narrowest”) we will speak of as “Ecumenical Unity” — which in addition to everything done under “Ecumenical Contact” will also include:
 - (1) pulpit fellowship;
 - (2) intercommunion;
 - (3) the exercise of mutual concern and admonition; and
 - (4) an agreement to respect each other’s procedures of discipline and pastoral concern.

Concerns

- Mr Chairman, you hear it, we are very much concerned that clear expression be given to matters of mutual concern. I would, therefore, be remiss in my duties, were I not to relate to you our concern on some matters presently before this Synod. Let me single out two.
- First of all the question of Women in Ecclesiastical Office
 - ❖ On Monday evening, in a beautiful message, we heard that God is light. The Scripture says that; we must confess that!
 - ❖ The Scriptures also say — not only that Jesus is the light of the world, but also that we, “we are the light of the world!” (Matth 5:14)
- Brother Neels Smit has pointed out in his book: Die nuwe ouderling that we live in a post modern world. Post-modernism is characterized by a desire to relativize everything — also the truth of the Word. Let me quote: (you will excuse my Suid-Afrikaans)
 - ❖ Die post-modernisme, wat deur die loop van die twintigste eeu sy momentum verkry, waarin die mens al hoe meer absolute (vasstaande) stelsels en waardes bevraagteken ten gunste van ‘n algemene gees van relativisme (betreklikheid).
- You hear it: relativism is the battle cry of the age.
- In the mouth of the world it says: what is true for you is not necessarily true for me.
- In the mouth of the Church it says: I am led by the Spirit, who are you to question that? But it is the same spirit — and it means to lead the church away from the Word. Remember, the Church has confessed with Calvin — against the errors of Rome and of Pentacostalism - that the Holy Spirit never contradicts the Word which He breathed out. The claim of the individual — (man or woman) — of being led by the Spirit must always be tested by the Word of the Spirit, a task uniquely assigned to the Church. For the Scripture is not of private interpretation! Therefore, I urge you, disregard all emotion - (which so easily leads to emotionalism) — and listen only to the words — spoke by people — and test those words — (of people) — by the Word of God!
It is significant that the CRC — in deciding to open all Ecclesiastical Offices to women — did not then, and does not now say of that decision: “Thus says the Lord”. It chose rather - having claimed that the testimony of Scripture is unclear - simple to change its Church Order!
- We would encourage you, therefore, to distinguish clearly between questions of life style — where often the Scriptures leave room for a variety of responses! — and questions of doctrine I of the teachings of the Word,

and the expression thereof in the practice of the Church. Here the Scriptures require obedience to the teaching once for all delivered to the saints.

- My second concern focusses on matters raised in the report: “Jeug en nderwys”. If I have understood correctly, the State means not only to remove the teaching of Bible and the Confessions from the schools, it means also to remove the foundation of Scripture and Confession from the schools. Once that succeeds, you understand, the spirit of Post-modernism will become the driving force for all education! And it cannot be denied: as the youth are taught, so the church will go! What you must fight for is Christian Schools that are governed and directed by the Christian Community.
- In closing, let me read with you these words from Paul’s prayer for the church (Eph 1:18 & 19): “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.”
- Such is my prayer for you. May God with you!

Humbly submitted,
Rev Raymond J Sikkema
10 January 2003

APPENDIX 4: Report – Meetings of the National Synod of the GKSA; January 6-16, 2003 at Potchefstroom, SA

The Synod Constituted

Bright and early on the morning of January 6 the Rev. H.S. Coetzee, minister of the Gereformeerde Kerk Noord of Potchefstroom, the calling church, welcomed the delegates, many of whom had arrived the previous afternoon/evening, led in opening devotions, and chaired the opening business of Synod – the election of the moderamen.

Thereupon the newly elected chairman, the Rev. P.J.Vander Walt, heartily welcomed various visitors, and fraternal delegates – from Australia, Botswana, New Zealand, the Netherlands, South Africa – and observers – from Canada, South Africa – inviting them to participate in the discussions on the floor of Synod as well as in the meetings of the many committees of pre-advice. He then read the Form of Subscription, requesting all delegates, including the fraternal delegates and observers, to signify their assent by rising, whereupon he declared the 48th session of the GKSA Synod constituted.

The Program Committee

A reporter for the Program Committee explained in detail the procedures Synod would follow in working through an Agenda of nearly 700 pages. The first part of that Agenda, pp. 1-324, had been mailed to the delegates. The second part – die Aanvullende, i.e. the Supplementary Agenda, pp. 325-650, plus many more pages handed out subsequently – was not in the hands of the delegates until the opening day of Synod. (Can you imagine that happening here?) It should be noted, however, that the GKSA has a remarkable work ethic. Its sessions were as follows:

Morning session – 8:00am – 12:45pm, with a 15 minute coffee break (morgen tee) at 10:30.

Noon mealtime – 12:45pm – 2:30pm.

Afternoon session – 2:30pm – 5:45pm with a 15 minute middag tee at 4:00pm.

Suppertime – 5:45pm – 7:00pm.

Evening session – 7:00pm – 9:00pm with no break. After 9:00pm the committees met till ???

I attended all the sessions –(English translations were provided). At first I made diligent use of those services, but as time went on I found that I could follow most of the discussions without that service, which enabled me to catch more of the flavor of what was being discussed and therefore preferable. I also attended meetings of both the pre-advice committee on Ecumenical Relations, and the pre-advice committee on Woman in Ecclesiastical Office.

The Modus Operandi of Synod

All of the Reports and the Supplementary Reports, a sum total of 38 – on Bible Distribution; on Diaconal Matters; on the Care of the Retirees; on Finances; on Youth and Education – both re Catechism and the (Christian) School; on Church Order; on Doctrinal Matters – including on: “He descended into hell”, and on: Women in Ecclesiastical Office”; on Publications and the Media; on Liturgy – including a new translation of the Psalter and new Hymns (Skrifberymings); on the Theological School; on Social Issues – including a Testimony re HIV- Aids, and a Testimony contra Swearing; on the Archives of the GKSA and its Museums; -- plus all the Appeals (9); all the Protests (43); all the Communications – Beskryvingspunte – (56); the Gravamena (3); the Requests for Advice (3); everything is presented to Synod before being accepted and sent on to a Committee of Pre-advice.

At this first “hearing” the writers (of all of the above) are given opportunity to present their document(s). Questions, for information only, may then be raised from the floor. It must then be decided, (re the Appeals, the Protests, the Gravamena) whether the matter is properly before Synod and, if so, is referred to the proper committee – the chairman usually simply ruling that such be done without bothering to call for a motion and a vote. (Goedgekuer Broeders? A mumbling of some Ja’s settles it.) Delegates who have any thoughts/concerns/proposals re any matter thus referred are expected to meet with the proper committee and present/defend the same there.

The committee writes its report which usually includes the following points: a reference to the Mandate given, including both its page(s) in the Agenda and the page in the Minutes of the Synod’s first hearing; matters Synod must take note of; argumentation(s) re the issue at hand; findings of the committee and the grounds supporting them; and recommendations – not motions! – for dealing with the issue. When the matter is then brought on to the floor of Synod again, the reporter presents the report and, if no other motion is proposed – which is often the case – the recommendation of the committee becomes the motion that is voted on.

For the issues which the delegates will discuss/debate the Clerks write down the names of those who wish to speak. Usually those, and only those, whose names appear on the list of speakers are given opportunity to speak. Any speaker may, while he has the floor, propose a motion. However, the Chairman will not place that motion on the floor for action until every speaker on his list has spoken. He will then go back to the speaker(s) who proposed a motion – (first come, first served) – call for a second, and ask for a vote, usually without further discussion. It may appear that in some ways the GKSA has a cumbersome process, since every item on the Agenda is handled twice on the floor of Synod. However, it was remarkable that on many matters – other than on the weighty/touchy issues – no one seemed concerned with issues of “proper procedure” which so often afflict us. Remarkably, there were very few Points of Order raised, and the Chairman was never challenged.

The Fraternal Delegates and Observers at Synod

On Friday morning, January 10, time was set aside for Greetings (Speeches?) from the Fraternal Delegates and the Observers. It should be noted that the GKSA carries on ecumenical relations – in one of three categories – with many churches worldwide. Ten of those churches had representatives present, each of whom spoke for 10 to 15 minutes. Present were Prof. Peels, CGKN, the Netherlands; Rev. Groenenboom, CRCA, Australia; Rev. Wessels, RCB, Botswana; Rev. Busstra, Ned. GK, the Netherlands; Rev. Rogers, RCNZ, New Zealand; Rev. Sethlare, Sinode Middellande, South Africa; Rev. Magaba, South Africa; Rev. Ten Brinke, GKN(V), the Netherlands; Rev. Nell, VGKSA, South Africa; and yours truly representing the URCNA. (My speech is attached).

The Synod expressed genuine thanks and appreciation for the greetings given and for the words of admonition and concern expressed, and asked that the speakers convey those sentiments to their respective churches – which I hereby do. Ecumenical relations are clearly and evidently of great importance to the GKSA. It looks for meaningful dialogue on matters on its Agenda with its various ecumenical “relatives”.

To that end I spoke at some length with the pre-advice committee on Ecumenical Relations re developments in the CRCNA. The committee was very receptive to proposals I suggested – after initial proposals presented on the floor of Synod which called for a stepping down of relations with the CRCNA were referred back to committee. I proposed the following:

Recommendation

1. That the GKSA continue to investigate developments in the CRC by
 - a. requesting that official documents underlying previous (specified) decisions made by the Synod of the CRC be sent to the GKSA;
 - b. conferring (per communications) with people – pastors/elders/professors – in the CRC,

- requesting them to reflect on developments in the CRC and their reactions to the same;
 - c. contacting former members of the CRC – pastors/elders/professors – requesting them to communicate their reasons for leaving the CRC, and to provide documentation in support of their decision.
2. That the GKSA in order to underscore the seriousness with which it takes its own concerns, ... , do not send delegates to the Synodical meetings of the CRC – until satisfactory answers are received to the above. It was essentially those proposals that were eventually adopted by the Synod. I trust that that decision will encourage the URCNA to continue its relationship with the GKSA.

Appeals, Protests, Gravamina, and Communications

As noted earlier, there were many such documents before the Synod, on a great variety of concerns – some on matters of such incidental significance that they should never have made it to Synod; (e.g. May a pastor speak a word of personal greeting before the service?) Needless to say, I found some of the Appeals and Protests very troubling. Over and over again the expression: “My reg is gekrenk”, that is: “My rights were violated” were spoken. I must have heard it a hundred times. It must be said to the credit of the Synod, however, that it listened with great patience. The procedure was as follows:

- the appellant presents his (written) case, highlighting the parts he chooses;
- the “illucidator” – someone representing the Particular Synod which had heard and rejected the case – highlights where, in his view, the appellant’s case has flaws, and therefore fails;
- questions – for information only – are allowed from the floor;
- opportunity is given to both the appellant and the illucidator to respond to the questions raised;
- the matter is referred to a Pre-advice Committee which recommends a proposed course of action;
- the recommended course of action is presented to the Synod;
- the delegates are given opportunity to express agreement/disagreement/alternative resolutions;
- the appellant is given opportunity to give a final statement;
- a vote by the Synod decides the issue.

The Communications covered a wide range of subjects, including concerns re the care of retired pastors, the high incidence of swearing in public,

APPENDIX 5: CECCA Proposal to Synod Calgary re: Procedures /Protocol to be followed by the URCNA when Observers/Fraternal Delegates are in attendance at Synod.

1. The chairman shall identify and welcome each of the visitors, indicating whether a person is in attendance as an Observer or as a Fraternal Delegate.
2. The Observers and Fraternal Delegates shall be encouraged to attend the various pre-advice committee meetings, as well as be accorded the privilege of the floor – though they cannot vote.
3. The Observers and Fraternal Delegates shall be requested to address the Synod at a time which coincides with the time the CECCA report is on the floor of Synod. The chairman shall appoint a synodical delegate or a member of the CECCA committee to respond to the Observer/Fraternal Delegate.
4. The addresses of the Observers and the Fraternal Delegates shall be included in the Acts of Synod.
5. A copy of the Acts - as well as a copy of the Agenda - shall be sent to the Observers and the Fraternal Delegates.
6. Hospitality, both accommodations and meals, shall be offered to Observers and Fraternal Delegates – while transportation to and from the venue of Synod are the responsibility of the sending church.

Appendix 6S

APPENDIX 6: ICRC MISSIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

To: Synod Calgary, 2004
From: Delegate ICRC Missions Committee
Re: The Work of the ICRC MC

Esteemed Brothers,

It is with a bit of a sense of uncertainty that I address the Synod with this report since I am not at all sure whether this is expected or required of me. Allow me a few lines of Background Information. Synod Escondido, 2001 elected me to serve as one of the URCNA delegates to the ICRC which was scheduled to meet later that same year in Philadelphia. The ICRC in turn chose me to membership on its Missions Committee, a committee that reports on its work to the ICRC. To the best of my knowledge, the members of the ICRC MC do not serve on this committee as *representatives* of their federations. However, the ICRC made an effort to have the membership of its Missions Committee chosen from member federations from various parts of the globe so as to have input that would truly be ecumenical as this committee seeks to implement its mandate.

Apparently, the Mandate given to the Missions Committee has been amended and revised at both meetings of the ICRC since its founding in Zwolle, the Netherlands, in 1993 and will no doubt be revised again when next it meets in South Africa, DV in 2005. However, whereas in the past the Missions Committee met only on the occasion of the meeting date and place of the ICRC quad-annual meeting (which for all practical purposes meant that proposals for change could not be thought through with care and requisite deliberation) the Missions Committee has met for a two day conference in Zwolle last year (2003) and plans a follow-up meeting in June of this year (2004), just prior to the scheduled date for the meeting of Synod Calgary, as well as having scheduled a “regular” meeting at the time and place of the next scheduled meeting date of the ICRC. At the Zwolle meeting (2003), as well as at the planned June meeting (2004), the committee is engaged in a careful reflection of its most recently assigned Mandate. We will endeavor to present to the next ICRC meeting a Mandate that is both durable and feasible – a Mandate, moreover, that will require more of the Missions Committee members than only a once-per-four-years meeting. It is the conviction of the members presently serving on the ICRC MC that the work of missions must not, yea may not be treated as a stepchild of the church; rather, it belongs to the very essence of the church’s work and well-being. Therefore, the ICRC must be diligent not only in the task of encouraging and promoting the work of missions, it must also do whatever it can to ensure that the member churches of the ICRC are faithful in performing this task – assigned to the church by the Lord of the church at His glorious ascension.

Regretfully, it is not possible for me to report on work thus far accomplished, since at this stage our work is very much a “work in progress”. Since I plan, however, to be present, DV, at Synod it may be possible, should Synod so desire, that I report briefly then.

Brothers, I am sure I speak for all the members of the ICRC MC when I say, Ora Pro Nobis. May the Lord richly bless you in your very important work.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, member ICRC MC

APPENDIX 7: Letter from Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, URC in Myanmar

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN MYANMAR
HEAD QUARTERS 35/1277 - 1278 KANTHAYAR STREET (1),
NORTH DAGON 11421, YANGON, MYNAMAR

To: Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, Secretary,
Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad,
The United Reformed Churches.
3578 King St. Box 105, Vineland ON LOR 2(A), Canada,

From: Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang, Chairman,
Contact Committee, United Reformed Churches in Myanmar
35/1093, Kantbayar St. 2, N. Dagon, 11421, Yangon, Myanmar
Date: October 1 2003

Dear brother,

Most cordially greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. the Lord of the Church.

I was overjoyed to receive your email and letter telling me that my request will be considered and presented to the members of the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) when next you meet.

I was indebted to Rev. C. Van Spronsen, Secretary ICRC, who sent you via surface mail my letter and the documents explaining the History and Church Order of the URC Myanmar, and also gave me your name and address. May I take this opportunity to introduce myself and the URC in Myanmar. I am Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang Chairman of the contact committee and pastor of Grace United Reformed Church in Yangon, Myanmar. Five Reformed families, in brief instituted the URCM, on 31 October 1993 on Reformation Sunday. To date the URCM has 25 local churches with members numbering about 2000. We have 21 ordained pastors, 6 pro-pastors, 34 elders and 57 deacons. The five ordained pastors and four elders are serving as cross-cultural missionaries in the mission fields. It is divided into three Classes and held her Constituent Synod on March 1995. The Synod enormously voted and changed the name of the church as United Reformed Churches in Myanmar. This Synod had adopted the Church Constitution and used it till they adopted the Church Order in 2002.

The URCM stands in the historic Reformed faith, and subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity (namely: the Belgic Confession of Faith, 1561; the Heidelberg Catechism, 1563; and the Canons of Dort, 1618-19), along with the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1617. When we called ourselves as United Reformed Churches in Myanmar, we firmly stand on the Three Forms of Unity. Our form of government is the Reformed Church government. When we started our Church as Reformed Presbyterian Church in October 1993 the basis of our Church was the Three Forms of Unity and along with the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Three Ecumenical Creeds. When we became United Reformed Churches in Myanmar as a Reformed Church, we could just have the Three Forms of Unity but we respected our Church decision and we therefore included the Westminster Confession of Faith (1561) as our basis.

Second Letter from the URC – Myanmar; Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang October 20/2003

The sixth General Assembly of URCM meeting held on 61 April 2000 has passed the resolution no. 32/2002 to seek two ICRC member churches to support URCM's membership application for ICRC. Again in our special Assembly meeting held on 29-31 March 2002 no 22/2002 passed resolution to seek sister church relationship with the ICRC member churches. We also passed to request Reformed Churches of New Zealand and the United Reformed Churches in North America to recommend us for ICRC membership and to have sister church relationship with both churches.

To answer your questions about our relationship with both CRC in Myanmar and CRC in North America. we are separated from both of them because some of CRC in North America recognize women ordination, the URCM stands firm against women ordination. We also have some ecclesiastical differences with the Christian Reformed

Churches in North America. We therefore, cannot establish ecumenical relations with the CRC in North America. Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar has sister church relationship with Christian Reformed Churches in North America and they are also full member of Reformed Ecumenical Council We have some ecclesiastical differences with the CRC in Myanmar. Because of the above reasons we. the URCM are separated from both the CRC in Myanmar and CRC in North America.

The United Reformed Churches in Myanmar have great interest to have international Christian Fellowship. So far we do not have such fellowship with any one yet as we do not want to compromise our faith, the URCM is not a member of the Myanmar Council of Churches (MCC), which is a part of the World Council of Churches (WCC). Neither does the URCM have any fellowship of contract with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC) and the Christian Reformed Churches in North America. As we are from a poor third world country, we have many difficulties and needs. May I ask your prayer support and response to my request that you be sponsors of our application to become a member of the ICRC, and indeed that we establish sister church relations.

I strongly believe that God will show you to extend your mission to Myanmar to meet the felt needs with us. May I say "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes." (Isa. 54:2). May this letter be "The voice of the call of Myanmar" to invite you to participate in our ministry for the Glory of God. May the Lord give you the heart for souls in Myanmar.

Please convey my warm greetings to your family and CECCA. We are looking forward to seeing your reply soon.

In the care of His grace,
Rev. Moses Ngunhlei Thang
Chairman, Contact Coinmittee, URCM
Copy to: Rev. Cornelius Van Spronsen,
Secretary. ICRC

Guidelines For The Co-operative Savings Fund Report

INTRODUCTION

The Synod of 2001 assigned the churches of Lynden United Reformed Church and Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church of Abbotsford BC the task of setting up a Co-operative Savings Plan, supported by free will offerings, and establishing guidelines to administer the plan

Both Lynden and Abbotsford councils would like to recognize the previous work performed by the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto and Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan in putting together the surveys and for the recommendations presented at Synod 2001.

The following was adopted by Synod 2001, article XXXVI, B.

That the recommendations of the two committees (Covenant and Walker) be harmonized in to the following recommendations to synod to be adopted as a uniform standard of practice by the churches:

1. All churches should as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister, include an allowance for a contribution to a government approved retirement plan or equivalent amount ranging from 5% to 10% of the gross remuneration, including any housing allowance of the equivalent thereof. This contribution should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent.
2. That the churches establish a Co-operative Savings Fund (two separate funds for Canada and the USA, if necessary) to assist the churches in supporting retiring ministers in need. Such a fund should be established through regular free-will offerings by the churches. Guidelines should be established to assist the churches in determining the amount of the Fund from time to time.
3. That an American and Canadian church be appointed to implement recommendation #2, who in turn should appoint trustees to administer the Fund. The committee recommends the appointment of Lynden United Reformed Church, WA (failing which First United Reformed Church of Chino, CA.) and Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church Of Abbotsford, BC (Failing which Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge, AB).
4. That all churches be encouraged to contract for disability insurance for their ministers, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration (including any housing allowance or the equivalent thereof.)
5. That the church visitors, as part of their duties, inquire concerning the visited church's response to recommendations 1 and 4.

Having reviewed the mandate assigned by Synod to look at a Co-operative Savings Plan for churches that are not financially able to contribute towards the minister's retirement, the Lynden and Abbotsford Councils arrived at the following conclusion:

A Co-operative Savings Plan for the entire Federation is not recommended for the following reasons:

- A. Administering and managing such a program would be a large task for the church to undertake by itself. To seek professional and financial advice would present a high expense to the church.
- B. While Synod only meets every three years it may not be able to respond fast enough or have the flexibility required to meet the changing needs.
- C. While churches in different Classis may not know each other and/or understand the need of every church, it may result in few churches contributing to the fund through free-will offerings.
- D. Setting guidelines for the entire federation may not address each needy church financial need.

We do however see a definite need to set standards for all churches to follow to help resolve the pastors pensions. After reading the surveys, conducting research and having many discussions we found several areas to address. They are as follows:

- 1. Establishing one plan to support both US and Canadian churches.
- 2. Getting all churches to contribute to their pastor's pension
- 3. Helping pastors who left other denominations who may have lost part of their pensions
- 4. Assisting widows of retired pastors in need who left other denominations to join the URC Federation
- 5. Helping churches in need contribute to the cost of paying for their pastor's retirement needs.

RECOMMENDATION

Recognizing the mandate that Synod assigned, we recommend as Councils that each Classis be responsible for overseeing that each church is contributing to their pastor's retirement plan. Furthermore, we recommend that each individual Classis establish their own Co-operative Savings Plan for the following reasons:

- A. Because each Classis meets every 12 months it will allow to better respond to the needs of the needy church.
- B. Churches in the same Classis are typically more aware of each others needs.
- C. Free-will offerings may be stronger due to the closer relationship between churches
- D. There will be more flexibility within each Classis to address the needs of the church
- E. Church visitors would act as a liaison between Classis and the church in need.

RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES:

- A. That church visitors ask the following questions beginning in the year 2005 during church visitations.
 - 1. As part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for your minister, are you including an allowance for a contribution to a government approved retirement plan or equivalent in amount ranging from 5% to 10% of gross remuneration, including any housing allowance or the equivalent value

thereof? This contribution should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent.

2. Are you currently providing disability insurance for your minister, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration? (including any housing allowance or the equivalent value thereof.)
 3. Does your church need assistance to support a retired pastor or widow of a formal pastor who was financially penalized for leaving their federation to join the URC?
- B. If there is a financial need in the local congregation to meet mandates 1 or 2, the Council must petition the help of the most recent church visitors to facilitate a request to Classis for assistance. If travel is an issue for the church visitors, the church visitors may appoint a local Council to assist. Request for assistance must be reviewed on a yearly basis.
- C. If the local congregation is unable to meet the needs of retired pastors and widows of retired pastors their Council may petition to their Classis for assistance. (Council would petition every five years) This would only apply to Pastors who retired within 10 years of joining the URC. This would not include mismanagement of retirement accounts.
- D. To fund such a program at the Classis level (if needed), that each Classis set up a needy church fund with its only task to make sure the needs of the pastors and/or widows of former pastors pension plan be met. Classis shall determine the amount of Funds needed to the frequency of free will offering suggested to meet the upcoming need.
- E. Classis should appoint a council to administer the Ministers Assistance Fund as per the above mandates for a minimum of 5 years.
- F. That all churches in the URC Federation who have been organized for less than 3 years be excluded from the above-mentioned recommendations.

IN SUMMARY

1. These guidelines would represent some healthy uniformity to the conditions under which our pastors labor.
2. This amount invested carefully would yield a handsome supplement to other personal savings and assets for retirement.
3. These general guidelines do not place an undo hardship on the churches.
4. The guidelines give clarification to the wording of C.O. Article 10 which states: Each church is to provide adequately for the minister for the work and his family while he is serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability of its minister.
5. The general principle that the strong ought to help the weak is a wonderful tenet of our Christian faith.

The councils strongly feel that each church is responsible for its own pastor and pension, but we recognize that there are some churches and former pastors who are having financial hardships.

We feel that if the above mention guidelines are followed, it will lessen the load for those needy churches and/or former pastors and possibly their widows. We recognize that no proposal is perfect but we feel this is a big step forward.

Yours in Christ Service,

President of Council
Lynden URC

President of Council
Immanuel Covenant Reformed

URCNA Web Site Report to Synod 2004

Submitted by the Consistory of Covenant URC, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Introduction

The June 2001 synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America asked the Consistory of Covenant URC of Kalamazoo, Michigan to administer and maintain an Internet Web site for the United Reformed federation. That Web site is to use the previously registered domain (address) of www.urchna.org, currently being used to direct Web users to the main United Reformed page of Covenant – Kalamazoo’s own Web site, www.covenant-urc.org. This report summarizes the progress that Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory has made in developing this Web site, presents several alternative budgets, and asks synod for guidance and funds.

In an effort to learn what needs could be met by this proposed Web site; a survey was conducted of members on the CO-URC e-mail discussion group, composed of over three hundred members of United Reformed churches and other Reformed churches. Among the many responses were numerous requests to provide electronic means for members of synodical committees and classes (regional assemblies) to communicate and collaborate on committee and classis business. It was also suggested that each classis be provided one or more pages to post whatever information they desire for the public. While synod has never authorized denominational publications, the new www.urchna.org site may eventually be called upon to provide electronic commerce (sales of printed materials, such as hymnals) features and news of events in URCNA churches and missions.

Any Web site with the amount of changeable content that www.urchna.org may be called upon to provide could exceed the ability of one person to maintain. Thus, the new Web server (the computer hosting the Web site) should permit several different people to update different sections of the site.

Suggested Features for a URCNA Web Site

History of www.urchna.org

After representatives of the founding churches met as the first synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America in October 1996, it was widely recognized that the new church federation needed a presence on the World Wide Web. Several individuals and churches made attempts to provide information about the URCNA on the Web. The first attempt was made shortly after the first URCNA synod by a member of the Beverly (now Bethany) URC of Wyoming, Michigan. That first site, which no longer exists, was funded and maintained by that individual. In the autumn of 1997, Beverly URC’s Web site appeared and all URCNA-related content on that individual’s site was transferred to Beverly’s. Beverly (now Bethany) URC’s United Reformed Web site can be viewed at <http://www.iserv.net/~bethany/URC.htm>.

Covenant URC of Kalamazoo’s Web site (<http://www.covenant-urc.org>) appeared on the Web in December 1997. Covenant – Kalamazoo’s site was originally intended for posting transcripts of one of our former pastors’ sermons as a missions project. From its beginning, however, Covenant – Kalamazoo’s site included pages providing general information about Covenant URC, our classis, the URCNA, Reformed literature, and suggestions for finding further information about the Reformed faith on the Internet.

In January 1998, Mr. Talman Wagenmaker recognized that the URCNA would need a Web presence. At that time, the Internet domain (address) of urchna.org (the most logical and easy to remember domain name for a URCNA Web site) was unused and had never been registered

(claimed) by any individual nor organization. To prevent other parties, some which might be hostile to the URCNA, from claiming that domain, Mr. Wagenmaker registered that domain in his own name and arranged that anyone aiming their Web browser (a computer program used for navigating and viewing Web pages) at www.urnca.org would be sent to the main URCNA page on Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Web site.

After Bethany – Wyoming’s and Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Web sites appeared, the URCNA-specific pages of both churches’ sites functioned as *de facto* denominational sites. Other URCNA churches that developed their own Web sites often directed their visitors to either Bethany’s or Covenant’s pages for information about the URCNA.

Mr. Wagenmaker made no secret of his desire to transfer his urnca.org domain to this federation. Consequently, the June 2001 URCNA synod accepted Mr. Wagenmaker’s offer and requested Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory to develop and maintain a URCNA Web site. Covenant’s Consistory subsequently voted to accept that responsibility, and arranged with Mr. Wagenmaker to transfer the urnca.org domain to Covenant – Kalamazoo. That transfer has been completed and that domain is now registered with Covenant URC of Kalamazoo. Covenant – Kalamazoo has also registered the additional domains of urnca.com and urnca.net for future URCNA use.

Expectations for a URCNA Web Site

Synod has not given any explicit guidance for what kind of content should be present on an official URCNA Web site, nor how that site should be managed. The only explicit instructions appeared in Article XLVII of the 2001 synod’s minutes:

2. That the consistory of Covenant URC of Kalamazoo be requested to administer and maintain the web site URCNA.org. (Failing which Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville, MI or Bethany URC, Wyoming, MI.)
 - a. Motion to amend the list of alternates by placing Allendale URC, Allendale, MI first.
Adopted
 - b. The motion including the three alternates is *adopted*.
 - c. Motion that synod authorize up to \$1,000 for costs, to be used by the consistory.
Adopted

Several things are evident from this decision. First, the synod of 2001 determined that a denominational Web site is in the best interest of the churches and their mission. One can also infer that the Consistory administering this site is accountable to synod for the site’s performance and content, and that therefore decisions about this site’s content and administration are to be made by that Consistory on behalf of the federation. Also, synod recognized that the federation has a responsibility to assume at least part of the cost of this site’s operation.

However, there are many unanswered questions about this proposed site’s content and management. For example:

1. What are the goals and purposes of this site?
2. What should be included on this site?
 - a. News and press releases about the URCNA?

- b. Doctrinal and educational material?
 - c. Sermons and essays by URCNA ministers?
 - d. A question/answer feature, whereby people can send in questions and one or more URCNA ministers can post answers?
3. Synod directed that a Consistory “administer and maintain” this Web site. How should that Consistory decide how proposed content is rejected or approved? What policies should apply?
 4. Synod has already directed that work proceed on developing a new hymnal. Will this site eventually be used for sales of hymnals and other publications?
 5. Synod’s decision made mention of “the *web site* [emphasis added] URCNA.org.” How can this site and other Internet technology (e-mail, long-distance audio conferencing and videoconferencing, Internet telephony) that can share the urcna.org Internet domain (and the urcna.com and urcna.net domains) aid synod, synodical committees, classes and churches?
 6. Many Web site design and usability experts recommend including an emblem or logo of the represented organization on organizational Web sites as an aid to site navigation. Clicking on the emblem, often located in the upper left corner of every page of that organization’s Web site, brings the Web site visitor back to the Web site’s home page (“Ten Good Deeds in Web Design”, *Jakob Nielsen's Alertbox*, October 3, 1999, <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/991003.html>). Such an emblem also provides a common visual identity to every page on the site. Should this site include such an emblem? If so, how would the emblem be developed and selected? Would this emblem be limited in use to Web site use or would it eventually represent the federation and all its churches and activities? Can Covenant’s Consistory choose an emblem or should this matter be referred to synod?

Past Guidance from URCNA Leaders and Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Past decisions of URCNA synods, as well as decisions of URCNA classes, and letters and articles printed in various periodicals widely read by URCNA officebearers, provide some clues as to what the 2001 synod may have intended. While this method is not infallible in discerning the intentions of the 2001 synod, and future synods may specify a different direction, enough clues exist to provide some guidance for the URCNA Web site’s near-term goals and policies. Future synods will have to provide further guidance, as necessary.

A major, overriding belief and practice of many members and leaders of URCNA churches appears to be, what might be called, *antibureaucratism*. Many of us came out of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), and many of us trace our difficulties with that denomination to the power and influence exercised by that denomination’s agencies and boards. Many of us saw the CRCNA synod as nothing more than a “rubber stamp” for whatever policies had already been decided by the CRCNA denominational boards, bureaucracies, and publishing activities. Dr. Cornel Venema, himself a CRCNA minister, wrote in the August 12, 2002 issue of *Christian Renewal* (p. 11) that the CRCNA is heavily influenced by a “main-line-leaning left” that “is not as numerous or broad-based as the evangelical right. However, due to its inordinate representations in positions of leadership and on denominational boards (not to mention more

aggressive posturing and pushing for its agenda), this group has considerable influence within this denomination.”

Dr. John Elliott, a Presbyterian elder and an American correspondent for Dutch television, spoke in a similar manner in an address he gave at a Reformed Fellowship meeting in 1992. In that speech, he spoke of the problems then present in the CRCNA and the responses that many conservatives were then proposing. Some, he said, planned to stay within the CRCNA to serve as a Reformed witness, and (hopefully) to recapture control of that denomination. But, as Dr. Elliott continued, churches are to be governed strictly in accordance with the pattern laid down in Scripture – what Dr. Elliott called the “regulative principle of church government” – that lawfully installed officebearers are to exercise all the functions of their office and that they *may not* delegate those functions to others. In other words, consistories, classes and synods may not delegate their powers and responsibilities to boards and bureaucracies. Furthermore, if this principle that Dr. Elliott spoke about is indeed valid, then why should confessional Reformed people strive to regain control of a denomination whose decision-making boards and bureaucracies violate this principle by their very existence?

This antibureaucratic principle appears to have expressed itself in the URCNA in several ways. A few years ago, there were proposals brought to URCNA ecclesiastical assemblies to create a denominational magazine and to create a ministers’ health insurance program; but such proposals have been consistently voted down. For example, the former Classis Midwest, at its second meeting, defeated an overture that would have asked synod to adopt *The Reformed Trumpet* as the official URCNA denominational magazine. Likewise, the 1999 synod defeated an overture to create a denominational health insurance plan for ministers. In the July 12, 1999 *Christian Renewal*, one minister was quoted as recommending that individual churches set up their own insurance plans, instead of relying on a plan established by synod, by saying “There’s no doubt of the need. We just need to do it in line with our principles.” And those principles appear to be antibureaucratic.

United Reformed churches, individually and as a federation, will discover and implement new forms of missions and ministry. Even today, United Reformed churches are carrying out foreign and home missions work, even though there are no denominational agencies supervising and funding such work. “We wish to maintain the local church and its consistory as the calling, sending and administrating body for the mission effort. This, however, needs to be done in cooperation, coordination, and with the encouragement of other churches.” (Report 4, Biblical and Confessional View of Missions, in the *Minutes* of the June 2001 synod, p. 108. This is the “Joint Venture Model” adopted by that synod.) This is in harmony with the Belgic Confession’s teachings about the roles of ecclesiastical assemblies and their elected members (Articles 30 and 31).

The needs and opportunities for missions, as well as for educational and support activities among URCNA churches, will continue and could well accelerate. But how can officebearers – not boards and bureaucracies – govern and supervise such work? How can such work be carried out without the emergence of a URCNA bureaucracy? How can such work be carried out under the direct control of designated ministers, elders and deacons?

A *Christian Renewal* article from 1997 (Gregory Rickmar, “Coordination of Christian Ministries”, September 8, 1997, page 16) suggested a solution. Quoting from a revised version of that article, available on the Web at <http://www.covenant-urc.org/literatr/grccm.html>:

Christian organizations often have their people dispersed in widely separated geographic areas. Their work often requires that their people travel to widely scattered regions of the earth. This is the way it should be. When Christ commanded His people to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,” He expected His church to send representatives to distant lands. Unfortunately, this wide dispersal of Christian workers only adds to the difficulty of their work. When Christian workers are dispersed, they have trouble keeping in touch with their fellow workers and supporters. They have trouble communicating their joys and sorrows with their co-workers. And they often have trouble communicating their needs and coordinating their work with others. . . .

Many business firms recently have been using their own computer networks to permit and improve communication within their own organizations. The software that these firms use to aid communication between their workers often includes electronic mail, scheduling, group conferencing, electronic bulletin boards and other features. Such software especially designed to improve group communication is called "groupware." The demand for groupware is increasing, and a number of software manufacturers offer groupware products. . . .

Groupware can thus be of great value to many Christian organizations. However, the groupware products that are currently available were first developed before the Internet's World Wide Web came into wide use. And groupware products are often expensive. Many businesses are now catching on that there is a low-cost alternative to groupware. And that is Internet technology.

An increasing number of organizations are using Internet newsgroups, electronic mail and Web sites to improve communication within their own organizations. Departments, project teams, and even individuals are setting up their own Web sites. Some organizations require every employee to set up his or her own Web page containing certain job and personal information. These personal Web sites allow the organization to gain a comprehensive personnel, telephone, E-mail and location directory. . . .

Officebearers should be able to effectively monitor and supervise missions and other activities of the churches, even across wide distances, if they have at their disposal the necessary means of communications. With the proper means of communications, they will be able to monitor the works being done, receive direct feedback from those affected by the works as well as from those performing those activities, and will be able to communicate with other officebearers supervising those activities; even across vast distances.

Current Internet technology has not only made all this possible, but much of this can already be carried out very inexpensively. E-mail and message boards are already inexpensive and in wide use. Committees and teams can collaborate across wide distances using those tools as well as Web-based team calendars and Web pages that allow team or committee members to post and share electronic documents. Internet telephony allows people to conduct long distance phone calls – even conference calls – at costs much less than those charged by telephone companies. And Internet-based videoconferencing is coming into wide use by corporations. The cost of Internet videoconferencing is currently prohibitive, but is expected to become both affordable and practical within a few years.

Some corporations are already using such systems for formal and informal meetings of their boards of directors (George Anders, "... Run a Board Meeting." *The Wall Street Journal*, Vol. CCXLII No. 53, September 15, 2003).

This new technology may appear mysterious and unconventional, but its application has the potential of allowing URCNA churches to administer and expand their mission activities while avoiding the bureaucratization that may have adversely affected other groups. This new URCNA Web site could thus become a major influence on the URCNA's character and ministries.

Suggestions from the Public

Interestingly, many people have echoed these same proposals. After we accepted the previous synod's request to develop and administer this Web site, one member of our church asked the over three hundred members of the CO-URC e-mail discussion group for ideas for this Web site. One suggestion that was repeatedly expressed was to provide ways for synodical committees and regional assemblies to conduct business over wide distances, by collaborating and working together over the Internet. Here are some sample comments:

- “Are we able to set up ‘chat’ capabilities in our site? What I have in mind is the ability to use ‘chat rooms’ discretely set up for various committees of the URCNA to hold on-line meetings. This would be a great asset in my opinion.” (From a URCNA minister who is a member of a synodical committee.)
- “While CO-URC and other e-mail groups are tremendously useful, some sort of private real-time ‘chat-type’ forums could be very useful for some of the URCNA's geographically diverse committees. While no replacement for periodic face-to-face meetings, such an online collaborative system should make it much easier for committee members to hash out particular issues from time to time.” (From a URCNA elder.)
- “Recently I had a discussion with Rev. [_____] regarding the issues that face us as a federation and our organizational preparedness to facilitate the sharing of information quickly. . . . There is no centralized database of church addresses to create mailing lists, and although the URCNA website does list information about churches, there does not seem to be a process to ensure that information is up-to-date. The committees certainly have no place to upload ‘work in progress’ to be able to work in a collaborative manner, nor is there any way for them to share information with the churches of the federation in a secure fashion. I also act as the [_____] for Classis [_____], and regularly receive written versions of all classis minutes, but have no vehicle to share these with other churches in our classis.” (From another URCNA elder.)
- “We are working on setting up a web site for our classis, and hope to include a few committee addresses like CIC@Classis[_____].org which would redirect all mail to the three members of the classical interim committee. If there is, for example, a task force mandated to negotiate the next step of union with [another federation], a link which would open one's e-mailer with an address going to every member of that task force would facilitate communication.” (From another minister.)

Initially, such workgroup and conferencing features could be inexpensively introduced by providing pages on the URCNA Web site, closed to all but committee members with the proper passwords. These passwords would allow committee members to share documents, schedule activities on a joint calendar and conduct discussions by e-mail or on Web-based message boards. Eventually, additional features might be introduced, including audio conferencing and even videoconferencing that would allow committee members and perhaps classis delegates to conduct face-to-face meetings while reducing expenditures of time and money for travel.

Some organizations are already relying on videoconferencing for business meetings, and are saving far more money by reducing travel expenses than what the videoconferencing systems cost. For an overview of some videoconferencing products and services already in wide use, see Leon Erlanger, "Take a Meeting Online", *PC Magazine*, Vol. 23 No. 1 (January 20, 2004) pages 118-127. This article is available on the Web at <http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,4149,1418394,00.asp>.

We do not believe that audio conferencing nor videoconferencing is yet advisable for widespread URCNA use, since many officebearers still lack the high-speed broadband Internet connections that these features require. However, they may become feasible within the next few years. Nevertheless, most of the other text-based workgroup and conferencing features mentioned above *are* feasible now.

Other features that have been suggested for urcna.org (or the other urcna.com and urcna.net domains that we registered) include:

- Providing pages for each classis to post whatever material they wish. Some of these pages may require passwords to access; for example, a classis may want to post its minutes for use by officebearers of its member churches, but not for use by others.
- Providing pages for URCNA churches to post their own information.
- E-mail addresses for officebearers, missionaries, etc. in the form of "anyone@urcna.org" (or .com or .net). As individuals' e-mail addresses have limited lives and tend to change over the years, this would provide a more permanent address, making it considerably easier for people to send mail to church officebearers.
 - A Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) minister described to us his experiences with such a system, and its advantages: "Again, that is some-thing we do and has proved a tremendous benefit. Our syntax for the ministers' email addresses is simple: Christian-name+surname@fccontinuing.org. Likewise the congregation's name@fccontinuing.org will work. Forwarding tables are cheap and easy to use and certainly get round the problem of changing email addresses very neatly. They can also include committee addresses so that mail addressed to a committee goes automatically to the Clerk to that committee. It's worked very well for us – hope it works equally well for the URC."
- Move all URCNA-specific content off of www.covenant-urc.org onto www.urcna.org. This would include the URCNA directory, Church Order, and synod minutes and agendas.
- Include evangelistic, doctrinal and educational materials for the general public, including materials for children.
- Include sermons (transcripts and/or audio) by URCNA ministers.
- Provide continuing education features for ministers and others in the URCNA.
 - For example, on-line, Web-based educational conferences could be offered. In such on-line conferences, three groups of people might participate: Presenters, Commentators and Audience. The Presenters might be three to six authors who

would present papers. The Commentators would be a second group made up of people who are knowledgeable about the topic being discussed and are there to offer their opinions and comments. The third group, the Audience, would be composed of the rest of the people who registered for the conference. When registering on-line for the conference, all participants (Presenters, Commentators and Audience) might provide a list of keywords with which to describe themselves.

Each conference might consist of Audience members going to the conference Web site, registering for the conference and reading each paper presented. Each participant in the conference – Presenters, Commentators and Audience – would simultaneously be added to an on-line e-mail group or a live chat session. Participants are thus enabled to ask questions and participate in the subsequent discussions.

At any time, Audience members can also perform name or keyword searches and start private conversations with other participants by e-mail or by live chat. Enough information about other participants would be provided to allow them to strike up conversations. Participants might opt to be assigned at random others to converse with.

By including both e-mail and live chat, the conference is both timely and time-insensitive. A scheduled time is published for each presentation, so that Presenters and Commentators are available for live chat with Audience members. Audience members can thus participate in the live chat at the scheduled group discussion time, or can participate at some other time through e-mail or by reading the group chat's transcript. (Adapted from "The Whiteboard Challenge" by Rosalyn Lum and David Caiati that appeared in *Software Development* magazine, Vol. 12 No. 3, March 2004, pp. 20, 21.)

- Permit on-line registration for synod and classis meetings, and provide information about available lodging.
- Literature and hymnal sales, should the URCNA ever engage in publishing activities.
- Include news of activities in URCNA churches and missions, as well as press releases of synodical activities whenever synod meets – although this might fly in the face of past ecclesiastical assembly decisions not to publish a denominational magazine.
- Provide data streams that would allow other Web sites to provide information from www.urna.org. For example, such data streams would allow URCNA churches to provide information (such as URCNA directory information) on their own Web sites that feeds directly off of the information stored on the URCNA Web server. Another example would be another denomination in ecclesiastical fellowship being able to draw church directory information off of our Web site and combine it in one large directory that would include churches from multiple Reformed denominations.
- The site should be designed so that different people can update and add content to different sections of the site. This would prevent any one person from shouldering all the work and would give different people and groups a sense of ownership.

- The site should be designed so that it will be easy for people to administer and so that others will find it easy to learn how to write computer programs to add new features to it. In other words, any technology that is difficult for people of average intelligence to learn should be avoided. Otherwise, it could prove difficult to recruit volunteers to perform the administrative and programming tasks.
- The site should use technology that does not require users and those responsible for the site's maintenance to use a specific vendor's products on their own personal computers.

Estimated Costs

If one were to open any computer-oriented magazine today, one will probably see many advertisements offering Web hosting services. Some advertisements will publicize Web hosting plans that will allow someone to have his or her own Web site for \$19.95 per month or \$24.95 per month. And if one doesn't mind letting someone else place "banner" advertisements on every page on the site, there are companies that will host one's Web site for free.

Yet, strangely enough, that same magazine may contain articles mentioning the hundreds of thousands of dollars that some large corporations spend *every month* on hosting their own Web sites. How can it be that some organizations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every month on Web hosting, when \$19.95 per month and even free Web hosting plans are available?

The answer is, different people – and different organizations – have different requirements for Web hosting. An individual creating a Web site devoted to his stamp-collecting hobby has far different Web hosting needs than do corporations with large commercial Web sites, such as sears.com and amazon.com.

Shared Hosting

The Web hosting industry offers three broad categories of Web hosting services. At the low end, the industry offers *shared hosting*. Shared hosting is where dozens – or even hundreds – of individual Web sites are operated – or hosted – on a single server computer. A stamp collector might sign up for a shared hosting plan for hosting a Web site devoted to his hobby. \$19.95 per month Web hosting plans are generally of the shared hosting variety. Many small informational sites – including most church Web sites – are run on shared servers. Shared Web hosting plans spread the cost of running a Web server and keeping it connected to the Internet over many Web sites, keeping the cost of hosting each Web site low. Shared hosting plans generally cost between US\$20 and US\$100 per month.

Why the broad range of prices? As hosting plans increase in price, they tend to offer more features. The more expensive hosting plans may provide, for example, more disk storage capacity and additional e-mail accounts. The more expensive plans also generally provide a greater monthly *bandwidth allowance* – the volume of Web site traffic permitted each month without extra fees. A high bandwidth allowance is especially important for sites that offer downloadable audio files – such as music or sermons. Audio files tend to be large, and any Web site that features audio files can be expected to need a high bandwidth allowance.

Shared Web hosting plans are good choices for small Web sites that are mainly informational in nature. They are not good, however, for sites requiring high security. If someone were to "crack" into one site on that server, chances are that he or she would gain access to not just that one site on that server, but to *all* the sites on that server. If one of the sites on that server contained

confidential information – such as credit card numbers – unauthorized people could gain access to sensitive information.

Shared Web hosting plans have other disadvantages. To make them economical, Web hosting providers generally set up every site on the server with the same, limited set of features. If our stamp collector friend wanted to set up a discussion board on his Web site to allow visitors to exchange news and opinions about stamps, his Web hosting provider might tell him that their server cannot provide such a feature. And if this stamp collector's site were to attract a large volume of visitors, many potential visitors will find that they cannot connect to this site: either the number of visitors has overwhelmed the server's capacity, or the number of visitors has exceeded the capacity of that Web server's connection to the Internet.

Dedicated Hosting

Because of the limitations of shared hosting, many organizations opt for a different type of Web hosting: *dedicated hosting*. Dedicated hosting does not rely on shared servers. Dedicated hosting allows a Web site owner to have complete control over one or more server computers. Web sites using dedicated hosting use at least one entire computer. Some of the larger Web sites using dedicated hosting use more than one computer.

In a typical dedicated hosting arrangement, the organization needing a Web site will purchase or lease the server computer(s). The computer(s) will then be physically located within a Web hosting company's *data center* – a guarded, secure building designed for computer use that has fire suppression systems, backup power supplies, and multiple, redundant high-speed connections to the Internet. The Web site owner can then remotely administer and update his or her Web server by connecting to it over the Internet and gaining administrative access to the server with the proper passwords.

Dedicated hosting is ideal for large Web sites, for sites attracting high volumes of visitors (such as cnn.com and foxnews.com), or for sites requiring high levels of security and resistance to unauthorized access (such as e-commerce sites). Dedicated Web hosting generally costs at least US\$300 per month and can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars per month for the largest and most heavily trafficked sites.

The server that is currently (and temporarily) hosting the www.urchna.org Web pages is a shared server. The current, temporary www.urchna.org site currently includes directories of United Reformed churches and ministers, minutes of past synods, our Church Order, and little else. In other words, the current www.urchna.org site is a purely informational site. It does not include any of the collaboration features that some have requested (such as committee conferencing) or that we anticipate may be expected of this site in the future (such as literature sales). Indeed, *few or none of the additional features that have been requested for the new URCNA Web site can be provided on a shared server. In other words, we do not believe that any of these additional requested features can be provided on a \$19.95 per month Web hosting plan.*

Virtual Private Hosting

Some Web sites may be too large, too feature-rich, or require too much security to be hosted on a shared server. Yet these same sites would not require the full resources of a dedicated server. To serve this middle ground between shared hosting and dedicated hosting, a third type of Web hosting has recently emerged: *virtual private hosting*. Virtual private hosting is a variant of shared hosting, but with enough different characteristics to qualify it as an entirely different type.

In virtual private hosting, one server computer will host multiple Web sites. Three things make this different from traditional shared hosting, however. First, a virtual private server will typically host only a handful of separate Web sites – unlike the dozens or hundreds of sites that a traditional shared server might host.

Second, higher quality software and techniques are used to “partition off” each Web site from the other sites sharing that server. This reduces the likelihood that someone gaining unauthorized access to one site on that server can gain access to the other sites hosted on that same server.

Third, because higher quality software and techniques are used to partition off each Web site sharing the same server, the Web hosting companies can provide the Web site owners greater administrative control of their sites. Web site owners are thus able to install additional software on the Web server to perform specialized tasks, such as e-mail messaging, discussion boards, and specialized search capabilities.

Virtual private hosting costs vary, but generally cost between US\$50 and US\$150 per month. As previously mention regarding shared hosting plans, the more expensive plans tend to provide more features. Over a three year period (the typical length of time between United Reformed synods), the total cost for virtual private hosting could vary between US\$1800 and US\$5400.

Consistory's Recommendations

Covenant – Kalamazoo’s Consistory recognizes the need for additional Internet-related services to aid United Reformed churches in their mission. These services cannot be provided by using a shared Web hosting server, yet might not require the full resources of a dedicated server between now and the next synod. Consistory thus recommends that a virtual private server Web hosting service be secured at this time. Virtual private servers are capable of handling the types of e-commerce and committee collaboration features, with the exception of audio conferencing and videoconferencing, that some have requested for the URCNA Web site. If synod indicates that it wants a site with features that will require a virtual private server, but experience shows that even a virtual private server is inadequate to meet the demands placed upon it, Consistory may ask subsequent synods for funds for a dedicated server. Consistory may also ask future synods for funds for one or more dedicated servers should a future synod request audio conferencing or videoconferencing features.

Synod Escondido (2001) approved reimbursing Covenant – Kalamazoo up to US\$1000 in Web site-related expenses. US\$1000 spread over a three-year period averages out to approximately US\$25 per month – sufficient only to pay for shared Web hosting – and insufficient to pay for the collaborative Web hosting features that some have requested.

Should synod desire a site with the committee collaboration features and other features that have been suggested, that will require, at minimum, a virtual private server that could cost US\$150 per month (US\$5400 over a three year period). We have found Web hosting companies that offer very good virtual private server plans for US\$100 per month, but we anticipate that additional charges (for example, a higher bandwidth allowance, additional database connections to serve multiple committee discussion boards) and possible future price increases could raise the cost to approximately US\$150 per month.

On the other hand, a shared server, that will be capable of hosting only a simple informational site, may cost between US\$20 and US\$100 per month (between US\$720 and US\$3600 over a three year period). The more expensive shared server plans would be appropriate for a simple

informational site that includes audio files of sermons. If audio files are not included on an informational site, such a site could be hosted for US\$50 per month (US\$1800 over three years).

We need to mention that most of the new, proposed features for this site that have been suggested will require customized programming. A member of our church is willing to do this work, but it will require time. These proposed features cannot be implemented immediately. Should synod indicate that it wants specific, additional features implemented, we anticipate that these features will be rolled out, one by one, over the next several years.

Additional e-mail mailboxes with a Web interface that will allow reading and composing messages in a Web browser, or sending and receiving messages using e-mail client software (such as Outlook Express or Eudora) will cost about US\$1 per month per account. This is an additional cost, over and above the cost for Web site hosting. Such a feature could be used to provide additional e-mail addresses in the form someone@urcna.org (or .com or .net).

Consistory's Requests of Synod

1. That synod will provide direction to Covenant – Kalamazoo's Consistory, informing Consistory what type of Web site synod desires, what features synod wants implemented soon, and what features synod would like to see added later.
2. If synod wishes to include certain types of content designed for public consumption (such as a question-answer board allowing the public to post doctrinal questions to be answered by URCNA officebearers, essays and sermons by URCNA ministers, news concerning URCNA churches and missions, and children's pages); that synod will either authorize Covenant – Kalamazoo's Consistory to recruit qualified personnel, or synod itself will appoint other officebearers, to supervise the selection and editing of such content.
3. That synod will provide sufficient funds for the Web site type and features it wants to see implemented.
4. As our report has indicated, it is considered good practice to include an emblem or logo on organizational Web sites as an aid to site navigation. Clicking on the emblem, often located in the upper left corner of every page on that organization's Web site, brings the Web site visitor back to the site's home page. Any emblem adopted for Web site use may eventually through its Web site use become a *de facto*, unofficial, emblem of this federation and will thus affect peoples' perceptions of this federation. Consistory would appreciate guidance from synod as to whether Consistory is free to select an emblem for Web site use. Synod, if it desires adoption of such an emblem, may desire that Consistory select a temporary emblem for Web site use, and that a subsequent synod select a more permanent emblem for general URCNA use.

Report of the Corporation of the United Reformed Churches in North America (Canada)

Since the last Synod (Escondido) the Corporation for the URCNA has been recognized by the Government of Canada (Business Number 86469 1480 RR0001) and has been granted Charitable Status. At the time of this writing the Corporation continues to pursue establishing a Joint Venture Agreement with the Corporation of the United Reformed Churches in North America (USA). The Corporation (Canada) has also opened a bank account. The Corporation (Canada) has not received or dispersed monies as Synod has yet to instruct the Corporation (Canada) in this regard. In order to make use of the Corporation we wish to recommend to the Synod (Calgary) the following:

- 1. That the monies currently held in trust by the Canadian Finance Committee be transferred to the Corporation.*
- 2. That henceforth the Corporation will be the receiving agency for the financial support of Canadian Finances relating to the operation and function of the Federation.*
- 3. That the Corporation use such monies as are received for the reimbursement of expenses incurred by members or churches in instances where:*
 - a. such expenses are required for the fulfilling of a Synodically directed responsibility.*
 - b. such expenses are for needy churches in their Federative responsibilities such as,*
 - i. sending delegates to Synod.*
 - ii. reimbursing members of such congregations in the fulfillment of their Synodical responsibilities.*
 - iii. fulfilling Synodically directed responsibilities.*
 - c. such expenses as are required for the operation of the Corporation such as*
 - i. legal fees.*
 - ii. government fees*
 - iii. accounting fees*
- 4. That a committee be established to oversee the distributions of these funds.*
 - a. This committee would report regularly to the Corporation.*
 - b. This committee's activities would be reported through the Corporation's minutes to the Federation at Synodical meetings.*
- 5. That said committee be constituted of members in good standing of URCNA churches appointed to this position by Synodical concurrence.*
- 6. That said Committee develop a mandate and protocol for receiving and administering requests to this fund.*
 - a. such mandate and protocol would be implemented immediately.*
 - b. such mandate and protocol would be subject to Synodical approval at the next Synodical meeting.*

Furthermore we recommend that the Synod instruct the Directors of the Corporation (Canada) to fulfill this recommendation pending final approval of the next Synod of the URCNA. This would allow the Finance Committee to take up its responsibilities and continue operation of the work of the Federation without delay.

Submitted on behalf of the Corporation,
Rev. J. Dykstra (Secretary)



99 Scott Street, St. Catharines, Ontario, L2N 1G8, 905-935-8322

March 2, 2004

Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America
C/o Rev. Bill DeJong, Stated Clerk

Dear Brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ

Please find attached a statement from the Canadian Finance Committee for your information. Up until now this committee has been under the supervision of the council of Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church. The United Reformed Church is now incorporated in Canada and we are told that a new committee will be set up by Synod to handle the finances of the corporation. We look forward to hearing from the new committee and we are prepared to help in the transition of work to this committee.

The Canadian Finance Committee looks after a fund which primarily covers federation expenses such as travel costs for Canadian members of synodical committees and travel costs for synodical representatives to other churches and organizations. The funds come to the committee from the churches as agreed upon at Synod 1996 where each church was asked to contribute "at least \$3 per family" to this fund.

Our council would like to share some concerns and suggestions about the Canadian Finance Committee fund:

- a) Appointment of Synodical Committee Members – Is it prudent for Synod to appoint representatives to committees from across North America? It would be more cost effective if synodical committees were appointed regionally.
- b) Sufficiency of Funds – (i) The Canadian fund is at times close to being depleted; should the synodical committee members, or delegates who receive reimbursement from the fund, forecast in advance their expenses for the year? This would allow the finance committee to prepare a budget and solicit the churches for additional funds if needed. (ii) Are there extra monies in the American fund that could be used to help with the Canadian expenses? Are there different tasks that could be handled by our American brothers?
- c) Accountability - Committee members or delegates who seek reimbursement for expenses submit receipts and are then sent a cheque. At the end of each year a summary statement is sent to all the Canadian Churches. Is this sufficient accountability? Are the statements reviewed at classis meetings? How best can the churches be held accountable for contributing to this fund while also recognizing that some smaller churches may have difficulty contributing to the fund?

Our delegates are prepared to speak further to this matter if called upon.

Yours in Christ,
Tyler Meijaard, clerk

Canadian Finance Committee - URCNA
Report to Synod 2004

The following is a report of activity since the previous synod:

Beginning Balance (December 31, 2000): \$7,543.52

2001 Credits:

"Askings" Receipts	3,545.74	
Dividends	2.76	
Total Credits:	\$3,548.50	3,548.50

2001 Expenses:

Federation Expenses	2,914.94	
Office Expenses	15.73	
Synod Expenses	630.60	
Stated Clerk Remuneration	1,365.00	
Bank Charges	11.25	
Total Expenses:	\$4,937.52	4,937.52

Balance (December 31, 2001): \$6,154.50

2002 Credits:

"Askings" Receipts	3,127.84	
Dividends	1.81	
Total Credits:	\$3,129.65	3,129.65

2002 Expenses:

Federation Expenses	5,202.83	
Office Expenses	16.10	
Legal Expenses (Corporation)	600.00	
Stated Clerk Remuneration & ICRC Dues	2,012.32	
Total Expenses:	\$7,831.25	7,831.25

Balance (December 31, 2002): \$1,452.90

2003 Credits:

"Askings" Receipts	5,519.34	
Dividends	1.24	
Interest	0.12	
Total Credits:	\$5,520.70	5,520.70

2003 Expenses:

Federation Expenses	4,911.88	
Office Expenses	20.24	
Stated Clerk Remuneration & ICRC Dues	1,641.20	
Total Expenses:	\$6,573.32	6,573.32

Ending Balance (December 31, 2003): \$400.28

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

February, 2004

To: Pastors, Elders, and Deacons of URCNA member churches
From: US URCNA Treasurer

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The purpose of this letter is to provide some observations and information relative to the finances of URCNA as well as summarize the US URCNA's finances for last year.

OBSERVATIONS

1. Almost all the checks are now made out to URCNA.
2. Almost all the checks are sent to the US URCNA Treasurer's address.
3. Thirty-nine out of Forty-seven of the member churches provided "askings" during 2003.
(Participation is up from 2002!)
4. Only six churches have provided collections for the Psalter Hymnal fund.
5. We had a lot of travel from various committees in anticipation of Synod 2004.

ASKINGS

URCNA "askings" equals "Suggested Donation". The Synodically approved formula for a suggested donation is \$3.00 per family. This money is used for the ongoing activity of URCNA. Some churches choose to take a free-will offering instead of using the formula. Each member church has a responsibility to participate, in whatever way, in the overall ministry of URCNA.

It has been suggested that many member churches do not remember about the "askings" from year to year because of the yearly changes in the council. Even my own church admits that they would forget about the "askings" if I were not around to remind them. Last year I mailed out a reminder to all churches, about the "askings" for URCNA. The reminder seems to have helped so I will do it again this year. This reminder will then allow the deacons to "tie the check to the request" – a wonderful thing when it comes time to audit the church books at the end of the fiscal year.

PSALTER HYMNAL FUND

The first resolution from Report 3, from the Psalter Hymnal committee, that was adopted by Synod 2001 was **"That synod establish a fund to finance the cost of producing the new Psalter Hymnal."** The second resolution that was adopted from the Psalter Hymnal committee states **"That synod request churches to contribute to that fund by suggesting that free-will offerings be collected for this cause until the new Psalter Hymnal is completed."** The local churches are still not following through with the resolutions their Synod 2001 representatives approved.

ENCLOSURES

A budget has been developed in order to provide information on the ongoing activities. A comparison between last year's budget and last year's actuals is also provided.

The following pages contain the unaudited End-Of-Year Report for 2003, a budget for 2004, and guidelines for reimbursement. **Please note that this year is a Synod year and that there will be more expenses than normal this year.** The reimbursement guidelines are intended to adhere to the guidelines defined by the U.S. Government.

INCOMING MAIL

All mail for the US Treasurer should be sent to the address at the bottom of the letter. This is the best method for a timely response.

CHECKS

Please make all checks payable to "URCNA".

REIMBURSEMENT GUIDELINES

1. When possible, provide actual receipts. (Fax copies are acceptable. Just make sure the information being faxed is legible.)
2. For airline travel, provide the last portion of the ticket, which contains the entire round-trip information. For those who get E-tickets, the cost of the ticket will not be printed. In addition to that ticket, please provide some sort of receipt from the travel agency or, as a last resort, a photocopy of the bankcard statement with the ticket charge circled. Please do not send boarding passes. You may keep them as a souvenir of your trip.
3. If a receipt has items that are personal, send a photocopy of the receipt and circle the reimbursable items.
4. Mileage will be reimbursed at the IRS rate, which, for 2004, is currently **37.5** cents per mile (up from 1.5 cents from last year).
5. Meals will be reimbursed.
6. It is not necessary to submit receipts for meals unless the total exceeds \$36.00 per day.
7. If somebody pays for a group meal, that receipt must be submitted.
8. When meeting with members from Canada, support as much of their bill as possible, they have a poor exchange rate.
9. When staying at a hotel, sharing a room is not a requirement.
10. Please indicate which URCNA committee is being represented when requesting a reimbursement so that it can be properly documented.

The goal is to get a reimbursement check out as soon as possible, so if additional information is needed, it will be requested when the reimbursement check is sent. The process is working well and will continue to be modified, as needed.

Thank for your attention to these financial items. May the Lord continue to bless you in your ministry in 2004.

Serving the Lord together.

Peter J. Moen, U.S. Treasurer, URCNA
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey 07444-1840
Work: 973-284-3092, Fax: 973-284-3394, Home: 973-831-7661

E-Mail: Peter.Moen@ITT.com

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

2003 End Of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2002 21,395.74

INCOME

Askings	12,260.24
Interest	201.26
Reimbursements ¹	1,234.02

TOTAL INCOME 13,695.52

EXPENSES

Bank Charges ²	25.00
Clerk ³	3,000.01
Dues ⁴	1,580.00
Incorporation ⁵	20.00
Internet ⁶	415.00
Postage	130.86
Supplies	202.51
Telephone	935.14
Travel	7,808.72

TOTAL EXPENSES 14,117.34

NET TOTAL (421.82)

BALANCE 12/31/2003 20,973.92

Note 1: Good faith estimate by CFC URCNA covering 35% Clerk and 35% ICRC Dues

Note 2: Banks are now passing along the fee to process out-of-country checks.

Note 3: Rev. Julien stepped down as clerk and Rev. DeJong took over. Honorariums are now issued on a monthly basis instead of at the end of the year's service. The partial year that Rev. Julien worked accounts for the increase this year.

Note 4: International Conference of Reformed Churches Year 2003 Dues

Note 5: Yearly fee to the State of Michigan for incorporation renewal

Note 6: Fee to establish Internet domain names for the URC

Hymnal Fund

BALANCE 12/31/2002	3,356.55
INCOME	
Collections	3,566.17
Interest	9.20
TOTAL INCOME	3,575.37
EXPENSES	
None	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	3,575.37
BALANCE 12/31/2003	6,931.92

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

2003 Budget Comparison

<u>Line Item</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Bank Charges	\$ 0	\$ 25.00
Clerk	\$2,000	\$3,000.01
Dues	\$1,600	\$1,580.00
Incorporation	\$ 0	\$ 20.00
Internet	\$ 0	\$ 415.00
Postage	\$ 350	\$ 130.86
Supplies	\$ 100	\$ 202.51
Telephone	\$ 500	\$ 935.24
Travel	<u>\$7,000</u>	<u>\$7,808.72</u>
Total	\$11,550	\$14,117.34

2004 Budget

(For planning and comparison purposes only.)

Bank Fee	\$ 25
Clerk ¹	\$2,000
Dues	\$1,600
Internet	\$ 100
Postage	\$ 200
Supplies	\$ 200
Synod Materials ²	\$1,600
Synod Postage ²	\$1,800
Synod Support Personal ²	\$1,100
Synod Travel ²	\$ 800
Telephone	\$1,000
Travel	<u>\$8,000</u>
Total	\$18,425

Note 1: Established by URCNA Synod.

Note 2: Extrapolated from Synod fees from 2001. Please note that each church is responsible for the cost of sending their delegates. These costs are for non-delegate persons required to attend the Synod.

THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

Rev. Bill DeJong
9519 Lane Ave.
Kansas City, MO 64134
Fax: 816-943-7109
Email: bdejong@planetkc.com

Stated Clerk's *Preliminary* Report for Synod 2004

April 8, 2004

Esteemed Brothers:

Although it is customary for the stated clerk to present an unseen report at synod, I've decided to make available to the churches a preliminary version of this report chiefly on account of the recommendations I make below which I believe ought to receive the attention of the consistories so as to prepare their delegates for commenting and ultimately voting on these recommendations.

I began my labors as Stated Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) on October 15, 2003 when Rev. Julien, my predecessor, concluded that he could not fulfill his clerical responsibilities in a timely manner given his increased workload as an instructor at a Christian high school. His resignation was accepted by his supervising consistory (Bethel URC in Calgary, AB) and I, as the synodically appointed alternate, was commissioned to resume Rev. Julien's work.

I wish at this point to reiterate what I wrote in my November 13, 2003 letter to the federation. Rev. Julien performed a faithful service for our churches, giving of his time and energy to ensure that the business of the federation was transacted decently and in order. The Lord had uniquely blessed him with a willingness and an aptitude for the work that I clearly lack. We ought to be grateful to the Lord for Rev. Julien's years of service (1996-2003).

Since the last synod, Rev. Julien published the minutes of synod Escondido 2001, handled federational correspondence and superintended the 2002 and 2003 annual directories of the URCNA published by Reformed Believer's United.

My workload since assuming the clerical responsibilities has never been anything but heavy. Already in October, the synod 2004 committee of the Calgary church and I began work on preparing the previous synodical agendas and minutes for publication in bound volumes, as per article 35 of the Minutes of Synod 2001. This work was tedious and I quickly enlisted the assistance of the Calgary church's secretary, Carla DeBruyn, who proved invaluable for this assignment.

On November 13, 2003 I sent a letter to all the churches in the federation indicating, among other things, that I had replaced Rev. Julien as stated clerk and had reset the deadline for submissions to the synodical agenda to March 31, 2004.

In December, 2003 I began work on the 2004 directory of the URCNA with Mr. Wayne Martin of Reformed Believer's United. I electronically mailed forms to each of the churches and was happy to receive most of them back the same way. I think this represents a major improvement to the way things were done previously since it is so cost, time and paper efficient.

Much of my time in 2004 has been spent handling denominational correspondence and answering questions about the federation from both insiders and outsiders. I've also been busy preparing the agenda for synod 2004 and have had regular contact with the convening church of Calgary about this.

I will be making available at synod a final copy of my stated clerk's report which will include information not yet available, such as a complete list of fraternal observers and delegates.

At this point I will be suggesting the following recommendations.

- a. That synod appoint a committee to draft synodical rules of procedure. In these rules (a) a standard of parliamentary law should be adopted (i) to ensure that the business of the synod meeting is transacted in an orderly, practical way and (ii) to assist the officers of synod in overseeing the proceedings and preserving order and (iii) to assist prospective appellants prepare an appeal and be familiar with protocol, standards of admissibility and preferred verbiage; (b) the authority and responsibilities of the stated clerk and the convening church should be clearly distinguished and defined so as to address, for example, who determines the admissibility of overtures, appeals and reports and what the standards of admissibility are. In the process of drafting these rules, the committee should research comparable rules employed in other Reformed denominations and federations.
- b. That synod delineate the inter-synodical responsibilities of the stated clerk. Much time was spent this past year soliciting and collating information from the churches for the annual URCNA directory published by Reformed Believers United without a specific mandate from synod to do so. Synod should determine whether this belongs properly to the task of the stated clerk. The advantage to having the stated clerk contribute to this work is it ensures a better response from the churches than a private outfit with no official ties to the federation.
- c. That synod clarify whose responsibility it is to invite fraternal observers and delegates to the meetings of synod. Is it that of the respective ecumenical committees, both foreign and domestic, or that of the stated clerk?
- d. That synod grant non-voting privilege of the floor to the stated clerk if he is not delegated to synod

by his consistory. It would make good sense for a consistory not to delegate the stated clerk to synod since it would be disadvantaged by having one of their delegates unable to contribute meaningfully to the deliberations of synod. In that scenario, the clerk should be given the privilege of the floor without voting rights.

- e. That synod appoint a new stated clerk and a new alternate to begin work in August of 2004. As per Article 64 of the Minutes of the 1999 synod the term of office for the Stated Clerk would be three (3) years with eligibility for no more than two (2) consecutive terms. Since this work presents a substantial diversion from the ministry, I would strongly recommend that the new stated clerk and alternate not be in full-time ministry. A semi-retired pastor, a retired pastor or an elder with spare time each would be fitting candidates for the task. It is also essential that the new clerk and his alternate be computer literate.

In his mercy and grace, the Lord has greatly blessed the United Reformed Churches in North America such that we now have 89 churches (including 7 church plants) in 4 Canadian provinces and 19 American states and approximately 20,000 souls under our care.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Bill DeJong

Late Communications

REPORT FROM COVENANT REFORMED CHURCH OF TORONTO ON BASIC AND EXTENDED HEALTH CARE BENEFITS (FROM A CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE)

Mandate:

Synod Escondido 2001 appointed Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto to report to Synod (from a Canadian perspective) on the following:

- a. To investigate what existing national group health plans (profit and non-profit) are available to the churches;
- b. To investigate the feasibility of forming a denominational plan and determine from the churches the likelihood of participation in such a plan, taking into consideration cross-border portability;
- c. to complete a preliminary survey of the churches within 6 months of the end of this synod to determine:
 - i. The health benefits being provided to their pastors;
 - ii. The various health benefits for which the churches require coverage through a health plan; and
- iii. The willingness of the churches to participate in various health plans.

Background:

The mandate clearly recognizes the disparity in health care benefits available between Canada and the USA. Canada has a universal health care system that provides basic health care benefits to all permanent residents, at little or no cost. Some governmental support is also available for long term disability. Given the substantive differences in basic health care benefits between the two countries, it is not feasible to examine any cross-border plan, other than to recognize that URC ministers who accept a call to Canada, should not be prevented from participating in basic and extended health care benefits as a result of such relocation.

Article 10 of the Church Order

The obligations imposed by article 10 of the Church Order on the local congregation make it clear that providing adequately for the minister of the Word and his family is mandatory. As a result, if special health care needs arise in the ministerial family, this obligation could impose a serious financial burden on the congregation.

Basic Health Care:

The Canadian government has prescribed a national health care system which is administered by the provinces. Although there are some differences in the application of this plan, no permanent Canadian resident is denied basic health care services at little or no cost. The Ontario plan (OHIP) provides eligibility on the basis of:

- a. Citizenship or immigration status; and
- b. Permanent residency; and
- c. Minimum residency of 153 days per year; and
- d. A three month waiting period for new residents.

If you meet the above eligibility requirements, you are issued a health card which entitles you to all

essential health services, including hospitalization. It does not include dental, drugs (except for those who are seniors or on a government support plan) and medical services that are not necessary.

Conclusion: There is no need for a Canadian national health group plan to provide for basic health care services. The only exception is when a minister and his family relocates to Canada from the USA or abroad. In that case, the calling church should make provision for a temporary health care policy to cover the minimum waiting period that is required for eligibility.

Extended Health Care:

All Canadians require extended health care of some kind on a regular basis, whether it be dental, drugs, vision products, or medical devices. However, these requirements for healthy families are often equivalent to the premiums paid for such benefits. The reason for contracting for private insurance coverage is to provide added protection should there be a major illness which results in significant long-term financial outlay, which could become a burden on the churches.

Lack of Uniform practice:

An informal survey of the URCNA churches in Canada would suggest that there is no uniform practice in the churches with respect to extended health care benefits. There is no shortage of product available for a young healthy family. However, there appears to be a lack of recognition in the churches that inadequate coverage for life insurance, long term disability, major illness, and expensive drug dependency can result in significant long term financial burden.

Private Insurance vs. Group Insurance

There are numerous private extended health care benefit plans available for purchase if you meet the minimum qualifications. Thus if a relatively young healthy ministerial family requires extended health care benefits, cost and insurability is not an issue. For example a basic Blue Cross plan that provides core health benefits, prescription drugs, dental coverage, vision care, special services (e.g. physiotherapy) and up to 15 days of coverage for world wide travel (all with some restrictions and limits) costs as follows in monthly premiums in Canadian dollars:

a. Family with oldest person 50 years old:	\$292.26
b. Single person age 50:	122.97
c. Family with oldest person 35 years old:	236.31
d. Couple both aged 50:	168.77

The foregoing examples are indicative of benefits available at a reasonable cost where eligibility is not an issue. The advantage of a group plan is that it allows a group to be tailored to whatever eligibility criteria the group wishes to establish. For example if there is no medical restriction on eligibility, the cost of the group plan may be higher, but the entire group is covered at all times. If the group experiences a high demand for benefits, the annual premiums will rise to reflect this cost. As a result, private groups often pay higher premiums than what is available in the open market for young healthy families.

Conclusion: There is a strong and compelling reason to form a group plan for URC ministers and their families to ensure full coverage for all, regardless of need. This would distribute the burden of extended health care coverage to all churches equally, regardless of demand.

Profit vs. Non-Profit Group Plans:

To establish a group plan, whether it be profit or non-profit, requires a considerable amount of administrative work. The advantage of a profit making plan is that effectively you have a large insurance carrier to backstop large claims should they arise (without the risk of depleting the fund) and the experience to effectively administer claims. The URCNA federation does not have enough churches in Canada to support a private non-profit group plan. Moreover, it is doubtful that the federation would realize any significant savings, and could potentially face excessive claims in one year that would bankrupt the plan.

Conclusion: If a group plan was established for the Canadian churches, it would be advisable to do so through a existing extended health care group plan provider.

Recommendations:

- 1. That Synod appoint a Canadian URCNA church to investigate the establishment of a group insurance plan to provide extended health care benefits (and other benefits if deemed advisable) for Canadian ministers and their families with an existing private group plan insurance provider;**
- 2. That the churches be provided with this information and requested to respond as their willingness to participate in such a plan;**
- 3. That the plan be established if a sufficient number of churches indicate a willingness to participate; and**
- 4. That all Canadian churches be encouraged to participate, if the plan is established.**

Submitted with Christian greetings and in brotherly love on behalf of Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto.

Charles M. K. Loopstra, Q.C.
Arthur Miedema, B.Com.

Conclusion of Incomplete *Appendix 4* of the CECCA Report (Continuing from p.129)

The Communications covered a wide range of subjects. In addition to many expressions of concern re the care of retired pastors, support for those who for medical reasons are (temporarily) incapacitated, and proper insurance provisions for the pastors – all in a real mess, it was said – there were Communications (Proposals/Overtures ?) re the high incidence of swearing in public, the alarming increase in violence, pursuing contact/communication with the Government, alternative Lord's Supper Formularies, re-writing the Formularies, principles and criteria governing the writing of hymns, the use of Information Technology by the church, moral standards and the Aids problem, moral standards and sexuality, the conferring of an honorary degree on Bishop Tutu by the PU for CHO, the financial situation of the GKSA as well as the importance of financial planning for the church, the training of pastors, the teaching of prayer, and the preparations for the 150th anniversary of the GKSA. Clearly, a wide range of subjects and concerns.

Press Releases were issued re some of the above – significantly one re the responsibility of the Government to take an active role in combating Aids – “don’t ignore it”; “there is no such thing as ‘safe sex’!”, and one re the high incidence of swearing in public.

Doctrinal Matters

As noted above, a number of doctrinal issues filled the Agenda of the synod. I mention the following:

1. The Sunday/Sabbath Issue

A well-written, carefully researched report – covering among others the question of the origin of the Sabbath, the Sabbath in the O.T., Christ and the Sabbath, Hebrews on the Sabbath, the celebration of Sabbath/Sunday in the church, and the Creeds on the Sabbath/Sunday – concluded with a nine point Summary and an eleven point Guidelines (Riglyne) for the Church, both of which were adopted. The Summary statements included the following:

- God gave the Sabbath-law with the intent that the Sabbath be a day of rest for Israel.
- The Sabbath originates at Sinai, not at the creation.
- The Sabbath receives its true meaning in Christ.
- Since the Sabbath is fulfilled in Christ, the Sunday is not to be kept as the O.T. Sabbath. Paul nowhere prescribes that the Sunday be kept as the O.T. Sabbath.
- There is no N.T. evidence that shows that Sabbath and Sunday are alike, are the same. The early Christian church’s celebration of Sunday shows that it had an altogether different character than the celebration of the Sabbath by the O.T. people of God. The reason for coming together on the 1st day of the week was not rooted in a desire to keep the Sabbath-law; rather, it was rooted in a need to come together for mutual encouragement and prayer.
- Starting with the 4th Century, the Sunday became more and more like the O.T. Sabbath again.
- With the Reformation of the 16th Century, under the leadership of Luther and Calvin the church confessed again that the Sabbath was fulfilled in Christ, that therefore the Sabbath (law) cannot be carried over to the Sunday.
- According to the English Puritans, the Sabbath is a creation ordinance which holds for all people. Their views re the Sabbath (which ought not to be embraced by the Reformed Churches) occasioned much debate in the Netherlands, debates which also influenced the understanding of the Sabbath/Sunday question in South Africa – (as indeed it has its influence among us in North America to this very day).

The eleven point Guidelines for the Church conclude with this quote from the RES 1976 Report on the same matter: “Lastly, the RES 1976 calls upon Reformed Churches to reinstate the note of joy to the keeping of the Lord’ day. Fellowship with the risen Christ and worship of the God who ‘on the first day’ gave the light and His Spirit, do not call for wearisome austerity but for a spirit of ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory’ as we draw water from the wells of salvation. Then shall the Sabbath be a day of delight in His presence, a foretaste of that eternal Sabbath that awaits the people of God.” This is a report worthy of reading and careful reflection.

2. Women in Ecclesiastical Office

The GKSA Synod had before it the following :

- a. A Protest/Appeal (Beswaarskrif) against a decision of Die Sinode 1988 – Die Vrou in Die Besondere Ampte, i.e. The Woman in Special Office. The authors presented four arguments (grounds). 1. That Synod was guilty of using an unbiblical starting point, viz. that all men have authority over all women; 2. that Synod was guilty of using an “unequal” and inconsequent hermeneutic, referring here to Synod’s appeal to 1 Tim 2:11 which in the South African translation adds the words “in die erediens”, i.e. in the worship service; 3. that Synod was guilty of using the Bible in a casuistic

manner; and 4. that Synod was guilty of using the Bible in an a-historic manner. Each of those grounds was carefully weighed – and found wanting! (Die beswaar slaag nie op beswaargrond ## nie). So far so good!

- b. The Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Matters – the Woman in the Church.
- c. The Report of the Committee on Doctrinal Matters, Alternative Partial Report – the Woman in the Church, (essentially a Minority Report)
- d. A Minority Report re part of the report mentioned under b. above re the place of the woman in the church.

The committee of pre-advice (re b.c.d. above) met for many hours and heard from many people – both delegates to Synod and individuals (men and women) who requested an audience, and indeed from me. (One night, in a severe thunderstorm, the hydro went off. No one was perturbed. We met in pitch darkness for another hour, listening to the testimony of Rev. Eric Kayayan and to a woman who advocated opening all offices to women.) The committee discussed at length questions relating to Phoebe, and to the correct understanding of I Tim. 3:11 – “the women likewise...” Who are those women? Are they the wives of the deacons or is it possible that they themselves were engaged in some form of diaconal ministry? If yes, then are we to understand that they are in the same office as the male Deacons in the congregation, or is the Apostle simply signaling that women too can engage in the work of service (diakonia) in the church without thereby saying that they are (to be installed) in office?

The pre-advice committee struggled long and hard to come with one report – rather than with a majority and a minority report. In that they succeeded, but in so doing those who thought that Synod would reject the recommendations proposed by the pre-advice committee were disappointed/fooled. Synod, to the utter dismay and disappointment of those in principle opposed to Women in Ecclesiastical Office, voted to open the Office of Deacon to women – on the following grounds (in summary statements, my translation):

- With the coming of Christ, the woman is restored to her place of equality with the man.
- The woman, as the man, is entrusted with gifts by the Holy Spirit. The church must, in submission, make use of these gifts.
- The woman is not inferior to the man. However, as in the home, so in the church a woman must recognize the headship of her husband.
- Texts, such as Rom.16:1,2 and I Tim 3:11; 5:9-15, are difficult; it is clear, however, that they point in the direction of women serving as deacons. Then comes this sentence: “Die Sinode keur in die lig van die Skrif goed dat vroue wat die nodige gawes het as diakens in die GKSA verkies en bevestig kan word.” (Synod, in or guided by the light of Scripture, approves that the office of deacon in the GKSA be opened to qualified women) Later on, this amplification was added: the texts (referred to) have for a long time already played an important supportive role for women in office in Reformed churches. On the one hand, there is no clarity, on the other hand, there is no command forbidding that women be placed in the office of deacon.
- The Church Order of the GKSA differentiates between the office(s) of the minister and the elder and that of the deacons. That differentiation means that there is no hindrance to ordaining women to the office of deacon. (However, Art. 38 of the GKSA Church Order may become the wedge that will lead to the opening of all offices to women.)

Synod decided, moreover, that

- It is clear that in N.T. times women used their gifts of prophesying and teaching. (Cf. I Tim.2:12 and I Cor.14:34). Synod must study how women may use such gifts in the church today.
- Synod appoint a committee which must study what implications a possible move to ordain women as elders/pastors will have – this in consultation with churches with which the GKSA has ecumenical unity.
- The relationship between man and woman (in marriage) is used in Scripture as a metaphor for what ought to be in the ‘household of God.’ (Cf. e.g. I Tim3:4; Titus 1:6,7) If elders are ‘the rulers of

God's household' how can the relationship between husband and wife in the home function in the church? To be studied by the committee.

- The offices in the church are not meant to confer status; rather they are means (ministries) by which the Lord cares for His church, (cf. Eph.4:12). Synod encourages the churches to abolish the notion of status in re the offices.
- The special offices are not for all members of the church. Since they are of a ministering character, (I Tim. 3:1-7; I Tim.5:9-15), the Synod urges the churches to be sure that only such people are chosen to office who have the necessary serving/ministering gifts for office.
- The committee (to be appointed) is given the mandate to make the necessary changes in the Church Order and in the Form for the Installation of Deacons. Article 38 of the CO (re the place of Deacons in the Consistory when that body has few members —as in a small congregation) will require special attention.
- Synod recognizes that there may be congregations in the GKSA where special circumstances which require special regulations
- Synod mandates the committee to find a gifted writer who can present the Reports of 1988 and 2003 to the churches. Practical directions re how the churches can make use of the gifts of God given to women (and men) are to be included in such a publication.
- The conscience of believers may not be bound if they are not convinced by the Word, (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 32). Previous studies done by the GKSA show that there are a number of issues that require further study. The committee is to study each and report back to Synod. (Eight such issues are listed.)

Needless to say, I found this a very disturbing development – as did many of the delegates with whom I spoke. The expectation is that there will be many Protests – Beswaarskrifte – forthcoming. The brothers who opposed these developments pleaded with me that I do all in my power to persuade the URCNA not to leave the GKSA in the lurch, but to help them to battle these developments. I assured them that I would do my best. Brothers, it is indeed my conviction that this is not the time for the URCNA to relinquish its relationship with the GKSA. I believe that we should clearly communicate to our South African brothers what our stand is, and why. We should plead with them to re-examine their position – warning them of the dangerous consequences the hermeneutic underlying their position holds. By God's grace we may be instrumental in calling this Church of the Lord back to the Word of the Lord on an issue that continues to disturb/plague the Church of Jesus Christ worldwide.

3. “He descended into hell”

The GKSA Synod 2000 had appointed a Study Committee to propose new wording re the words in the Apostles Creed: “He descended into hell”, (and similar wording as found in the Athanasian Creed) since that wording is both incorrect and misleading. After much debate and twice referring the matter back to the committee of pre-advice, Synod adopted a new reading, as follows: “... wat die angste van die hel tot in die dood toe ondergaan het,..” That is, “...who suffered the terrors of hell unto death,...” (Similar re-wording of the Athanasian Creed was adopted.) Synod further instructed its Ecumenical Relations Committee to discuss this change of wording with the churches with whom ecumenical relations are pursued, and to report back to the next Synod. In the meantime the churches of the GKSA are encouraged to use the new wording, with a view to an eventual adopting of a final (re-worded ?) version.

4. The use of Individual Cups (Kelkies) in the celebration of the Lord's Supper

On the last day of Synod, Synod – once again – debated the issue of the use of the individual cup when celebrating the Lord's Supper. A heated debate it was. Comments such as: Are we going to stick with the Word of God? Christ clearly spoke of a cup, not of cups. The cup is very significant in Scripture, think e.g. of the cup of God's wrath, dominated the discussion. The issue came to the floor of Synod by way of a Protest/ Appeal against the Synod 2000 decision which allowed churches, in exceptional

circumstances, to use Kelkies. For some that was anathema. Synod sustained the appellants, but its attempt to re-word the 2000 decision may still not satisfy all. It says that when there are circumstances where the common cup cannot be used, the consistory must act responsibly before the Lord.

Concluding Remarks

Many other items of interest could be reported on, including issues relating to education and the youth. Remarkably, there are virtually no Christian Schools in SA. Up until recently, the schools of the land permitted the teaching of Bible and teaching from a Christian perspective. All of that, however, is in the process of being changed by the government of Mbeki. Only a secular, God-denying perspective will be permitted in the schools – including in the (few) Christian schools. It will require much wisdom and courage to challenge these developments.

Let me, in closing, thank you brothers for giving me the opportunity to serve the church of Jesus Christ in this capacity – as your delegate. It has been a very rewarding experience for me. It is my prayer that the Lord may bless this work and our continuing contact with the GKSA.

To Him be the glory!

Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema, Observer
January 31, 2003

Overture #14^a

Classis Western Canada Overtures Synod 2004 of the URCNA to realign the classical districts of the federation.

Grounds:

1. Article 26 of the Church Order of the URCNA indicates that a “Classis shall consist of neighboring churches . . .”
2. The present configuration of Classis Canada West, extending through an arc from Salem, OR through the Bulkley Valley of BC and across the Canadian Prairie all the way to Thunder Bay, ON on the north shore of Lake Superior, represents an unwieldy scale of ‘neighborhood.’
3. The great distances between the extremities of this classical district tends to preclude the convening of Classis more than once per year and contributes to potentially excessive travel costs for the churches in this district.
4. The formation of classical districts should be based on geographical proximity.
5. While it may be preferable to align classical districts to recognize international borders, we have not found an international border to be an impediment to fellowship with churches in the federation.

Classis Western Canada
Henry Van Olst

^a The Stated Clerk did not receive a copy of the minutes in which this overture was adopted.