

## **Report of the Interchurch Relations Committee**

### **General**

Synod 2011 appointed Revs. Paul Archbald, Leo de Vos, Dirk van Garderen and Daniel Wilson and Mr. Pieter van der Wel as members of the IRC.

During the inter-synodical period our committee has met five times and one of these meetings was held at the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, where we also met with the Deputies of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, the Deputies of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and representatives of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia. Other work has been done via email.

### **Recommendation**

1. *To receive this report.*

### **A. Interchurch relationships**

Synod 2011 made the following decisions in relation to our interchurch relationships

1. *To establish a new category of interchurch relations in addition to the existing sister-church relationship, called “Ecclesiastical Fellowship”. (Acts 2011, Art.93-1)*
2. *To adopt provisionally the proposed “Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship” as the rules for this new relationship. (Acts 2011, Art.93-2)*

These provisionally adopted Rules are:

1. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies.
2. The eligibility of call of ministers from each other’s churches, subject to our established practice of a “colloquium doctum”.
3. Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships.
4. Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
5. A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).
6. Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another’s concerns.

In our meetings the “Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship” as well as the name of the relationship were frequent topics of discussion both due to questions from members of the IRC and from questions, especially from fraternal delegates, from the floor of Synod at the time. For your information we have attached Appendix 1 with the

*The Rules for Sister Church Relationships (Acts of Synod 1962),*

*Redefinition of Ecclesiastical Ties (Acts of Synod 1983, Art. 66-2,3)*

*The Objectives adopted as a basis for a more constructive and meaningful sister church relationship (Acts 1989 Art.44-o (i-vi))*

## Report 19 Interchurch Relations Committee

### 1. Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship

It is possible that our churches will use this category for other ecumenical relationships with other denominations. The committee therefore proposes amendments and a note with regard to the implications of Church Order Articles 61 and 62.

Proposed ADJUSTED Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (specifically 1-3 and the reference to RCNZ CO 61-62). The additions or amendments have been underlined.

1. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies. If feasible, the Inter-church relations committees should meet at least once in the inter-synodical period.
2. The eligibility of call of ministers from each other's churches, subject to our current practice of holding a preliminary evaluation before a call is issued and a *Colloquium Doctum*. (see Church Order article 10)
3. Occasional pulpit exchange as a means of maintaining and/or developing understanding and relationships, subject to Session examination; longer-term pulpit supply should be subject to Presbytery evaluation.
4. Joint exchange of information and, when considered mutually beneficial, cooperation in areas of common responsibility (e.g. diaconal works, mission work, theological education).
5. A willingness to interact and share resources with a view to advancing the Reformed faith (e.g. conferences, teaching, or publication ventures).
6. Communication on major issues with mutual respect for the differences that exist and a willingness to consider one another's concerns

**Please note:** Church Order Articles 61-62, regarding oversight of the Lord's Table and the admitting of new members, do apply to Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

### Recommendation

2. *That the Synod approve the adjusted Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as presented.*

### 2. The name "Ecclesiastical Fellowship"

When the name "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" for our new proposed ecumenical relationship was discussed on the floor of Synod the OPC delegates pointed out that this designation is used as their equivalent of sister-church relationship. When looking further afield we found that:

- The CanRC has a similar nomenclature as the OPC,
- The CRCA uses "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as a general name that covers all their ecumenical relationships;
- The PCEA uses the term "fraternal relations" for all their ecumenical relationships;
- The URCNA uses the term "Ecumenical Relations" for all their ecumenical relationships but has various levels within this concept.

As you can see there is a variety of names and structures. The committee believes under these circumstances the term "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" is not the most helpful name for our new ecumenical relationship and will not be helpful for our sister-churches to work with. We have also discussed this matter with the CER and in general terms they agree with our view on this matter.

We therefore propose

**Recommendation**

3. *That Synod approve that the name Ecclesiastical Fellowship be changed to Ecumenical Fellowship.*

If approved this recommendation will affect the wording of Recommendation 20

**B. Sister-churches**

**1. Orthodox Presbyterian Church USA (OPC)**

Synod 2011 decided (Art. 61-1):

1. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the OPC.*

During the inter-synodical period our cooperation with the OPC has continued on the mission field in Uganda. Both the Rev. Barry and Mrs Anne James and as well as Rev. Paul Archbald spent time teaching at Knox College in Mbale again.

Synod 2011 decided not to send a delegate to an OPC general assembly during the inter-synodical period. However, due to the fact that the URCNA synod (to which synod had decided to send a delegate) was virtually back to back with the 2012 OPC assembly and the venues were relatively close together, the IRC decided that we send a fraternal delegate to both of these gatherings.

The General Assembly of the OPC was held from 6-12 June 2012 at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. The URCNA Synod was held from 11-15 June 2012 at Nyack, New York.

Rev Leo de Vos attended this 79th General Assembly. He had opportunity to meet with the Committee for Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations and was also addressed the Assembly on behalf of our churches. His report is attached as Appendix 2.

Our churches continue to receive pulpit supply from retired OPC ministers and do at times extend calls to their ministers. The OPC has expressed appreciation for our continued support of the mission work in Uganda.

**Recommendation**

4. *To continue our sister-relationship with the OPC, USA.*
5. *To send a delegate to an OPC general assembly during the next inter-synodical period.*

**2. Canadian/American Reformed Churches (CanRC)**

Synod 2011 decided (Art. 61-2,3,4):

2. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the CanRC.*
3. *To express our appreciation for the privilege of cooperating with the CanRC in the mission work in Papua New Guinea.*
4. *To convey our change of relationship with the CRCA explaining that seeking to continue a strained sister-church relationship has not been profitable for either the CRCA or the RCNZ.*

We have not had much direct contact with the CanRC during the past inter-synodical period. However, Rev. Paul Archbald interacted with their delegates at the FRCA Synod in July 2012 when he attended that synod as an observer.

## **Report 19**

### **Interchurch Relations Committee**

Rev. Dirk van Garderen also met with their delegates to the ICRC Conference in Cardiff, Wales in September 2013 and with their delegate to the RCN Synod in March 2014.

Through our cooperation on the mission field in Papua New Guinea there has been more intensive contact with representatives of the CanRC present on the field and at the recent mission conference in October 2013. We appreciate the continued good cooperation with the CanRC in this mission work.

Our study committee of Updating the Forms and Confessions has been able to make use of work done by the CanRC in new translations of the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, for which we are thankful.

### **Recommendations**

- 6. To continue our sister-church relationship with the CanRC.*
- 7. To send a delegate to the next CanRC Synod*

### **3. United Reformed Churches of North America (URC/NA)**

Synod 2011 decided (Art. 32-1,2):

- 1. To express our appreciation to the URC/NA for entering into full Ecumenical Relations with us.*
- 2. To send a delegate to the next synod of the URC/NA.*

Rev. de Vos attended the URCNA Synod in Nyack, New York. He reported very positively.

A major step forward for the denomination was the decision for the URCNA to cooperate with the OPC to work on producing a new Psalter Hymnal for both federations. . The discussion at the Synod also showed that the URCNA is deeply convicted of its missionary calling and passed a recommendation to hire a Missions Coordinator for the denomination. Much time was devoted to ecumenical relations with reformed / presbyterian churches both in the USA and abroad.

The fraternal delegate's report is attached to this report as Appendix 3.

We do not recommend sending a delegate to a URCNA synod during the next inter-synodical period unless the opportunity presents itself.

### **Recommendations**

- 8. To continue our sister-church relationship with the URCNA*

### **4. Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA)**

Synod 2011 decided (art. 110-1,2,3):

- 1. To continue our sister-church relationship with the GKSA.*
- 2. To express our deep concern to the GKSA concerning its decision to allow women to be ordained as deacons, and to warn that this could negatively affect our sister-church relationship.*
- 3. To send a fraternal delegate to the next synod of the GKSA.*

In January, 2012, the Rev. John Rogers visited the GKSA Synod on behalf of our churches. While there, as in the past, he made courtesy calls on the Afrikaanse Protestantse Kerk (Prof. Izaak Brink, secretary of the Central Committee) and the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (Dr Kobus Gerber, General Secretary). On this occasion he was not able to contact the relevant person of the Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk.

At our Synod of 2011, we omitted to express appreciation for their decisions of 2009 regarding women in ecclesiastical office by which they affirmed that Scripture teaches that only men may occupy the office elder and minister in the church. John expressed our thankfulness for those decisions when he addressed the synod. He also formally informed them of our decision expressing concern at women being ordained as deacons in the GKSA and explained the cause of that concern. His fraternal address is attached to this report as Appendix 4. His report of the synod is not attached since its substance is basically given in our report here.

As with all the reformed denominations in South Africa, the GKSA was really a family of churches, up until 2009 still comprising the Afrikaner National Synod, the Soutpansberg Synod and the Middelande Synod. Synod 2009 decided to integrate from classis level and thus Synod 2012 was the first truly General Synod of the GKSA. However, the Soutpansberg Synod has at this stage remained outside the General Synod.

The GKSA is in talks with the NGK & the NHK – and there is no agreement about where these talks should lead.

There were three overtures that expressed concern about the spiritual state of the GKSA. After lengthy discussions the Synod appointed a Study Committee to study how the decline in church membership might be halted.

There were six appeals on the matter of women in ecclesiastical office. Eventually none were dealt with by the Synod. Instead, on the last day of Synod, the moderamen presented an ‘order motion’:

*“that the petitions of protest (appeals) in regard to women in the particular services (offices) are only adjudicated upon at a (my emphasis) next synod since there are matters that require urgent attention before these petitions of protest can be dealt with to the edification of the churches.”*

Grounds:

- i) *it has become clear during this synod that there exist differences in viewpoint and practices with regard to women in office despite decisions taken during synods. Even if the synod was to adjudicate upon the petitions of protest it would not really solve the problem in respect of the differences – it may even deepen the differences;*
  
- ii) *the Lord has led the General Synod to place the missionary calling of the churches at the forefront. The Synod has decided to work out a **Turnaround Strategy** for the GKSA to fulfil this calling. Should there be adjudication on the petitions of protest during this Synod the different viewpoints will still not be clarified. To the contrary, it can place the focus of our churches rather on the mutual differences. And thus the wonderfully positive and unanimous attitude of the churches towards the decision regarding our calling can be quelled.*

This motion was passed.

The committee is deeply concerned about how these appeals were received and acted upon by the Synod.

## **Recommendations**

9. *To continue to express our deepest concern to the GKSA concerning its decision to allow women to be ordained as deacons (with emphasis on the matter of ordination).*

## **Report 19**

### **Interchurch Relations Committee**

10. *To express our dismay to the GKSA at the fact and the manner of their failure to deal with the appeals presented to their 2012 Synod.*
11. *To inform the GKSA that while our sister relationship remains in place it is now officially under strain.*
12. *To send a fraternal delegate to the next synod of the GKSA.*

## **5. Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)**

Synod 2011 decided (Art. 25-2,3):

2. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the PCEA.*
3. *To send a delegate to a synod of the PCEA held during the inter-synodical period.*

Elder Pieter van der Wel visited the 2013 synod of the PCEA, which was held from 7-9 May in Wauchope, NSW.

The report on this synod is included in this report as Appendix 5 and besides the information given in the report there is little else to tell.

## **Recommendation**

13. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the PCEA.*
14. *To send a fraternal delegate to one of their synods during the next inter-synodical period.*

## **6. Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (CGKN)**

Synod 2011 decided (Art. 25-6,7):

6. *To express to the CGKN our thanks and appreciation for the ties which have existed between our denominations since the establishment of the RCNZ in 1953.*
7. *To direct the IRC to discuss with the deputies of the CGKN the value of continuing our sister relationship and to make mutually agreed recommendations to the next synod.*

As a result of the second recommendation with regard to the CGKN the committee has at various points in its meetings discussed this relationship. At his visit to the ICRC Conference in Wales in 2013 Rev. van Garderen had a meeting with the delegates from the CGKN.

Rev. van Garderen met again with representatives of the CGKN when he was in Holland in March 2014 on the occasion of his attendance at the RCN Synod. As a result of the meeting at the ICRC Conference the CGKN committee on ecumenical relations agreed that it would be quite appropriate for our churches to discontinue our formal sister-church relationship and maintain ecclesiastical bonds via our common membership of the ICRC.

However, they did suggest that the possibility of receiving of each other's members should remain in place (occasional as that may be) and that the freedom/ability to call pastors from each other's denomination should also be maintained/safeguarded. Rev. van Garderen pointed out that a pastor called from the CGKN would necessarily undergo a colloquium doctum. They accepted this wholeheartedly and pointed out that they have a similar requirement.

The CGKN deputies mentioned that the offices in the church currently remain closed to women as per their 1998 decision. The CGKN recently completed a report on homosexuality. They indicated that it was of a non-controversial nature. Its main focus is pastoral, viz., how do we as churches (office-bearers) respond and interact with people from a pastoral perspective.

## **Recommendations**

15. *To express our thanks to the CGKN for the sister-church relationship we have had with them since the establishment of our denomination in New Zealand.*
16. *That in view of the limited contact we have had with them we discontinue our sister-church relationship*
17. *To direct the IRC to explore other ways of maintaining contact with the CGKN especially through the ICRC.*

## **7. Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN-lib)**

In relation to the GKN-lib Synod 2011 decided (Art. 25-4,5):

4. *To continue our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN-lib).*
5. *To continue to monitor developments within these churches and communicate concerns, especially with respect to the role of women and the new church order.*

The GKNv is now known as the GKN, hence the use of RCN in our report.

Direct contact between the deputies of our denominations during the inter-synodical period has taken place via correspondence, contact with their delegates the FRCA Synod in 2012, at the ICRC meeting in Cardiff during 2013 as well as the visit of Rev. van Garderen as fraternal delegate to the 2014 Synod of the RCN. His report on this visit is attached as Appendix 6.

We have received two “spring letters” updating us on various developments in the RCN and in which they also pass on greetings.

As a committee we corresponded with the RCN expressing concern about their practice of sending both male and female fraternal delegates to synods of their sister-churches. This practice came to our attention through synodical reports to the FRCA synod in 2012 which was attended by Rev. Paul Archbald.

In early September 2013 the Deputies Male / Female in the Church submitted their report *Man and Woman in the Church* (Report M/V) to the General Synod of the RCN. After discussing the matter the committee requested the agreement of the SIC to send a delegate to attend the week on Foreign Relations of the RCN synod in March 2014 to express our deep concern about the direction of this report and its recommendations. The SIC agreed with our request.

Rev. van Garderen expressed our deep misgivings about the report and its recommendations to the RCN synod on behalf of our churches. Our main concern is that the report uses language and presuppositions that call into question the adherence of the RCN to the inherent authority of Scripture. We believe that their hermeneutical approach places too much weight on the cultural context in which the Bible was written and the cultural context in which it needs to be proclaimed today. Other sister-churches of the RCN who were represented at the synod also expressed strong reservations about this report.

## Report 19 Interchurch Relations Committee

The current focus of our concern is clearly on the discussion in the RCN whether women can serve in the offices of the church. That this continues to need our attention is borne out by the fact that the RCN 'Synode Journaal' from 14 June 2014 reports that Synod has approved the ongoing discussion towards closer relations with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)<sup>1</sup>. Therefore we can only conclude that the practice of allowing women to serve in all offices, which is the practice in the NGK, is no longer a barrier to sister-church relations.

We must be aware that the discussion on the role of women in the church is part of a bigger picture where God and religion do not seem to have the last word anymore. Other areas of concern in the life of the RCN are their views on the doctrine of creation and on homosexuality. If the current hermeneutical issues are not resolved these other issues may very well come up for debate.

Our sister church, the Canadian Reformed Churches, as well as other sister-churches of the RCN, have expressed concerns in these areas.

### Recommendations

18. *That synod is encouraged that the RCN synod did not open the offices to women and that there appears to be a willingness to listen to the concerns of sister-churches.*
19. *That synod express its concern that the RCN synod has not clearly rejected the hermeneutical foundations of the conclusion and recommendations of the Report M/V*
20. *That Synod instruct the IRC to seek clarification from the BBK-RCN regarding these decisions, since unless they constitute a clear withdrawal from this hermeneutical direction (see Rec. 19) our sister-church relationship may be affected negatively.*
21. *That we continue our sister-church relationship with the RCN at this time.*
22. *That Synod, barring unforeseen circumstances, send a fraternal delegate to the next RCN general synod.*

## C. Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship

### 1. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)

Synod 2011 made the following decisions in relation to the CRCA (Acts 2011, Art. 93-3,4,5).

3. *To discontinue the sister-church relationship with the CRCA and establish instead a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.*
4. *To inform the CRCA of this new relationship with them and seek ratification of this at the next synod of the CRCA.*

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<sup>1</sup> From GKv "Synode Journaal" 13-14 June 2014 on cooperation with the NGK (see <http://www.synode.gkv.nl/>)

#### Kerkelijke eenheid

De synode heeft het aanbod van de NGK om op 31 oktober 2016 één te zijn besproken. Het gesprek met NGK wordt veranderd in gerichte samenspreking om tot staat van hereniging te komen. Dit is niet over één nacht gegaan want er is geruime tijd gesprek gevoerd. Maar vandaag is deze belangrijke beslissing door de synode genomen om tot kerkelijke eenheid te komen. Deputaten Kerkelijke eenheid krijgen de gelegenheid zich pro-actief te richten op het gebeid van kerkelijke eenheid. Ze krijgen de ruimte en vrijheid om adequaat in te spelen als situaties -waar de synode nog geen uitspraak over heeft gedaan – zich aandienen, zodat het samenwerkingsproces niet stil komt te liggen.

#### Ecclesiastical unity (translation by Pieter van der Wel)

The Synod has discussed the proposal of the NGK to unite [with them] on 31 October 2016. The conversation with NGK will be changed into a targeted discussion to reach a situation where reunification is possible. The synod has discussed this thoroughly and at length, and today the Synod has taken the important decision to work towards ecclesiastical unity. The Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity now have the opportunity to focus proactively on the area of ecclesiastical unity. They have received the space and freedom to respond meaningfully to situations that present themselves – situations on which the Synod has made no decisions - so that the process towards closer cooperation is not hindered.



5. *To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*

The CRCA Synod 2012 was held in May of that year and was attended by Revs. Haverland and Willemse as fraternal delegates. Their report is attached as Appendix 7.

The Synod ratified the change in relationship between the CRCA and the RCNZ to one of Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The general view seemed to be that this would bring the relationship into line with the CRCA's other ecumenical relationships. Synod also agreed to send two fraternal delegates to the next RCNZ Synod and to send two CER representatives for up to two inter-synodical meetings with our own IRC.

The Synod also decided to seek membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Consequently, in July 2012, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations of the CRCA (CER) wrote to the IRC requesting that the RCNZ be one of the two member churches to nominate the CRCA for membership of the ICRC. After consultation with the Synodical Interim Committee (SIC) the IRC in its meeting in October 2013 adopted the following motion:

***That the Interchurch Relations Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand sponsor the application by the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia for membership in the International Council of Reformed Churches***

The IRC informed the CER of this decision and on 25th February 2013 wrote a letter supporting their application for membership to the secretariat of the ICRC. The CRCA did not receive quite enough support at the Conference of the ICRC to be admitted to membership. The CER will recommend to the next CRCA Synod that it continue to pursue membership in the ICRC.

On the 13th November the IRC met with the Deputies of the CER (Revs. Reinier Noppers, Geoff van Schie and Joe Vermeulen) at the premises of the RTC, Geelong. The main topics for the discussion were the events surrounding the CRCA's application for membership of the ICRC, the proposed amendments to the Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship and the possible change of name for this relationship, which are reported on above.

Various other matters were touched on briefly but these concerned mainly sharing information on the work of other synodical committees that men on the CER or the IRC were aware of.

As with our two deputies to the CRCA Synod, our committee, after meeting with the CER, also came away with a positive view of the recent developments in the CRCA for which we give thanks to God.

## **Recommendations**

23. *To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with CRCA.*
24. *To inform the CRCA of the amended "Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship" as per recommendation 2 under A, if approved*
25. *To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*

## **D. International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)**

Rev. Bruce Hoyt and Rev. Dirk van Garderen represented the RCNZ at the International Conference of Reformed Churches which met in Cardiff, Wales, from 28th August till 4th September 2013. Their report is attached as Appendix 8.

During the conference, they met with the delegates of various sister-churches. Where relevant these meetings have been reflected in the reports on these churches.

They met with delegates from the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the United Reformed Churches of North America and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Lib). Informal meetings took place with  
*Synod 2014*

## **Report 19**

### **Interchurch Relations Committee**

delegates from various other denominations.

The conference made various new appointments and formed some new committees.

Rev. Bruce Hoyt was asked to fill the position of 'Coordinator' of the Coordinating Committee. This is a key position in the planning and activities of the ICRC in the next 4 years.

A newly established 'Diaconal Committee' has a similar mandate to the former 'Missions Committee'. Rev. Dirk van Garderen was appointed as convenor.

There is now also a 'Regional Conference Committee'. Regional conferences will replace the former 'mission conferences'. The 'Asia-Pacific Regional Conference' will be hosted by the Independent Reformed Church of Korea (Rev Heon Soo Kim) and will meet from 8-11 October 2015 in Seoul, DV. The proposed topic (as decided by a special committee set up at the conference) is 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper' - with a special emphasis on providing Bible study material that can be used in Indian, Indonesian and South East Asian church planting contexts. Rev. van Garderen was asked to prepare and present the paper on baptism.

The next ICRC conference will be hosted by the URCNA in Ontario, Canada, in 2017. Rev. Dick Moes will be the chairman at that meeting, DV.

### **Recommendations**

26. *To continue our membership in the ICRC.*
27. *To send up to three delegates to the 2017 ICRC to be held in Hamilton, Ontario.*

## **E. Churches with Which We Have Contact**

### **1. Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand**

Synod 2011 decided (Acts 2011, Art. 110-6,7,8,9):

6. *That pulpit exchanges between our two denominations be done with caution.*
7. *To encourage local churches to continue local contact in order to promote Christian unity with the GPC.*
8. *To encourage sessions to meet with the local GPC session when difficulties arise between the churches in order to remove any hindrance to Christian unity.*
9. *To authorise the IRC to appoint a fraternal delegate to the GPC assemblies.*

The IRC requested local ministers to act as delegates to the annual General Assemblies of the GPCNZ. Rev. Robert van Wichen attended the 9th GA in Christchurch in 2011, Revs. Peter Moelker and Dirk van Garderen were able to pass on greetings to the 10th GA held in Auckland in 2012 and Rev. Erik Stolte attended the 11th GA in Dunedin. Reports from the delegates to the Auckland and Dunedin Assemblies are attached as Appendices 9A and 9B.

In their reports these brothers reported very positively on the activities and enthusiasm for the gospel in the Grace Presbyterian churches, particularly in the area of church planting. The delegates believe that it would be mutually beneficial to seek closer cooperation with the GPCNZ.

We make the following recommendations:

### **Recommendations**

28. *That the IRC initiate official contact with the appropriate deputies from the GPCNZ in order to explore future cooperation.*

29. *To encourage sessions to meet with the local GPC session when difficulties arise between the churches in order to remove any hindrance to Christian unity.*

30. *To authorise the IRC to appoint a fraternal delegate to the GPC assemblies.*

## **2. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)**

Synod 2011 decided (Acts 2011, Art.110-4,5)

4. *To continue our offer of sister-church relations with the FRCA.*

5. *To send one delegate to the 2012 synod of the FRCA.*

The 2012 Synod of the FRCA met at Armadale, Western Australia. Rev. Paul Archbald represented our churches at this synod. His report is attached below as Appendix 10.

The main items on the agenda were:

- a. relations with the Dutch churches (now identified as RCN)
- b. the up-date of the Canadian Reformed Book of Praise;
- c. relations with the RCN (restored);
- d. relations with the RCNZ

There was quite some discussion with regard to the relationship with our churches. Their decisions are summarised here:

- They reaffirmed their recognition of the RCNZ as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and their commitment to continue to work towards a sister-church relationship.
- The synod acknowledged our decision to change our relationship with the CRCA and instead establish a relationship of *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*.
- The synod did not accept their deputies' proposal to enter into fraternal relations with the RCNZ rather than a sister-church relationship with the RCNZ. This is because they do not have such a category.
- The synod also decided to appoint new deputies for contact with the RCNZ to "determine how the nature and practical implications of the RCNZ's new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCA differs from their previous sister-church relationship and evaluate how this impacts on the impediment identified by previous Synods". At our meeting in November 2013, at their request, we explained our committee's recommendation to amend the provisional Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
- Their deputies were also mandated to meet regularly with their New Zealand counterparts, which is a new development on the part of the FRCA, if possible at least twice in every inter-synodical period.
- Other existing areas of cooperation with regard to the work of missions in PNG and Christian education between our denominations continue in a positive fashion.

We note with interest that their Synod has decided to commence work on evaluating the ESV. Our previous synodical study on this was used positively by the FRCA. The 2011 NIV is not to be used in the FRCA worship services.

In an informal meeting with the delegate of the FRC South Africa Rev. Archbald learned that the FRCSA Synod 2011 (Acts, p.19) decided "to maintain contact with the RCNZ", especially for the sake of immigrants from their churches.

**Report 19**  
**Interchurch Relations Committee**

**Recommendations**

31. *That the RCNZ continue to offer a sister-church relationship to the FRCA.*
32. *That the IRC meet with the FRCA deputies during the next inter-synodical period.*
33. *That the RCNZ send one delegate to the next synod of the FRCA.*

**3. Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia**

Synod 2011 decided (Acts 2011, Art. 33):

*To mandate the Interchurch Relations Committee to investigate entering into a fraternal relationship with the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia.*

Further to this decision there was an occasional exchange of correspondence and elder Pieter van der Wel went as an observer to the Presbytery of the PRCA held at Wollongong in April 2013.

The committee, aware of their confessional commitment to the Westminster standards, also received and perused copies of the *PRC Book of Common Order* (their liturgical forms) and the current issue of the *PRC Code* (including *Rules and Forms of Procedure*) which is the basis of their church polity. We also received the *Presbytery Guidelines* which function as general procedures for the courts of the PRC.

It was also noted that the PRCA is involved in mission work both in Australia (Northern Territory) and in Vanuatu. They support a single congregation in Fiji and regularly send men to Kenya to lecture at a theological college there.

The PRCA has its own training institute (*John Knox Theological College*) but the church is concerned about the decreasing number of students.

Their Inter Church Relations Committee had prepared an extensive report which basically sought to answer the question “What is involved in a sister relationship with a like-minded church?” The committee moved:

That the PRCA inform the RCNZ Interchurch Relationships Committee of our satisfaction and gratitude to God for what they represent, and that we request to enter into a sister relationship with them.

Their Presbytery decided to hold the motion over to their next meeting in October 2013.

In November 2013, our committee met with the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the PRCA which reported that the Presbytery had adopted the above motion (Motion 54, Presbytery PRC, October 2013) without dissent:

**That the PRCA inform the RCNZ Interchurch Relationships (sic) Committee of our satisfaction and gratitude to God for what they represent, and we request to enter into a sister relationship with them.**

The differences between Reformed and Presbyterian churches revolve mainly around church government and liturgy. However, one issue re the PRC’s application of the two office view needs to be pointed out. They practice such parity between teaching and ruling elders, that the ruling elders preach regularly and also administer the sacraments. However, the elders supervise the preaching of the word, as they do in our churches. This matter was discussed at our meeting in November 2013 and your committee believes this should not be a hindrance in establishing an ecclesiastical relationship with the PRC.

We have discussed this matter with them and their Inter-Church Relations Committee is preparing a document on this matter for distribution to our sessions.

We also note that the PRCA has some amendments to the Westminster Confession of Faith,

particularly their addition of a chapter 34 on the free offer of the gospel. It is our opinion that in making these amendments the PRC has not deviated from the reformed system of doctrine.

The report of the Mr. van der Wel to the Presbytery of the PRCA in April 2013 has been attached as Appendix 11

### **Recommendations**

- 34. That the IRC work towards recommending that we establish a sister-church relationship with the PRCA at our next Synod.*
- 35. That the RCNZ send a delegate to at least one Presbytery of the PRCA annually during the inter-synodical period.*

### **F. Web Site**

The RCNZ website continued operating on a “business as usual” basis during the last three years.

A search feature has been added to the Faith in Focus page, and the collection of written sermons continued to grow. Many thanks to the ministers who have faithfully contributed to this ministry.

The system of denomination-wide email forwarding to ministers, session clerks, deacons and bulletin editors continues to be well utilised. The website administrator appreciates having any error messages received forwarded to him, as well as being informed when local contacts change so that everything remains up to date! As some office bearers have set themselves separate email accounts to receive their church related communications, it is timely to remind the sessions that the [rcnz.org.nz](http://rcnz.org.nz) addresses should be the ones advertised to the congregations and the public. This helps to “future-proof” the ability to contact officer bearers when appointments change, as the same email address is retained.

During the past three years, design and coding costs have been low with the main expenses being the continued costs of domain registration and content hosting. However it is helpful to have the contingency for more coding and design if and when needed, so we recommend the current funding levels be maintained.

A statement of income and expenditure for the website is below

Service	Description	Total Costs	Total Costs	Total Costs
		Jan 12 – Dec 12	Jan 13 – Dec 13	Jan 14 – Mar14
Hosting Costs	<a href="http://rcnzonline.com">rcnzonline.com</a>	24.73	49.45	\$ 0 Paid until 2015
	<a href="http://rcnz.org.nz">rcnz.org.nz</a>	145.42	170.64	160.95
<b>Annual costs</b>		<b>170.15</b>	<b>220.09</b>	<b>160.95</b>

**Report 19**  
**Interchurch Relations Committee**

**Recommendation**

*36. That Synod approve funding of up to \$1000.00 per year for the ongoing development and maintenance of the denominational website.*

The IRC considers that oversight of the denominational Website more appropriately belongs to the National Publications Committee.

**Recommendation**

*37. That Synod place the website under the jurisdiction of the National Publication Committee.*

We have a further recommendation with regard to the inclusion of the reports of fraternal delegates in the report of the IRC to synod. In an attempt to restrict the length of the IRC report we recommend as follows:

**Recommendation**

*38. That the Reports of Fraternal Delegates intended for inclusion in the IRC Report to synod be limited to no more than 3 pages. A fuller report can be referred to and be available on request from the IRC.*

All the members of the Interchurch Relations Committee are willing to continue to serve on this committee.

Humbly submitted,  
Paul Archbald  
Leo de Vos  
Pieter van der Wel, Convenor  
Dirk van Garderen  
Daniel Wilson

## Appendix 1

### Rules for Sister Church Relationships (Acts of Synod 1962)

The sister church relationship involves:

1. The appointment of delegates to each other's synods or general assemblies, if possible, as a token of mutual friendship and interest in the Lord.
2. Keeping each other duly informed of our *gesta ecclesiastica*, (i.e. events, developments and decisions) through the exchange of the Acts of Synods or General Assemblies.
3. Bringing to each other's attention our spiritual and ecclesiastical problems together with our attempts at their scriptural solution; and offering each other help upon request thereof.
4. Warning each other in respect of spiritual dangers that arise and spread and imperil the Church of Christ.
5. Correcting each other in love in the event of unfaithfulness whether by commission or omission on the score of profession and/or practice of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.
6. Consulting each other regarding the eventual revision of our respective ecclesiastical standards (i.e. the Confessions, Catechism).

### Redefining Ecclesiastical Ties (Acts of Synod 1983, Art. 66-2,3)

See also Report 13 to Synod 1983

Synod dealt with this report and decided:..

2. That our present system of Sister and Correspondence Church relationships be retained,
3. That. Synod endorse the findings of the Committee on Ecumenical matters as follows:
  - a. that ordinarily membership in the RES functions as the necessary basis for the existence of Correspondence Church relationships and is regarded as a sufficient and efficient means of continual contact.
  - b. that Sister Church relationships build on the foundation of Correspondence Church relationships by means of direct and meaningful contact with the churches concerned.

Note: What formerly applied to membership in the RES now applies to membership in the ICRC.

### Objectives as a basis for a more constructive and meaningful sister church relationship (Acts 1989)

In addition to the Rules for Sister-Church Relationships, Synod 1989 (Acts 1989 Art.44-o (i-vi) adopted the following objectives as a basis for a more constructive and meaningful sister church relationship:

- 1) Fraternal delegates to present their speech/remarks in writing for inclusion in the Acts/Minutes of Synod. Such an address to include material of mutual concerns and questions.
- 2) If unable to send delegates, send written greetings and information on current life and state of the church, on matters before the church that would be of interest and concern to the other church, and also on any significant actions of the most recent Synod/General Assembly.
- 3) To consult each other prior to making amendments or additions to the confessional

**Report 19**  
**Interchurch Relations Committee**

standards.

- 4) To consult with each other concerning relationships with third parties (denominational and/or ecumenical bodies).
- 5) To share insights in matters of pastoral concerns and make use of each other's studies on theological issues and other ecclesiastical matters.
- 6) To find ways and means to cooperate in areas of evangelism and overseas mission.



## **Appendix 2**

### **Report of the Fraternal Delegate to the OPC**

Report on Visit to OPC 79<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Wheaton Illinois

I was warmly received at the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church held in Wheaton Illinois (held from June 6-12, 2012). The Orthodox Presbyterian Church laid excellent foundations in New Zealand when we were just a fledgling Church.

Rev. Tony Curto, who is well-known to many of us, was elected as moderator. There were approximately 150 commissioners present. The OPC now consists of 275 churches, 51 mission works, and 30,279 members.

It was most encouraging to hear the reports of church planting and the Lord's rich blessing on foreign missions. Missions lies at the heart of the OPC and the reports and testimonies at this Assembly were very moving and encouraging. The OPC expressed thanks to the URCNA for Eric Tuininga and his family. Rev. Tuininga has accepted the call to serve the Lord in the work in Uganda. Mr. David Nakhla gave an informative presentation on the Diaconal work of the OPC in disaster relief. After the earthquakes in Japan, the OPC was able to assist in the Sendai region.

A highlight of the Assembly was the retirement of Rev. Ross Graham who was the General Secretary for the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extensions. Rev. Graham has laboured tirelessly offering counsel to new church plants and has written a booklet, *How to Start on Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. This book, which is in its second printing, has helped other denominations with church planting as well as the OPC. During 2011 the OPC started 12 home mission works and already by June 2012, 6 new works had begun.

Closer to home, the commissioners accepted an invitation from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to send a fraternal observer to their future Synods. I also had an opportunity to meet with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) to attempt to clarify some issues which the OPC delegates had raised with our ICR committee concerning our last Synod.

The committee on Christian Education reported on the Psalter Hymnal project. The committee expressed a strong desire and invitation to work together with the URCNA on this project. (As you will read in the report on the URCNA synod, the URCNA has accepted invitation. We can have high hopes that this effort of pooling the talents in both churches will produce an excellent Psalter Hymnal.)

I was given opportunity to extend the greetings from the RCNZ to the OPC. This greeting also expressed thanks to the OPC for the diaconal assistance they offered and sent to help our churches in Christchurch. It was good to catch up with some people I knew and to experience the communion of the saints with these brethren. On Sunday evening a large communion service including all the delegates was held on campus. I appreciated the lovely fellowship, expressed in many ways. The OPC, faithful to the principles of past, has a wonderful vision for future growth. It is refreshing that they do not encourage growth by changing worship styles or dumbing down the gospel, but by pressing onward in the old paths.

Rev. Leo de Vos

## **Appendix 3**

### **Report of the Fraternal Delegate to the URC/NA**

Report on Visit To URCNA Synod, Nyack, NY, 2012 June 11-15

Although I had attended a few Classis meetings of the URCNA in past years, and had had close contact with many URCNA brethren, I had never attended their meeting of Synod before. From reports of various delegates, this Synod proved to be one of their best Synods ever. Some have compared the young federation of the URCNA to a teenager who is maturing. This increasing maturity was evident at the assembly held in Nyack, NY, located in the beautiful Hudson River Valley near WestPoint.

The first evening began with a moving prayer meeting in which various elders and ministers prayed for all aspects of Synod. After each prayer time, the assembly also sang lustily.

A highlight of this assembly was the accepting of an invitation from the OPC to work on producing a new Psalter Hymnal for both federations. The URCNA had spend a great deal of time deliberating songbook options in the past, so this decision was formative. In my opinion, this song book, produced from pooling the talents of these two federations, could very well prove to be among the best of our century.

It is clear that the URCNA has accepted its missionary calling. Several ministers addressed missions in their devotions. Rev. Paul Murphy from Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in NY, presented a powerful sermon on the missionary calling as the Church's mandate. Planting churches is not an option, but the Church's work. Two major decisions at the Synod reflected this. The first was the adoption of a recommendation to establish a Missions committee. After a lengthy discussion, Synod overwhelmingly passed a recommendation to hire a Missions Coordinator for the denomination.

The URCNA has two standing committees dealing with ecumenical relationships. CERCU (Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity) and CECCA (Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad). The relationship of the URCNA with the Canadian Reformed Churches remains at phase two. This phase permits closer relations including the exchanging of pulpits. Although both parties are still willing to work on this, various difficulties from both sides seem to prevent a complete merger of these federations at this time. After a lengthy debate the Synod approved entering into phase two with the RPCNA, a denomination which traces its roots to the Scottish Covenanters. The main cause of concern for the URCNA was the fact that the RPCNA has had women in the office of deacon for the last hundred years. Also, the RPCNA exegesis for this position on deaconesses was less than compelling. This decision requires ratification by two-thirds of the churches by January 1, 2013.

At the recommendation of the CECCA, Synod re-affirmed the Phase One, Ecumenical Contact, relationship status with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA), with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv), and with the United Reformed Churches of Congo (URCC) as well as with the Calvinistic Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRT-NTT), where Yonson Dethan serves. Synod also voted to enter into Phase One with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and the Free Protestant Church in Argentina (FPCA). I spend a lunch meal meeting with the CECCA and was impressed by the care, and mutual encouragement the brothers of this committee offered to our churches.

One of the sadder aspects of Synod is appeals regarding disciplinary issues. For me it

was rather reassuring to witness a long appeal as the realization hit home that other federations struggle with many of the same issues with which we struggle in the RCNZ. I was also reminded that the further removed an issue is from the original assemblies which first heard it, the more difficult it will be to understand the original decisions.

I addressed this assembly on Friday morning and tried to make my speech lively as all delegates are pretty tired out by Friday. A joy for me was meeting a brother from Burlington, WA, the congregation I previously served before coming to NZ. I had not seen the face of anyone from this congregation for eleven years! I counted the delegates and concluded that I knew at least 50 people at this Assembly; they were not just acquaintances but people I knew over a cup of coffee or better.

The closing words of the very able Chairman Rev. Ron Scheuers were: “The battle for the church will never stop, but it is such a tremendous joy to fight it side by side with you, who mutually love the truth and are willing to lay down your lives for it...To that end I wish to comfort and assure you with the truth that because Christ has purchased you, He will always preserve you. You are His sheep and not one of His sheep will be stolen from His care. Go then to your homes, churches, and places of service with that confidence in Christ.”

Those closing words were so meaningful to a weary traveller with a long flight back. I left for home with fond memories and joy in my heart.

Rev. Leo de Vos

## **Appendix 4**

### **Fraternal Address to GKSA Synod 2012**

Mr Chairman, members of the Moderamen, delegates and visitors, it is a pleasure to be here and to have fellowship with you once again. In the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, the Lord of all, greetings from the RCNZ

We thank you, brothers, for your fellowship in the Gospel and the example that you are in many ways in your desire to serve the Lord, to be faithful to his Word, and to take the Gospel to others in Africa and other parts. I have visited South Africa seven times now and have got to know many GKSA people and what you are doing.

Thank you also for sending delegates to our Synods since 1998, most recently for sending Ds Stephanus de Bruyn for the second time last year. He represented you well and we appreciated his occasional contribution.

We wish to express our appreciation again to you all – from all the former national synods – for your desire to express the unity of the saints as unity in a common faith in Jesus Christ and the Word of God which transcends all other distinctions and differences. We salute you all – and pray for you – especially having heard some of difficulties the black brothers are experiencing. That was very sad to hear and we pray for you.

We give thanks to God, and you also, for your decisions taken a bit later in 2009 regarding women in ecclesiastical office. For we too believe, however contrary to spirit of our age it may be and how that makes us do a double-take on our reading of the Bible, that Scripture confines the offices in the church to men – which you affirmed and are “convinced” about – at least with regard to elder and minister. We are thankful for that decision brothers and it has been reported to our synod. With regard to it, I need to state that we were frankly remiss in not expressing our heartfelt thanks to the Lord and to you for that decision. That should have been acknowledged by synodical resolution and it was a very bad oversight on our part that we did not; as we should also your coming together in a General Synod for the first time. And I have to confess that I, myself, did not notice the omission until after our synod. Please forgive us for that, brothers.

I am not going to enter the debate in these greetings, but I need to make a couple of further remarks on your decisions. I have been charged by our Inter-Church Relations Committee to inform you of a decision taken at our Synod in September. I then need to give a little explanation of that decision.

The decision we took in response to your decisions in 2009 was as follows:

*To express our deep concern to the GKSA concerning its decision to allow women to be ordained as deacons, and to warn that this could negatively affect our sister-church relationship.*

That was our decision but I need to explain where the emphasis lies in this decision so that you understand it rightly. Our concern is not that you have women deacons, or deaconesses. Our concern is that they are **ordained**. (We are aware that you intend to amend Art.38 of your CO to exclude deacons from the ruling council of the church, at least where you have deacons.) We are not unhappy that deaconesses are elected and it is right

that they be properly appointed and publicly acknowledged in some way. Our concern, brothers, is that in 2009 you reiterated your 2003 decision, viz. *Synod endorses in the light of Scripture that women who have the necessary gifts may be **instituted** in the **office** of deacon* (my emphasis). By instituted we understand you mean ordained and I understand that they are ordained into the office of deacon with exactly the same form – the common form for elders and deacons – that you (and we) have always used. It is this **ordination into office** that gives us difficulty. For the term office in ecclesiastical usage is inextricably bound up with the delegated rule of Christ in his church – as much in the offices of minister, elder and deacon; and by ordination, one is conferred with the authority of Christ to rule in his church, to exercise the keys of the kingdom as under-shepherds/diaconal servants of our Lord.

With respect, brothers, in our judgment this is an unhappy confusion that, on the one hand, denigrates the concept of office and ordination, and on the other hand, may come back to bite you – and in fact is, in the Krugersdorp appeal, for Krugersdorp see all deacons acting with the authority of Christ.

May we ask you: please give this serious consideration and separate the **office** of deacon on the one hand, and deaconesses, on the other hand, clearly?

As for ourselves, we can and do make no great claims but the Lord is good to us. We believe he still uses us in his service both in NZ and in missionary service abroad, including Africa. We have a ministerial couple in Papua-New Guinea and another couple in a diaconal role; we have a lady working in Asia in radio work; we still send a retired minister and his wife to teach in Uganda from time to time; and at our last synod took a decision, in conjunction with the OPC, to send a minister to Uganda fulltime. That will not now take place, unfortunately, at least at the present time, but the decision was made and is still our intention.

The Lord has preserved us united within the denomination. We also, like you, are becoming more aware of our evangelistic calling and we see some evangelistic growth in some congregations. And we are drawing near to the end of the preparation of our own Psalter-Hymnal, *Sing to the Lord*. We hope to publish it in a little over a year.

You have a continuing concern about South African immigrants coming to NZ. From our side brothers, please notify us of any South Africans leaving your congregations – contact me, or our stated clerk (see our website for details) and we will send this information to the minister of the nearest Reformed congregation and we will follow them up.

As for NZ as a nation, it has been a rough eighteen months, from a very bad mining disaster on the west coast of the South Island, to two very large earthquakes in our third largest city, Christchurch, which continue, seemingly without end. Just when we think we can begin rebuilding they strike again. Maybe 300 buildings in the central business district have been or will have to be destroyed (ha! I didn't want to exaggerate, but it is actually 1300), including the hotel in which the ICRC was held two years ago. Large tracts of the city will have to be abandoned due to liquefaction of the soil. Yet still, as we read in Rev.16, we do not repent, least of all the unbelieving church.

**Report 19**  
**Interchurch Relations Committee**

Thank you for the kind expressions of sympathy many of you sent. We need and appreciate your prayers, both for the nation and church.

Thank you for your invitation to be present with you this week. It is a pleasure to be here again and may the Lord guide and keep you, both in your land and church work generally. And may he give you much wisdom in the decisions you have still to make this week.

In conclusion, Mr Chairman, greetings from your brothers and sisters in Aotearoa, the land of the long white cloud – and the victorious black jersey!

John Rogers.

## **Appendix 5**

### **Report on the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) held in May 2013**

The 2013 Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia was held from 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> May in Wauchope, NSW, which is hometown to the Hastings River congregation.

Elder Pieter van der Wel attended the Synod as a fraternal delegate on behalf of the RCNZ, also in his capacity of member of the Interchurch Relations Committee. He was warmly welcomed and given the full privilege of the floor. He was also given opportunity to address the Synod more formally, in which he gave greetings from our churches, some details of our current situation and of efforts taking place in local and overseas missions.

Considerable time was taken up by legal and property matters. Due to the denominational structure of the PCEA *The Synod of Eastern Australia Property Act* (NSW 1918) needed to be amended. Thankfully the proposals on these matters were passed quite quickly at Synod, as the *Law & Advisory Committee* had done much preparatory work.

The committee reported that the amendments to the *Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia Property Act* (Victoria, 1953) have gone through the Victorian State Parliament. Now that these matters have been dealt with property matters should be easier to deal with in the future.

The *Training of Ministry Committee* reported that two men, Mr. Robin Tso and Mr. Denver Boehret, have now fulfilled the general requirements to enter the ministry of the PCEA. It now lies in the hands of the respective Presbyteries to examine them.

The *Church & Nation Committee* of PCEA has formulated brief statements on the issues of homosexual marriage and abortion, which have been sent to the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader in Federal Parliament.

The *Media Committee* reported on the denominational magazine *The Presbyterian Banner* and the PCEA website. *The Presbyterian Banner* is self-supporting. It is the aim of the editor (Rev. Sjik Bajema, who cut his editorial teeth on *Faith in Focus*) to use as much material as possible that is produced within the denomination. The magazine is available in hardcopy and electronically.

Rev. George Ball, presented the *Inter-Church Relations* Report and noted various matters with regard to sister-churches. Rev. Ball and Rev. Rowland Ward will represent the PCEA at the International Conference of Reformed Churches when it meets in Cardiff, Wales, in August 2013.

The PCEA has a number of interests in overseas and local missions and there was a 'Missions Night' on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> May. The synod heard first from Vijay Tagore, who lectures at the Reformed Theological Seminary in Dehra Dun, North India. Rev Bruce Christian spoke on behalf of Christian Witness to Israel. He outlined the present situation in Australia with the Mission.

Rev. Trevor Leggott spoke of his on-going work with the Australian Indigenous Ministries. He has been very encouraged of late by the deep interest for God's Word among a number of aboriginal groups.

The business of the Synod concluded with the presentation of the financial reports and committee appointments. Rev. Jim Klazinga was appointed as moderator-elect for 2014-2015 which includes leading the next synod, which will again be hosted by the Hastings River congregation.

I had opportunity to meet and talk face to face with a number of delegates, as well as Revs. Jim Klazinga, Sjik Bajema and Andre Scheepers.

*Pieter van der Wel*

## **Appendix 6**

### **Report of Fraternal Delegate to the 2014 General Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (liberated) (RCN)**

Before attending the RCN synod Rev. van Garderen met with the deputies of the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (CGKN) as reported under B6.

Delegates of sister-churches mainly attend the 'Week on Foreign relations' as organised by the RCN's foreign relations committee (deputaten Betrekking Buitenlandse Kerken, BBK). It coincided with a sitting of the General Synod of RCN (Friday and Saturday morning of that week).<sup>2</sup>

The RCN takes its responsibility to establish and maintain sister relationships with churches abroad very seriously. It recommended to its synod that its relationship with its 33 (!) sister churches be maintained. This along with the contact it has with 25 other churches and organisations. The week on foreign relations was attended by the members of BBK (a number of whom also stayed at the Belmont) as well as 26 guests from various locations around the world.

Amongst other things they organised a meeting designed to introduce the delegates, their churches and situations to each other. Rev. van Garderen attended the Asia-Australia-New Zealand. Insights into the various churches represented and why they are in a sister relationship with RCN were helpful and useful.

Over the next three days there were meetings and activities that gave opportunity to interact with or at least to hear about various issues currently facing the RCN. One matter concerns how they should deal with members who seek and receive baptism (by immersion as a second baptism) in another fellowship, but who wish to retain their membership/affiliation in their local (RCN) church. The BBK has also proposed a modified concept of 'sister' church moving it to 'networks' which would allow for contact with churches that are not as distinctively Reformed/Presbyterian or confessional.

The question of sending female delegates (deputies of BBK) to the major assemblies of their sister churches was also discussed, as well as a proposal to hand over the publication of '*Lux Mundi*' (the BBK's English language periodical) to the ICRC as its own publication.

Formal decisions on these last three questions were taken by the General Synod at its meeting on Friday, 28<sup>th</sup> March.

There was also ample opportunity to have in-depth discussions both with other fraternal delegates and with synodical delegates on various issues, especially on the report 'Man/Woman in the Church', which were helpful in forming a picture of what people are thinking in this regard.

We also visited the Theological University of the RCN (TUK). The focus was a conference designed to show how the faculty 'do' their theology while serving a church community affected by a postmodern lifestyle and way of thinking, living in a pluralist and secularised society while striving to witness in an academic theological environment.

Four papers were presented on various topics in relation to this.<sup>3</sup>

On Friday 28<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> March the various representatives from sister-churches were given opportunity to extend greetings to the general synod.

A large majority of churches expressed concern over the recommendations of the 'M/V in de Kerk' report. The two daughter churches (FRCA & CanRC) went into considerable detail to express their strongest reservations not just with the recommendations but more especially with the underlying hermeneutics. They warned that the acceptance and subsequent possible

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<sup>2</sup> The General Synod meets fortnightly on Fridays and Saturdays. The current General Synod is meeting at the Ontmoetingskerk (Ede) and has been meeting since January 2014. It expects to finish its business in late May or early June of this year.

<sup>3</sup> Hard copies of these lectures are available from me (Dirk). Unfortunately I do not have electronic versions.



implementation of these recommendations would lead to serious consequences in terms of the sister relationship.

Rev. van Garderen expressed that the RCNZ was also deeply concerned for the same reasons and warned that continuing in this direction would eventually lead to a break in our sister-relationship. Later conversations with delegates highlighted that what was said by the foreign delegates made a very deep impression and, the Lord willing, would have a significant impact on the discussion of this report on Friday, Saturday May 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>4</sup>

On Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> March, representatives of the daughter churches (FRCA and CanRC) were invited to meet with the authors of the M/V report. Rev. van Garderen was not able to attend this meeting but has received a report of the discussion.<sup>5</sup>

The face-to-face contact with RCN as well as many others was much more profitable and helpful than anticipated. Meeting a church/organisation personally is much more meaningful and effective than interacting and coming to conclusions via correspondence. My coming to RCN was greatly appreciated and provided a tangible expression of what it means to call ourselves sister churches. Meeting real people in real situations is both a privilege and responsibility. I am thankful for the opportunity that I was given.

The final decisions<sup>6</sup> on the report 'M/V in the Church' have shown that the RCN listening to the concerns of its sister churches, but always in the context of their own struggles and needs as they seek to be faithful to the Great Commission in their own cultural context. As they see it, the context in which the gospel must be preached in the Netherlands (and entire western world) today is one where gender roles have become blurred and in which 'men only' restrictions in terms of calling (vocation) are a genuine hindrance and stumbling block. They believe that restricting the offices of the church to men only is not necessarily an essential part of the gospel, something that is, in terms of the essential message of salvation, a matter of indifference.

Ideally the RCN would love to be able to continue to remain in a healthy sister relationship with their daughters and sisters. However, were it to come to a question having to choose between a relationship with their sister churches and their perceived ability to address the gospel to their own time and culture, I believe they would opt for the latter, no matter how painful.

The FRCA has taken the stance that not only should the M/V report and its recommendations be rejected, the authors (and staff members of TUC who propose and defend a similar hermeneutic) should be censured. The IRC believes that currently this may not be the most fruitful direction and our expressed desire was that the General Synod will not accept the recommendations of the M/V report and maintain the status quo and believed this option was genuinely open.

Dirk J van Garderen  
(11 April 2014)

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, there is a report on this meeting by the Rev Klaas van den Geest (Zeeheldenbuurt, April 1, 2014) entitled 'God is Veelkleurig' (God is multicoloured). (<http://www.pastorklaas.nl/god-veelkleurig/>) It can be 'translated' into Google English at the press of a button!) It certainly presents an alternative impression and will, no doubt, have its impact.

<sup>5</sup> I have not appended this to this report at this point of time. This because I have not, as yet, had any response to it at all and also because I think it needs to be read in the context of the Dutch minutes.

<sup>6</sup> Currently these decisions are only available in Dutch. We are waiting for an officially approved translation from the RCN, though translations are available of course.

## **Appendix 7**

### **Report of CRCA Synod 2012 in Blacktown NSW**

#### **Introduction**

The CRCA Synod met from 6 May to 11 May in the Christian Reformed Church of Blacktown (NSW). It began with a prayer service in which Rev. David Groenenboom preached from Colossians 1:24-29 on the theme “Christ in you ... the hope of glory.”

The official business of Synod began on Monday 7 May with the moderamen comprised of Rev. John Westendorp (Chairman), Rev John de Jongh (vice-Chairman), and brothers Ian de Graaf and John Bylsma (as 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> clerks respectively). Rev. Westendorp drew attention to the passing into glory since the last Synod, of Revs Peter Van Dam, Bill Deenick, Harry Hoving and also the CRCA administrator, Br Rob Vander Noord. (Rob’s job has now been divided between his son Troy doing the financials 3 days / week and Maria Jobse doing admin 2 days / week.) The chairman also welcomed fraternal delegates from the GKSA, Reformed Church of Indonesia (GRI), NRCSA (formerly NHK), RPC, RCNZ, as well as an observer from CRC Myanmar. As part of his opening remarks, he noted that 20 out of the 25 delegates to synod were first-time delegates (three of the four moderamen were also first-timers). A reasonable proportion of these were also at a CRCA Synod for the first time.

#### **General observations**

The CRCA gives greater weight to denominational structures and makes greater use of part-time / full-time denominational workers especially the Ministry Training Co-ordinator (Rev. Jack de Vries), Children’s worker (Rev. Ray Rus) and Youth Worker (Jonathan van den Burg). Decisions made at this Synod confirmed this direction, although the synod did agree to a review of these positions (see below)

After the opening formalities, Troy van der Noord advised Synod, on behalf of the Board of Management, that there had been significant budget overruns to the tune of \$140,000, particularly in the area of the Ministry Training Co-ordinator, resulting in Synod’s reserves being only a fraction of the denominational requirement. This set the tone for a Synod conscious of financial constraints and the need for good stewardship – almost the whole closing day was spent on the BoM report.

#### **Decisions of note**

##### **Four-fold task**

It was pleasing to note that the Ministry Formation Work Group had taken on board the concerns expressed at previous Synods and had reframed Task 2 (previously Multiply, now Grow) to have a strong focus on church health. This draws in emphases like pastoral care, reformational heritage and other markers of a healthy functioning church. The report stated “we should not only be planting healthy churches, but also encouraging those churches already established into increasing health.” This change in focus was also expressed in a desire to establish “Church Health Networks” where “local churches will, relying on God’s grace and goodness, regularly encourage one another to become the healthiest expression of Christ’s new community that they possibly can.”

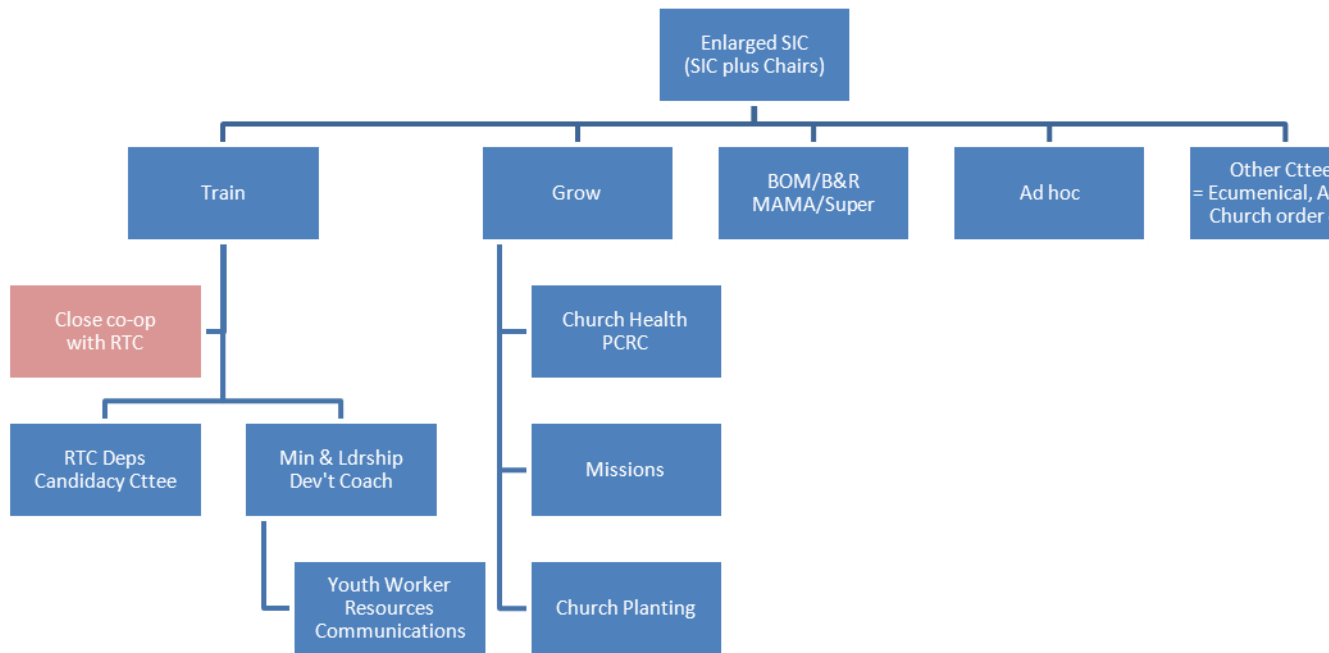
Under the MFWG report, the task of the Ministry Training Co-ordinator was rebranded to that of Ministry and Leadership Development Coach (DC). The MFWG was disbanded and its tasks realigned to fit in with the fourfold task with the majority coming under the Train Work Group (TWG). The mandate for TWG was amended to accommodate this with the balance of the tasks going to the Grow Work Group and an expanded SIC.

Perhaps the most significant change proposed was an expansion of the SIC’s role with a corresponding increase in the number of members on the committee. To accommodate this change,

a change to the Church Order was also proposed. This seemed to us to turn the SIC from a primarily reactive body, whose role was simply to conduct essential business between Synods, to a proactive body with significant responsibility.

In the end, all three denominational workers were reappointed with almost no discussion. The budget for the MTC (nearly half a million for the inter-synodical period) was approved without comment (though refer to Board of Management discussion below) and the change to the church order article passed, also almost without comment. The additional members to the SIC (the chairs of each of the work groups) were added as non-voting, ex-officio members.

The resulting denominational structure looks like this:



NB: After we left the Synod, it was agreed that an “independent, expert group from the members of the CRCA” be appointed to conduct a review of the National Children’s and Youth Workers and the Ministry Development Coach and report to Synod 2015. This review is to recommend whether these positions continue and, if so, whether the incumbents be offered a further term.

### **Campolo Matters**

Four overtures and one appeal related to the invitation for Tony Campolo to speak at the 2008 National Youth Convention and his subsequent engagement at “The Gathering.” Because of the amount of material related to this issue, Synod appointed a pre-advisory committee to recommend how to hear the issues.

Synod began by giving an opportunity for those who felt that they had been misinterpreted to make brief clarifying statements. Elder Glen Dekker (Wantirna) and Rev. Richard Schoenmaker (Mt Evelyn) both took this opportunity. Glen’s comments, in particular, set a helpful tone for the discussions which followed.

In regards to the issues, Synod made the following decisions:

That Synod, with the wisdom of hindsight, declares that Dr Tony Campolo was not and is not a suitable Christian Reformed Church Youth convention speaker because of his unorthodox and inconsistent views.

## **Report 19**

### **Interchurch Relations Committee**

That Synod rescind the decision of Synod 2009 which approved the “Pastoral Letter” that the SIC wrote in response to the cancellation of the 2008 National Youth Convention.  
(Close vote: 11/10)

That Synod humbly acknowledges that a teacher whose teaching includes unbiblical and anti-reformed theology was given a prominent teaching platform in our churches and particularly before our young people, which we have come to believe he ought not have been given. We humbly acknowledge that we were in error in endorsing this and confess our corporate sin.

That Synod humbly acknowledges that this issue has been handled poorly by our churches and such attempts as were made to follow correct denominational procedures to date have not led to an outcome which has honoured the Lord or edified His Church, but rather has resulted in ongoing and public disunity.

That Synod call for a time of corporate repentance and prayer, seeking the Lord’s forgiveness for our sin, pleading for his mercy and for great gospel faithfulness, discernment, diligence and wisdom in our ongoing work as part of His Church.

There was a great deal of unity expressed in the discussions around these motions and the time of corporate repentance, prayer and forgiveness which followed was very encouraging.

Synod also allowed a further opportunity on the second-last day of Synod for those who believed that there may still be substantial divisive issues within the denomination to state their concerns. A number of men made use of this opportunity.

### **Ecumenical Relations**

Synod 2012 ratified the change in relationship between the CRCA and the RCNZ to one of ecclesiastical fellowship with little discussion. The general view seemed to be that this would bring the relationship into line with the CRCA’s other ecumenical relationships. Synod also agreed to send two fraternal delegates to the next RCNZ Synod and to send two CER representatives for up to two inter-synodical meetings with our own IRC.

The CER placed two parallel sets of recommendations before Synod: one recommending continuing with the WCRC and the other recommending membership in the ICRC instead. Some of the CEF churches had written encouraging the CRCA to persist with the WCRC but some of the fraternal delegates present strongly encouraged the CRCA to join the ICRC. This all prompted some useful and encouraging discussion. Synod voted without dissent to step away from the WCRC and to join the ICRC.

Synod accepted the CER’s recommendation to maintain loose, unstructured contact with the three Presbyterian denominations (PCA, PCEA and RPC). It also expressed its commitment to fostering relationships with the Christian churches of Java, Indonesia and Sumba (GKJ, GKI and GKS.) Synod expressed its desire for Ecclesiastical Fellowship with Reformed Church of Indonesia (GRI) and will determine at the next Synod at what level that relationship will be conducted.

Synod also confirmed its commitments to the three South African churches with whom the CRCA has ecclesiastical fellowship – the NGKSA (whose fraternal delegate fell sick just before the CRCA Synod and was unable to attend), GKSA, and the NRCSA. It was agreed to send fraternal delegates to one of each of the three synods in the inter-synodical period (although this may yet be reviewed in the light of financial constraints).

The CRCA also has fraternal relations with CRCNA and the OPC and agreed to send a delegate to a CRCNA synod when invited.

### **Candidacy Committee**

Synod agreed to set aside an amount of \$10,000 to allow for all ministerial candidates to undergo personality profile assessments. However this was later scrapped as a result of cost-cutting measures.

Synod also agreed “To instruct the Candidacy Committee, in consultation with the Training Work Group, the Reformed Theological College and the churches, to review the paradigm for ministry requirements such that account is taken of the change in ministry demands involved with the Four-fold task and the changing circumstances in 21st century Australia.” This decision was of some concern to us and we await the outcome of their work to see which way the CRCA will head.

It also worth noting in this connection that Synod accepted the Leadership Development Work Group’s recommendation “To encourage Sessions to give their ministers two weeks study leave per year above their regular annual leave. For such to be provided the ministers will need to apply to their Sessions showing how they will use their study leave (e.g. attend course at a theological college or other institute, attend seminars or workshop s, read a specific number of books)”

### **Other Overtures**

Grace CRC had submitted an overture asking Synod to rule that ministers from CEF denominations who hold the view that Scripture allows women to serve in the offices of elder or minister but are willing to abide by the CRCA’s position that these offices are not open to women, may be called to serve in the CRCA.

We were encouraged to hear delegates and ministers who were not delegates strongly challenging this overture and affirming that the Bible does not allow women to serve in these offices. Synod appointed an advisory committee to help grapple with the issue before reaching the following decisions.

Synod decided:

1. That when a minister seeking to enter the ordained ministry in the CRCA from a CEF church holds a view on women in office, or any other issue, contrary to the stated biblical position of the CRCA, or comes from a denomination that does, the Classis ought to proceed with great care, as follows:
  - a. Seriously interact with the person on their biblical hermeneutic
  - b. Engage in a discussion over a period of time and not seek to settle the matter in a single Colloquium Doctum
  - c. Gladly embrace the wider input of Synodical Deputies, CER and SIC.
  - d. Seek assurance that the Synodical decisions will be supported and not agitated against.
2. That the CER in conjunction with the Candidacy Committee, explore the appropriateness of a Colloquium Doctum alone in determining the suitability of a candidate from a CEF church for ordination in the CRCA and consider whether additional means of assessment might be beneficial.

While these decisions affirm the CRCA’s stated biblical position that the offices of minister and elder are not open to women, they were not as strong as we had hoped. Ultimately, the proof of the pudding is in the eating and we will watch with interest to see how these decisions work out in practice.

An overture from NSW seeking to define guidelines for the role of Church Counsellor (to vacant churches) was upheld. This may be something that we in the RCNZ may wish to consider taking up.

NSW’s overture seeking representation of all churches at Synod (along the same lines as NZ) was defeated, predominantly on cost grounds. It seemed to us that there was broad support for greater representation of the churches at Synod but that this overture was “a bridge too far.”

## **Report 19**

### **Interchurch Relations Committee**

An overture seeking the division of Tasmania into two classes was defeated, particularly because it came to light that the churches in Tasmania were themselves divided over the issue.

In response to an overture from WA, Synod appointed “a study group to assess the suitability of the 2011 version of the NIV as our approved translation for pulpit use and devotional reading and to reconsider what other version may be suitable if the NIV2011 is considered unacceptable.” This committee is to report to the Classes by July 2013 and the Classes to advise the SIC of their responses by October 2013. If all agree with the committee’s recommendations, they will be accepted in the inter-synodical period.

Classis Tasmania had put forward an overture asking that Synod review Minister’s stipends. It appeared to come from the view that ministers were being overpaid and that reducing stipends would allow the employment of more ministry workers. This resulted in some spirited debate. In the end Synod appointed a committee to review stipends in the light of previous Synodical decisions regarding the understanding of stipend, calling and how this relates to the use of contracts. This review will also take into account the practices of similar churches, the use of allowances, the implications that flow from tax-exempt benefits and the impact of locality.

### **Board of Management matters**

Almost the whole of the final day of Synod was given over to the BoM report. It was stressed that no additional expenditure beyond budget be incurred except in exceptional circumstances and then only with the approval of the SIC and the BoM. A range of financial measures were agreed to including:

- An increase in ministry share (i.e. quota)
- Only publishing one year book for 2012/13
- Correcting the cash reserve problems by borrowing from MAMA funds and then recovering this through an extra prescribed offering.
- Bert Kuipers’ salary to be paid out of the World Development & Relief budget rather than Synod’s
- To limit the number of prescribed offerings to 20 per annum (21 in 2012) and the number of recommended offerings to 10.
- The \$10,000 allocation for personality profile assessment was scrapped

In addition to these measures, committees were encouraged to meet electronically where possible, cuts to synodical travel were mooted and the possibility of not sending fraternal delegates to synods faraway was also raised.

The task of finalising the master budget could not be completed at Synod and so will be finalised off-line in consultation with the SIC.

### **Sundry matters**

It was agreed that Rev. David Groenenboom would publish an electronic quarterly in an effort to keep the denomination informed of what was happening.

During his address to Synod on the work in the Solomon Islands, Rev. Kevin Rietveld specifically asked us to pass on his appreciation to the RCNZ churches for our support of the work there – particularly with the work of Jair & Lauretta Duinkerke, Susan Larsen, the containers which have been sent from NZ and the impending work of Ant & Petra Lagas.

Classis WA was charged to convene the 2015 Synod with Perth CRC as the convening church. This decision was made with the understanding that WA would fund-raise in order to offset extra travel costs!

## **In conclusion**

Our apologies for the length of this report! A number of significant matters of interest to us were on the floor of this Synod and we believed that there was merit in reporting these fairly fully.

We were very encouraged by the time we spent at the CRCA Synod. It was heartening to see the CRCA making a clear stand on a number of issues and showing a willingness to own up to past mistakes and a desire to go forward in unity for the sake of the Gospel. Although it doesn't show in our report, there seems to be a returning commitment to the RTC and a strong desire for the RTC's input on a broad range of issues. At a number of critical junctures, the input of the RTC was pivotal to discussion.

Overall we came away with a positive view of developments in the CRCA and a cautious optimism about the future for which we give thanks to God.

We also enjoyed the opportunity of meeting with many pastors and elders we knew, including men who have served in the RCNZ and those with whom we had trained at the RTC.

Reporters:

Rev. M. R. Willemse

Rev. J.A. Haverland

## **Appendix 8**

### **Report on the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) meeting held in Cardiff, Wales, 28th August till 4th September 2013**

Revs Bruce Hoyt and Dirk van Garderen attended the Conference was on behalf of our churches. The report is divided into several sections:

- A. A series of brief accounts of meetings with representatives of various sister-churches.
- B. An outline of ICRC appointments as they impact (one way or another) on our churches.

#### **A. Meetings with various sister-churches**

##### **1. CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES OF THE NETHERLANDS (CRCN or CGKN)**

This denomination has been in a sister-church relationship with RCNZ almost since our establishment 1953. While there is a long historical tie, the actual contact is quite limited. In the last 20 years or so they have sent a fraternal delegate to two of our synods (Paul den Butter and Dirk van der Zwaag) and on one occasion br Wim Stolte of Masterton passed on our greetings when he was present at one of their synods.

We met with brs Wim Wullschleger and William Middelkoop. During this meeting it soon became clear that their view of our sister-relationship with them coincides with ours - not a lot of real interaction or contact ecclesiastically or on a missional level.

They agreed with us that our sister-relationship should cease, not because of doctrinal concerns but simply because of isolation from each other due to distance. It was agreed that the ICRC be the common forum for future contact.

##### **2. CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES**

We met with two of their representatives, Harold Leyenhout and Dr John Vanderstoep. Their other representative, Rev Anthoni Souman, was not available at that time.

The discussions were positive and constructive.

- 2.1 We were asked to elaborate on our support of the CRCA into membership of the ICRC - especially in the light of their relationship with the FRCA. Our explanation satisfied them for their delegates voted in favour of receiving this denomination into the ICRC.
- 2.2 The main part of our discussion was on the question of their relationship with the GKN (lib) and their intentions at the synod of GKN planned for April 2014. They mentioned four issues that are of special concern to them:
  - 1) Views coming from or tolerated at the Theological University in Kampen.
  - 2) The work of the deputies Man/Woman in the 2005, 2008 reports, and now in the 2013 report - especially with regard to their view of the authority of Scripture.
  - 3) Their growing relationship with Netherlands Reformed Churches without resolution of crucial matters.
  - 4) A growing sense of estrangement as a consequence of these concerns.
- 2.3 When asked they felt that we should not consider sending a delegate to the RCN synod a priority.

##### **3. ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH USA**

We met with brs Mark Bube, Rev. Jack Sawyer - as well as with Dr. Tony Curto and Germany based OPC chaplain, Chris Wisdom.



The OPC delegates did encourage us to send a delegate to the RCN synod. The OPC does not have an ecclesiastical relationship with this denomination except through common membership of ICRC.

#### **4. UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA (URCNA)**

This denomination was represented by Rev Dick Moes and Huibert de Boer. Also present was Rev. Raymond Sikkema. The meeting we held was cordial but informal.

#### **5. REFORMED CHURCHES OF SOUTH AFRICA**

The RCSA was represented by Douw Breed and Malan van Rhyn. We were able to have a formal meeting, but casual conversations were generally positive but were not in any depth on any issues.

#### **6. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF EASTERN AUSTRALIA**

They were represented by Revs. Rowland Ward and George Ball. We met informally with George Ball. The PCEA was opposed to receiving the CRCA into membership of ICRC.

#### **7. GEREFORMEERDE KERKEN NEDERLAND (lib)**

Rev. van Garderen had a formal meeting with their representatives Rev Piet Meyer and Rev Dr Melle Herman Oosterhuis (also a faculty member at Kampen). The meeting remained quite general, but they did say that they believe that the critical comments about various views being tolerated at Kampen were misrepresented and taken out of context and that these views were not taught or even defended on campus at present.

We learned from Dr J.J.A. Colijn from Kampen that the faculty of the Theological University is preparing a new degree - 'Research Master of Reformed Theology'. More information on this is available on request.

#### **8. CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA**

This denomination was represented by Rev. Geoff van Schie. His report has, I understand, been circulated to our ministers. More is reported on this in section C-1 under *Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship*

## **B. APPOINTMENTS**

The following arrangements and appointments were made:

1. The URCNA will host the next ICRC conference in Canada (Ontario) in 2017. The Rev Dick Moes will be the chairman at that meeting (DV)
2. The position of 'Coordinator' of the Coordinating Committee was extended to Bruce Hoyt (ex officio). This is a key position in the planning and activities of the ICRC in the next four years.
3. The 'Diaconal Committee' is a new committee. Its mandate is somewhat similar to that of the Missions Committee. Rev. Dirk van Garderen) was appointed as convener of that committee and will need to start work on this early in 2014.
4. A 'Regional Conference Committee' has been appointed to organise regional conferences to replace the former 'mission conferences'. The 'Asia-Pacific Regional Conference' will be hosted by the Independent Reformed Church of Korea (Rev Heon Soo Kim) from October 8-11, 2015. The conference topic will be 'Baptism and the Lord's Supper' - with a special emphasis on guiding and giving biblical instruction for Asian churches. These papers are to be practical and to be presented with a Bible-study that can be used in Indian, Indonesian, and SE Asian contexts. Rev. van Garderen is to prepare and present the paper on Baptism.

Respectfully submitted by Rev. Dirk van Garderen  
18<sup>th</sup> October 2013

## **Appendix 9A**

### **9<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand 12<sup>th</sup> till 15 October 2011**

Dear brothers,

I was privileged to be able to attend the Grace General Assembly this year. It started on Wednesday 12 October in the evening and finished on Friday 15 October. Since it was right in my backyard, I was easily able to attend a most of the sessions.

The continued growth of the Grace Churches is a cause for thanksgiving. There are now 17 churches and church plants and about 800 communicant members.

There were two significant debates on church order. The first related to the normal requirements for ordination of ministers. Ordinarily those wishing to enter the ministry will be required to undertake theological education. In the past, the Grace Churches have ordained men without formal qualifications. They have served well, but it was agreed that this should not become the norm. This change brings the practice of the GPCNZ closer to our own. The second debate was about the ‘rights’ of the congregation with respect to the nomination and appointment of elders. This is an important issue within GPCNZ. Elders are appointed for life. Complicating the issue is that members are not required to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. It was decided that the Session could ask the congregation for nominations. However it was not mandatory for them to do so. Again this is not too far from our position. It was encouraging to read the reports and hear the debates. It is clear the GPCNZ is seeking to be faithful to Scripture.

The General Assembly spent a good deal of time talking about church planting in the New Zealand and overseas missions. One theme that came up repeatedly was the need to train leaders and encourage suitable men to consider the ministry. GPCNZ is being proactive in establishing churches in New Zealand, and is passionate about evangelism and mission. In this area, we would benefit from working more closely with them. Their enthusiasm for outreach is heart-warming. Furthermore, it may be worthwhile for our OMB and the GPCNZ OMB to be aware of what the other is doing and considering.

The GPCNZ is still supported very generously by Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, Alabama. Last year, they received about NZ\$130,000 for the support of new church plants (for up to three years). Tom Cheeley, a pastor from Briarwood, was present at the general assembly and led the devotions. Having heard him speak and interact with others there, perhaps he could be nicknamed “Barnabas” (son of encouragement).

It is clear that we already have many connections with the GPCNZ. The number of people at General Assembly I knew personally surprised me. David Bayne, who once served in our denomination, is currently the stated clerk. Some of our members used to be in the Grace Churches, and vice versa. Some of our churches have close connections with local Grace Churches. Furthermore, we have much in common in terms of our beliefs and practices.

GPCNZ is a young, energetic denomination. But sometimes its youth shows. It is having to figure out how best to do things and is still forging its corporate identity. We could be a real blessing to them if we showed interest in what they are doing and got alongside them as we have opportunity whether as individuals, congregations, or a denomination.

In Christ's service,  
Robert van Wichen

## **Appendix 9B**

### **11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand** **15<sup>th</sup> till 18<sup>th</sup> October 2013**

Dear brothers in the Lord,

I was privileged to attend the 11<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand New Zealand (GPCNZ). It was held in Waihola from Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> to Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October and celebrated 10 years as a church. I was able to attend most of the day sessions, but missed the night sessions, which consisted of teaching sessions led by David Jones from the Presbyterian Church of Australia.

I brought fraternal greetings on behalf of our churches, expressing our joy in their ten years of work as the GPC in New Zealand, our common unity in the faith, and our desire to continue to have close working relations on a local level if and when we are able.

Although I did not participate in any of their discussions and debates, I was able to converse and connect with nearly all the delegates during informal break and meal times. I sought to speak honestly about our differences but emphasised the unity we share as churches. As I spoke to many of the pastors, it is obvious that there are many ex-RCNZ members in their churches who are greatly appreciated because of their faithfulness to the work of the Lord and his church.

The main debate at the GA was around the membership of the pastor. Currently, the GPCNZ Book of Church Order (BCO) states that the pastor is member of the presbytery as well as of his local congregation. This seems to have caused conflict within some churches, so this clause in the BCO was voted to be removed. I suspect the last has not been said on this subject. Within this debate the differing role of the teaching and ruling elders were also discussed. The result of this is a study committee to bring some clarity to this matter

There was also some discussion around the issue of Youth Camps. There is a huge amount of work being done amongst the young people in the GPCNZ. There is a continuing focus on leadership training within the youth camp scene. One brother commented that youth camps are used to challenge the youth as leaders, train them as leaders so that they come back to the church as leaders. This might be a concept we can learn from to train up young people as leaders within our churches.

As has been reported before, the GPCNZ pour a huge amount of resources and energy into church planting. Their mission is "that within 20 years [2025] every New Zealander will have access to the ministry of a Grace Presbyterian church"; an ambitious vision, but to be commended. Hence, the Thursday morning session was taken up by church planting reports from five different church plants around the country. The Church Planters spoke very candidly of the pain and suffering in their work but also of the blessings. They spoke of God's work not only in their ministry, but also on them personally. Although the GPCNZ has the man power, they struggle with the financial resources to forge ahead in this work.

As a denomination we could be a real blessing to the GPCNZ with our solid foundation in the scriptures and confessions. Their youthfulness shows in their wide ranging opinions on certain matters. However, allowing even some of their enthusiasm for evangelism and church planting to

**Report 19**  
**Interchurch Relations Committee**

rub off on us would be of great benefit to us. As we are able, each of our local churches would do well to show interest in what the other is doing.

Continuing and increasing our formal relationship would also allow us a better understanding of each other. I urged David Bayne (stated Clerk) to make sure a delegate comes to our Synod next year.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this GA. I was blessed to be able to meet and cement ties with individual leaders of the GPCNZ. I trust those relationships will be for the good of our churches and the GPCNZ and ultimately for the good of God's Kingdom and his glory.

In the service of our King

Erik Stolte

## **Appendix 10**

### **Report of the Delegate to the FRCA**

**Report on FRCA Synod 2012**  
Rev. P. Archbald.

#### **Introduction:**

The FRCA Synod Armadale 2012 ran from July 9 to July 19, an indication of the weighty matters on their agenda. I was received and treated throughout in a friendly manner, given opportunity to pass on fraternal greetings, respond to the discussion on the RCNZ and audit the sub-committee meetings working on a proposal re our churches. In fact, I was even allowed to help a little with some of the wording.

The main items on the agenda were (in order of importance to the FRCA):

- a. relations with the Dutch churches (now identified as RCN, since the old name, GKN, is no longer in use in Holland; the “v” has dropped out from what we formerly called GKNv).);
- b. the up-date of the Canadian Reformed “Book of Praise”;
- c. relations with the RCN (restored);
- d. relations with the RCNZ.

For the purpose of this report the sequence has been changed as seen below.

#### **1. Relations with the RCNZ**

The FRCA deputies for the RCNZ proposed that the FRCA enter into “fraternal relations” with the RCNZ (see Acts 2002, Report 3, p.4-40). This would have been a step up for them, because it involved slightly greater privileges than before. However, I pointed out that this was offered in 2000, but not acted upon by us and then withdrawn by their next synod. To go back to that proposal after we have changed our relationship with the CRCA – the only impediment they have identified to sister-relations – would seem to be a backward step. Moreover, the main change involved in the fraternal relationship would be the mutual acceptance of attestation papers – a system that we do not officially use.

Synod did not pursue the deputies’ recommendation

Three churches made overtures to move away from the RCNZ. These moves were strongly rejected. One delegate moved to enter sister-relations immediately, but this also drew little support. A strong majority wanted to investigate further whether our new “Ecclesiastical Fellowship” with the CRCA is a substantive end of sister-relations, or only “on paper.” Most were concerned that we might still be sisters in effect, but without the mutual accountability. I assured them that there was significant change: the lessening of accountability is appropriate to a non-sister relationship – though we can still address any major issues with each other; and that our committee is looking at the rules for the relationship, a matter to be decided next synod. The FRCA synod therefore decided to wait and see how that works out and the new deputies have been asked to assess that.

The synod appointed four new deputies, with Rev. Richard Pot as the convener. This action reflects a desire to know our churches more thoroughly and hopefully provide enough information to enable a sister-church relationship. Synod made it clear that the aim is not to find new impediments or a justification for not entering a sister-relationship. Acts Art. 89, III.5.b (see below) is not to be read negatively. They have acknowledged that there is a changed relationship with the CRCA (Acts Art. 89, III.3). The FRCA simply wants to be sure that the single “impediment” has been removed (Art. 89, III.5.c).

## **Report 19**

### **Interchurch Relations Committee**

In line with this desire, synod decided to seek more contact with our IRC. Their committee is to seek to meet twice with us in the inter-synodical period (III.6.f). Their budget for travel to NZ has been increased. Location and time are to be worked out between the committees.

The discussions about relations with the RCNZ were largely positive and we have come closer together. While the FRCA has not yet offered us sister-relations, they have put themselves in a position where they must decide one way or the other next synod – as they freely acknowledged.

### **2. Relations with the RCN:**

Relations with the RCN was by far the major item on the agenda. The RCN sent 3 delegates to this synod. Their presence and replies to questions did not appear to hold the FRCA back from expressing their concerns more strongly than before. Synod decided to deliver an “official admonition” to the Dutch churches, after consultation with the CanRC and the FRC South Africa. All previous issues – homosexuality, women in office, a liberal hermeneutic and teachings by theological professors (e.g. on Genesis), relations with the NGK, 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> commandments etc. - are still matters of concern. The CanRC delegates indicated to me that they thought their churches would agree with nearly all of these concerns. A committee will formulate the admonition and propose consequences if it is ignored by the RCN. This will be brought to a continuation of the synod in April next year.

There was much debate about the RCN practice of sending female delegates to synods of sister-churches. Our IRC had written to the RCN on this matter also but it appears we had incorrectly understood (as had others) that they would send one to this FRCA synod. However, as Rev. Archbald pointed out to the delegates, our general concern remains. As a matter of order the Synod voted overwhelmingly against allowing female delegates to address synod

### **3. Relations with the RCN-restored:**

Relations with the RCNr have cooled considerably for several reasons.

- a. This is mainly because the RCNr has become sisters with the Abbotsford CanRC that seceded from the denomination. Abbotsford seceded because of the CanRC sister-relations with the OPC and URCNA. Abbotsford has declared the CanRC a false church. The FRCA values their relationship with the CanRC and has no issue with their sister-relations with the OPC, URCNA or RCNZ. The FRCA believes the RCNr has effectively called their Canadian sister a false church.
- b. The RCNr synod said that the FRCA lacked judgement by not yet breaking with the RCN and joining with them. The FRCA does not want to deal so quickly with the RCN.
- c. The RCNr is itself fragmenting – which makes the FRCA cautious about them.
- d. The RCNr has withdrawn its offer of sister-relations with the FRCA.

The FRCA synod decided to maintain contact with the RCNr, but also be open to contact with the other groups that have seceded from the RCN. They indicated that the Abbotsford situation could be an impediment to sister-relations with the RCNr.

### **4. The Canadian Book of Praise:**

The FRCA synod expressed concern about the “unnecessary proliferation” of hymns in the new CanRC Book of Praise. The Canadians appear to be intending to keep adding hymns in the future. The FRCA also rejected some of the particular hymns added more recently. The synod decided to use the new Book of Praise, minus the 19 rejected hymns. They also kept the door open to producing their own Book of Praise in due time.

## **5. Bible Versions**

Synod has decided to commence work on evaluating the ESV. Our synodical study on this was used positively by the FRCA. The 2011 NIV is not to be used in the FRCA worship services.

## **6. Free Reformed Church South Africa**

Their delegate informed Rev. Archbald that their Synod 2011 (Acts, p.19) decided to maintain contact with us, especially for the sake of immigrants from their churches. Their delegate was very positive about the RCNZ. However, there is no record of any communication from them so far.

Many other matters were discussed at the synod, but I believe this covers those of greatest interest to us.

# **The decisions made about the RCNZ**

**Article 89 - Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ) (refer Articles 25, 26, 71)**

### **I. Material:**

Agenda Item 11.f.i – Deputies Report for Relations with other Churches – Reformed Churches of New Zealand.

Agenda Item 8.f.ii – Overture from FRC Byford regarding RCNZ.

Agenda Item 8.h.ii – Overture from FRC Darling Downs re RCNZ.

Agenda Item 8.c.iii – Overture from FRC Mt Nasura regarding RCNZ.

### **II. Recommendation:**

The recommendation of the advisory committee was tabled.

### **III. Decision:**

Synod decides:

1. To confirm what was said by Synod 2000 (Acts Article 93), namely, to recognize that the RCNZ are true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to express our continued resolve to work towards the goal of a sister church relationship, and thereby bring our unity in faith to practical and visible expression.
2. To continue to encourage our local churches to exercise practical support and interaction wherever possible in areas that are not reserved for relationships between sister churches.
3. To acknowledge that the RCNZ decided to change its relationship with the CRCA (Minutes of the Acts RCNZ Synod 2011, Art. 93 pp. 1-24) "...  
*3. To discontinue the sister church relationship with the CRCA and establish instead a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.*"
4. Not to accept the deputies proposal to enter into fraternal relations with the RCNZ.
5. To discharge deputies, thank them for their work and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
  - a. convey Synod's decisions to the RCNZ and provide to the RCNZ a copy of the Acts of Synod Armadale 2012;
  - b. observe and report on the continuing faithfulness of the RCNZ in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy;
  - c. determine how the nature and practical implications of the RCNZ's new relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the CRCA differs from their previous sister church relationship and evaluate how this impacts on the impediment identified by previous Synods;
  - d. encourage the RCNZ to continue to be consequential in their relationship with the CRCA;
  - e. invite delegates of the RCNZ to our next Synod;

## Report 19 Interchurch Relations Committee

- f. upon invitation attend the next Synod of the RCNZ with two deputies and endeavour to meet with the inter-church relations committee of the RCNZ at least twice within the inter-synodical period, in order to stay well-informed about the RCNZ (pending budget constraints);
  - g. provide information about the RCNZ to the membership of our churches and keep the churches informed about the decisions of the RCNZ and the work of the deputies.
6. That these decisions adequately address submissions from FRC Byford, FRC Darling Downs and FRC Mt Nasura.

### Grounds:

1. There is no reason to question the continuing faithfulness of RCNZ.
2. In our continuing recognition of the RCNZ as a true church it is important for deputies to provide details of ongoing faithfulness as would normally be done in a sister church relationship.
3. Synod West Kelmscott 2006 (Art 102) decided:  
*“To encourage consistories to take note, and act on, Synod’s positive view towards the RCNZ in regard to practical support and interaction where these are not restricted to those between sister-churches only, e.g. application of membership from former members of the RCNZ, matters pertaining to the mission field and theological and Christian education”*  
and this is being implemented.
4. Synod Rockingham 2003 (Art 72) decided  
*“not to proceed with the decision in principle to offer fraternal relations”*  
on the grounds that  
*“From the responses of the churches to the decision of the 2000 Synod and from the appeals of the churches it becomes clear that the offer of fraternal relations does not find general acceptance. The RCNZ have rejected this offer as well.”*  
  
The recommendation of deputies to offer fraternal relations has not sufficiently demonstrated that these grounds are no longer valid.
5. Synod cannot determine at this time whether the RCNZ’s new relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the CRCA remains an impediment to enter into a sister church relation since the RCNZ rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship have not yet been finalised. Synod RCNZ 2011 (Art 93.2) *“decided to adopt provisionally the proposed Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship as the rules for this new relationship”*.
6. It is beneficial to meet together to convey greetings, discuss matters and come to understand each other and to develop regular contacts.
7. Synod 1990 decided to concentrate on relations and contacts with churches which are geographically closer to us (Art 58), which requires allocating a certain measure of priority and resources to our growing relationship with the RCNZ.
8. Synod 1996 (Acts, Art 53.4) observed that  
*“Synod 1985 decided that our declaration of another church as being “true and faithful church of the Lord Jesus Christ ... has as direct consequence that a sister-church relationship can be established without disregarding the fact that historical developments may well give cause to several stumbling blocks still lying on the road to a practical realisation of unity” (Article 67, Acts Synod 1985).*

Therefore there is urgency to remedy the present anomaly of recognising a church to be true and faithful without a sister church relationship.



## **Appendix 11**

### **Report on the visit to the Presbytery of the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia (PRCA) held on 26 and 27 April 2013 at Wollongong, NSW**

The PRCA meets twice a year as a presbytery which is probably more the equivalent of our Synod meetings. Because the PRCA only has one presbytery the agenda covers both congregational matters and matters that concern the whole denomination. These meetings therefore are in a way a mixture of our presbytery meetings and synod meetings.

The congregations take turns in organizing these meetings and this Presbytery was held under the auspices of the PRC of Wollongong (just south of Sydney).

Elder Pieter van der Wel attended the Presbytery as an observer on behalf of the RCNZ, also in his capacity as a member of the Interchurch Relations Committee of our churches. He was warmly welcomed and given the full privilege of the floor. He was also given opportunity to address the Synod more formally, and gave some details of the current situation of our churches and also of efforts taking place in local and overseas missions.

Many matters before the Presbytery were administrative. Others, because of the structure of the PRC concerned the life of the various congregations.

Some more major issues on the agenda concerned:

- The Status and Function of Elders after Retirement from the Eldership (The PRC holds to a two office views and practices full parity between teaching and ruling elders, so that the ruling elders preach regularly and also administer the sacraments).
- The Use of Wine in the Lord's Supper. The PRC currently uses grape juice at the Lord's Supper and the report on this matter looked at both the mention of "wine" in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the terms used in Scripture with regard to "wine" in relation to the Lord's Supper.
- There is concern about the decreasing number of students at their training institute *John Knox Theological College*.

These were delicate matters but the discussions were conducted in a brotherly spirit and well led by the moderator, Rev. Kirk Zylstra.

During the presentation of the report of the Inter Church Relations Committee of the PRC he had the opportunity to answer some questions.

The report basically asked the question:

What is involved in a sister relationship with a likeminded church?

Under that heading it looked at

- Terminology and Introduction
- Levels of communication / interaction
- Expectations for a PRCA - sister church relationship

Under this heading some 20 aspects were raised re what elders and members in the PRC might expect from entering in an ecclesiastical relationship with a likeminded church

On the basis of the experiences of PRCA members and elders, published documents of the RCNZ and interaction of delegates with RCNZ Synods and Presbyteries, the PRCA recognises the RCNZ as a church with which they might have a fruitful ecclesiastical relationship so the committee proposed the following motion to the Presbytery.

## **Report 19**

### **Interchurch Relations Committee**

**Motion:** That the PRCA inform the RCNZ InterChurch Relationships Committee of our satisfaction and gratitude to God for what they represent, and that we request to enter into a sister relationship with them.

After discussion the Presbytery decided to hold the motion over to their next meeting in October (to be held in Adelaide).

He encouraged the Presbytery to give special attention to their expectations as noted in the report and it would probably be wise on our part to peruse their report carefully and respond as necessary on any matters we believe warrant this.

The PRC is actively involved in various missions, such as

- Australian Indigenous Ministries to the Aboriginal people in Northern Territory
- They support a missionary in Vanuatu, who has a strong mentoring role among the local elders) where three churches constitute the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Vanuatu (a separate Presbytery supported by the PRCA)
- They support a single congregation in Fiji.
- They regularly send men to Kenya to lecture at a college (much like we send men to Knox Theological College in Uganda)

The PRCA is a small denomination and the opportunity to meet and talk face to face was deeply appreciated by them and our prayer is that this may lead to further cooperation in the Lord's work.

Elder Pieter van der Wel