

Report of the Interchurch Relations Committee

General

Synod 2005 appointed Revs. Michael Flinn, Bruce Hoyt, Jim Klazinga and Dirk van Garderen as members of the IRC. Upon the request of Rev. Klazinga to be relieved from the committee Rev. Reinier Noppers was asked to join the committee. He was willing and the SIC gave its concurrence. During the inter-synodical period our committee has met only as required. We have done our best to carry out the mandates given by Synod 2005 as well as maintain our relations with other churches according to our general synodical requirements. What follows is a report on our activity together with recommendations. The report follows the same format as those submitted to previous synods.

Recommendation

- 1. To receive this report.*

A. Sister-churches

1. Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (CGKN)

Synod 2005 recommended that we continue our sister-relationship with the CRC Netherlands and also to send a delegate to the next synod of the CRC/Neth if this could be done at no cost to Synod. (*Art 86*). The Rev D. van der Zwaag attended that synod and shared with us the challenges facing their churches in the Netherlands.

There has been no contact beyond formal correspondence and informal attempts at strengthening the ties with the Rev van der Zwaag. The denomination's mission, evangelism and diaconal magazine (*Doorgeven*) continues to provide the main source of information about them – at least for those able to read Dutch!

As this report is being compiled, the Rev Dirk van Garderen, who will be attending the Synod of the GKN Liberated in May, will also seek further contact and, if possible, a meeting with the ecumenical committee of the CRC Netherlands.

Recommendations

- 2. To continue our sister relationship with the CRC Netherlands.*
- 3. To continue to encourage closer contact and cooperation where and as possible especially via the International Conference of Reformed Churches.*

2. Orthodox Presbyterian Church USA (OPC)

In relation to the OPC, Synod 2005 decided:

- 1. To continue our sister-church relationship with the OPC, USA.*
- 2. To send a delegate to an OPC assembly during the next inter-synodical period. (Acts 2005, Art. 85).*

During the inter-synodical period our cooperation with the OPC has continued in particular on the mission field in Uganda. The Rev Barry and Mrs Anne James continued to make a most meaningful contribution to the work in Uganda – a work much appreciated both in Uganda and in the USA. During the latter half of 2007 the Rev John and Mrs Sheryl Rogers also spent time on the field, again in a manner that was greatly valued. Other openings and opportunities are currently being explored.

The Rev Dirk van Garderen attended the OPC's 74th General Assembly (June 13-20, 2007) at Dordt College in Sioux Center, Iowa. An extensive article outlining relevant issues and impressions of this denomination was subsequently published in *Faith in Focus* (Vol 34/8 Sept 2007). A shortened

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version of that article is included as Appendix 5.

Our sister relationship with the OPC dates back from a request made by us at our first synod in July 1953 and has, through the years, had a profound impact on our development. It was good to be able to meet a number of the delegates (more especially at the meal tables!) as well as with a number of other men from other denominations linked to the OPC.

Our delegate was granted an opportunity to address the Assembly on behalf of our churches. It provided an opportunity to describe the character and needs of our denomination and what we are currently doing. An opportunity to pass on our appreciation for the contribution the OPC has made to our churches through the years was well received. During the General Assembly there was also a special meeting with the OPC's *Ecumenicity and Church Relations Committee* at which all the fraternal delegates from other denominations shared on their current situation and needs.

Appraisal

The IRC reported to Synod 2002 that it had been many years since we had sent a representative. Indeed, we had never specifically sent someone before. (The late Prof Raymond Zorn had represented us – and the Reformed Churches of Australia – in conjunction with a meeting of the RES in 1978. The Rev Jack Sawyer represented us while visiting family in 1994.) Being there was a fraternal delegate was much appreciated. However, given the size and nature of the Assembly, direct input on the floor was virtually ruled out. Any strengthening of bonds could only take place in informal settings and committee meetings.

Opportunities for further cooperation with OPC were also explored. The most obvious focus is on the mission field. Work in Uganda has received a special focus with both mission and diaconal ministries being considered. It is particularly by means of overseas work (both word and deed ministries) that meaningful cooperation is being established. In that sense meeting with and informal discussions with various members of the Board of Foreign Missions was mutually helpful.

The possibility of having ministers from the OPC coming to serve our churches was mentioned in the address made to the General Assembly. While there was some interest in this, no specific requests of a viable nature were received.

Recommendations

- 4. To continue our sister-relationship with the OPC, USA.*

3. Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA)

Synod 2005 decided:

- 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.*
- 3. To sponsor the GKSA's application to join the International Conference of Reformed Churches notwithstanding our concern about women as deacons.*
- 4. To continue to monitor closely the ongoing discussion in the GKSA on the role of women in the church and to report on any further synodical decisions in this area.*
- 5. To send a delegate to the next synod of the GKSA.*

Rev. John Rogers attended the last synod of the GKSA, at which a committee report on the subject of women in office was discussed in full. His report in abridged form is attached as Appendix 6.

Rev. Rogers has informed us that our concerns regarding the GKSA decision to allow women to be ordained as deacons were shared by a number of fraternal delegates from other churches. They, along with our delegate, were granted permission to address the concerns of their churches to the synod. We are grateful that the input of the fraternal delegates on this matter was apparently appreciated and

proved helpful in the debate. We stress, however, that this question of women in office remains an ongoing discussion within the GKSA and final decisions one way or the other are yet to be made. Given that there is a study committee still in place and that this situation is quite fluid, it would be well for us to monitor closely developments in this area.

Recommendations

- 5. To continue our sister church relationship with the GKSA.*
- 6. To continue to monitor discussions within the GKSA and synodical decisions on the subject of women in office.*
- 7. To send a fraternal delegate to the next synod of the GKSA.*

4. Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)

Synod 2005 made the following decisions in relation to the CRCA.

- 1. To continue our sister-church relationship with the CRCA.*
- 2. To continue the meetings between the CER of the CRCA and our IRC.*
- 3. To express appreciation for the decision of CRCA Synod 2003 regarding “children and church membership”.*
- 4. To monitor the ongoing study and discussion within the CRCA on the matter of women as deacons.*
- 5. To advise the CRCA that our sister-church relationship is still under strain because of their decision on Women as Deacons and their rejection of appeals against this decision.*
- 6. To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*

Revs. Bruce Hoyt and Reinier Noppers attended the 2006 Synod of the CRCA, held from May 7-13 in Redlands, Queensland, as fraternal delegates. We were welcomed at Brisbane airport by the members of their Committee for Ecumenical Relations (CER), and spent some time at the airport in what was a fruitful and open discussion regarding matters of mutual concern and encouragement, amongst which were the perceptions created by the motion at our recent Synod to sever ties with the CRCA. We were able to point out that this motion was not in fact out of order although it certainly produced some tension.

We also queried the comment made in the CER report that cooperation in mission and diaconal work was unlikely. However, we were assured that this was not because of any lack of desire to work together but simply because many churches are taking up initiatives at a local level. This does not preclude the possibility of exchanging information regarding mission and diaconal activities in which our two churches may cooperate, for example with activities such as SWIM (Seasonal Workshops In Missions) at a local or presbyterial / classis level.

We also encouraged the CER to take up the suggestions made in their report to further study the questions of “Ordination” and “Office”, as such a study would be of benefit for both denominations, but nothing further eventuated from this suggestion.

We were assured that we would have the full privilege of the floor.

Much of the Synod was focused on the task of bringing the gospel to the nation; a focus which is commendable, also given the fact that the CRCA has allocated the larger proportion of its financial reserves to this task.

There was little debate regarding the relationship with the RCNZ. The Synod concurred with the work done by the CER in relation to the RCNZ, and expressed deep gratitude for the reduction of strain between our churches. They want to continue to work at clarifying and, if possible, to removing the remaining issue of tension between us, that of the issue of women deacons. As a result the CRCA have

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agreed to send representatives for two intersynodical meetings, and also two delegates to the next Synod of the RCNZ.

Matters of interest to the RCNZ included:

- Word of Salvation: both CRCA and RCNZ ministers are encouraged to submit sermons when asked to contribute.
- The Committee Report on Bible Translations: Synod decided to maintain the status quo, with the NIV as pulpit Bible and the updated NASB as study Bible. The CER will continue to liaise with our RCNZ committee regarding developments during the intersynodical period. All their material has been made available to our committee for our own study.
- Deacons, Session and Belgic Confession: This is an area of ongoing concern for the RCNZ, and the reason that our relationship was still considered to be under strain at our previous Synod. The committee presented two alternate reports to the Synod as to whether deacons are part of the session, neither of which were accepted. After much discussion, the following was adopted: *“Synod decided that since in our church history both views have been held, and since the Belgic Confession is seen as not requiring one view only, to allow sessions the freedom to include deacons as part of the session or as separate to the session, according to local regulations. Where a session decides to include deacons as part of the session, only men can be deacons. Where a session decides to separate deacons from the session, men and women can be deacons.”* This was passed with a greater than 2/3 majority. The Church Order was also adapted to reflect this decision.

This decision does help to clarify the decision regarding women as deacons, and seeks to state firmly that women are not to be part of the ruling body of the church, the session. We are thankful that Synod made this ruling, and see this as a step in the right direction, since the Synod again made it clear that women deacons are not to be part of the session.

- REC: Prof H DeWaard gave a report of developments within the REC. Many members of the REC are also members of World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and an REC committee was formed to look into that overlap, though specifically instructed that merger was not part of the mandate. However, it was reported on the floor of Synod that a communiqué was made public that the REC and WARC would merge. A proposal was put forward to form the “World Reformed Communion”, with a final decision to be made by 2009. It was subsequently pointed out that membership of WARC is so theologically diverse that the CRCA could not in good conscience be a part of this body. A motion was passed to express the disappointment of the CRCA to the Executive of the REC regarding this proposed new body, and that recommendations regarding their ecumenical future would be made to the next CRCA Synod. At a later meeting with the CER, we were informed that a final decision regarding the future of this merger between the REC and WARC will occur around the middle of 2010, and the CRCA will monitor these developments and respond at that time.
- RTC. We raised the question as to whether the CRCA intends to continue using the RTC as their primary training facility for men for ministry, as the number of students for the ministry from the CRCA continues to decline. Synod decided that the RTC remains the primary means of training for the Ministry in the CRCA, particularly so that those who enter the ministry in the CRCA are prepared in regards to the denominational ethos. Financial support was continued without dissent.

Rev Bruce Hoyt extended greetings on behalf of the RCNZ, and expressed our ongoing appreciation for the open and encouraging discussions that continue to be held between the two churches. He raised the ongoing strain in our sister-church relationship caused by the CRCA’s decisions regarding women deacons, and encouraged the CRCA to take up the suggestion to study the question of ordination to office and that such a study would also benefit the RCNZ.

During the Synod we were requested to meditate upon pictures of Christ as part of a devotional, which

was challenged from the floor of Synod by a number of delegates who perceived this to be contrary to Scripture and Confession. An apology was given for any offence caused. We raised the same concerns with the CER at the Synod, and subsequently have been informed that an overture may be forthcoming to their next Synod to raise this matter. We will wait to see how this develops.

As fraternal delegates, we were grateful for the way we were received and for the way in which the concerns of our churches were heard by the CRCA synod.

Recommendations

- 8. To continue our sister-church relationship with the CRCA.*
- 9. To continue the meetings between the CER of the CRCA and our IRC.*
- 10. To send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.*

5. Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN-lib)

In relation to the GKN (Lib) Synod 2005 decided:

- 1. To continue our sister-church relationship with the GKN-lib.*
- 2. To send a delegate to the next synod of the GKN-lib.*

Contact with the *Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches of Netherlands* (BBK) has been limited during the inter-synodical period. The main (English language) source of information from and about them is the quarterly magazine (*Lux Mundi*). The GKN-lib website is also a continuing source of information.

In August 2007, the Rev Dirk van Garderen, while on a visit to the Netherlands, received an invitation to lead the service at the *Rehoboth Kerk* in Utrecht. This proved to be an historic event in that it was the very first time one of our ministers was invited to do so. Response to the service was positive.

The Rev Dirk van Garderen has been appointed by our committee to attend the GKN-lib's synod in 2008. The General Synod itself extends over a considerable period of time (not meeting continuously) but has set aside Tuesday, May 26th till Saturday, May 31st as 'the week set aside for foreign guests'. A report on this meeting will be published as soon as possible after that meeting.

Recommendations

- 11. To continue our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN-lib).*
- 12. To continue to encourage closer contact and cooperation where and as possible especially via the International Conference of Reformed Churches.*

6. Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)

Synod 2005 decided:

- 1. To continue our sister-church relationship with the PCEA.*
- 2. To send a delegate to one synod of the PCEA during the intersynodical period.*

There has been little contact with the PCEA during the intersynodical period, except that congregations within the PCEA showed interest in the calling of vicars Andrew Nugteren and David Waldron.

Their Synod is planned for mid 2008 and a report of that meeting will be made available prior to our Synod.

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Recommendations

13. To continue our sister-church relationship with the PCEA.

7. Canadian/American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Synod 2005 decided:

To try once again to establish contact with the CanRC in accordance with the mandate of Synod 2002.

Rev. Bruce Hoyt was providentially able to attend the 2007 synod of the CanRC. His report is included as Appendix 4 and details how at that synod the CanRC decided to accept our offer of sister church relations. The full decisions are detailed below:

- 1. To recognize that the RCNZ is a faithful church of God and accept the invitation of the RCNZ to enter into sister-church relations according to the established rules.*
- 2. To write a letter addressed to the next Synod of the RCNZ communicating this decision and including the request that the RCNZ take note of and take seriously the concerns of the FRCA regarding the CRC Australia.*
- 3. To send a delegate (delegation) to the next Synod of the RCNZ in order to present this letter to formalize relations and visit the churches.*

In relation to decision 2, no doubt the fraternal delegate of the CanRC will be able to explain further the thinking behind this, and will benefit from being able to observe our discussion and decisions in relation to the FRCA and to the CRCA.

With gratitude, we therefore recommend the following.

Recommendations

- 14. To express our appreciation to the CanRC for their acceptance of our invitation to enter a sister church relationship with them.*
- 15. To continue to work closely with the CanRC in connection with the mission work in PNG.*
- 16. To send a delegate to the next synod of the CanRC.*

B. International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

Rev. Bruce Hoyt and Rev. John Goris represented the RCNZ at the International Conference of Reformed Churches which met in Pretoria, South Africa, in October 2005. The 22 member churches sent delegates. In addition there were 5 churches that had applied for membership, three of which were accepted as members: the Confessing Reformed Church of Congo, Reformed Churches of South Africa, and the Reformed Churches of Spain. There were observers from an additional 8 churches.

It is the practice of the ICRC to choose a vice chairman who will take over the role of chairman in the subsequent meeting in order to provide continuity. Since the Interim Committee proposed to ask the RCNZ to host the next meeting, Rev. Bruce Hoyt was appointed Vice Chairman. Rev. Bort de Graaf of the Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands was appointed Chairman, Rev. Cornelius van Spronsen of the Canadian Reformed Churches was appointed as Corresponding Secretary, Rev. Peter Naylor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales was appointed as Recording Secretary and Henk Berends of the Canadian Reformed Churches was re-appointed as Treasurer.

The theme for the conference papers and discussions was “The Lordship of Christ: 1. In the life of the believer, 2. In the church, and 3. In the world”.

Your IRC committee has approached the Bishopdale session to be the host church for next meeting of the ICRC which is scheduled to meet 15-22 October 2009. After careful consideration, we believe Bishopdale is the church in the best position to be the host church and that Christchurch is the best

location for the ICRC meeting. We believe this is a great opportunity to meet Reformed delegates and observers from churches around the world and learn first hand about the work God is doing through them in the advance of His kingdom and the spread of the Gospel.

Although the ICRC has budgeted \$60,000USD for conference costs to cover food, accommodation, facilities and equipment, there will be a great deal of organising to be done prior to and during the conference. We recommend that Synod allow for a budget of up to \$5000 to pay a conference organiser.

Because Reformed Churches around the world do not all have the same confessional standards, the confessional basis for membership in the ICRC has been discussed at several meetings of the ICRC. The constitution requires that churches will be admitted as members only if they “faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith”. The confessional standards listed in the Basis are: the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

It is now proposed that churches shall be admitted as members which:

adhere and are faithful to one or more of the confessional standards stated in the Basis, as each church has adopted one or more of these as its own standards, or adhere and are faithful to Reformed Confessions which are equivalent in content to the Confessions listed in the Basis (Art. 2), and which Confession (or Confessions) shall be proposed to be added to Article II of the Constitution.

While we can understand the desire to require faithful adherence to specific confessional standards, your Committee believes the proposed change will cause confusion and will become unwieldy. We therefore recommend that Synod not support the proposed change to the ICRC Constitution.

Recommendations

- 17. To continue our membership in the ICRC.*
- 18. To allocate up to \$5000 to pay a conference organiser for work prior to and during ICRC 2009.*
- 19. Not to support the proposed change to the ICRC Constitution.*

C. Churches with Which We Have Contact

1. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

Our official discussions with the FRCA go back to the Synod of 1992 when we received at our synod a representative from these churches. Since then we have regularly exchanged delegates and continued discussion with a view to establishing a sister-church relationship with them.

Synod 2005 decided

- 1. To continue the offer of a sister church relationship with the FRCA.*
- 2. To convey by correspondence the offer of a sister church relationship to the FRCA deputies for consideration at their Synod 2006.*

At the 2005 Synod, in their fraternal address, the FRCA delegate again reiterated that our sister relation with the CRCA is the only remaining impediment hindering them from accepting our offer of sister-church relations, and that the FRCA are considering whether that ought to be an impediment. Despite their difficulties he assured us of their continued desire to have a sister relationship with us.

At the 2006 Synod of the FRCA, the deputies' report was presented with the following introduction: “Deputies were able to agree on the text of most of this report. However, at some significant points, including the recommendations, they were unable to come to agreement. Two deputies advocate one

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approach, and two another. Consequently, it is not possible to speak of “majority” or “minority” reports. At these points, two parallel versions were prepared.”

Subsequent to this, the FRCA Synod 2006, made the following decisions regarding the RCNZ.

- 1. Thank the deputies for the work done and declare that their mandate has been completed.*
- 2. To renew the mandate of deputies to strive for relations with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand by:
 - a. Monitoring the relationship between the RCNZ and the CRCA, and to encourage the RCNZ to continue to admonish the CRCA where necessary.*
 - b. Authorising two delegates to attend the next Synod of the RCNZ, in order to convey greetings and discuss matters of mutual interest.*
 - c. Reassuring the RCNZ that it is our sincere desire to enter into a sister relationship with them but the matter of a triangular relationship with the CRCA remains an impediment.*
 - d. Inviting delegates of the RCNZ to our next Synod as observers with the privileges mentioned in rules 6 of our “Rules for Synods” (Acts 1998, Appendix 12).*
 - e. Providing information to the membership of our churches about the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.**
- 3. 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.*
- 4. To convey Synod’s decisions to RCNZ.*

Grounds:

- 1. Deputies have reported to synod in a manner that satisfies the mandate.*
- 2. See Deputies Report (Appendix 10).*

From these decisions it is clear that the FRCA have been unable to come to a united position in the question of their relationship with us.

Recommendations

- 20. To acknowledge with sadness that we have been unable to make progress towards a sister church relationship with the FRCA.*
- 21. To inform the FRCA that we cannot accept that our sister-relationship with the CRCA should be an impediment to the FRCA accepting our offer.*
- 22. To continue our offer of sister-church relations with the FRCA.*
- 23. To convey these decisions to the FRCA by correspondence.*

2. United Reformed Churches of North America (URC/NA)

Synod 2005 decided:

- 1. To continue an exchange of information with a view to establishing a sister-church relationship with the URC/NA.*
- 2. To encourage the URC/NA at their next synod meeting to establish Ecumenical Contact with our churches, with the hope that they will eventually establish Ecumenical Fellowship with us.*
- 3. To send a delegate to the upcoming synod of the URC/NA if it can be done at no cost to synod.*

In July 2007, Rev. Peter Kloosterman was able to attend a URC/NA synod at no cost to the RCNZ. His report, which includes helpful background on the United Reformed Churches and a discussion of their major synod decisions, is attached as Appendix 3.

We are pleased to report that the URC/NA synod responded positively to our encouragement and have

agreed to establish Ecumenical Contact with our churches. As outlined in the appendix, the next stage of the relationship would be the establishment of Ecumenical Fellowship, which we understand would be the equivalent of our sister church relationship.

Especially during this intermediate stage, while correspondence can be helpful, there is no substitute for face-to-face contact. Since the RCNZ are hosting the next meeting of the ICRC in 2009, there will be opportunity to spend some time with the URC/NA representatives, and perhaps even invite them to visit more extensively with our churches before or after that time. We also recommend sending a delegate to the next URC/NA synod, especially if they will then be considering entering Ecumenical Fellowship with us.

Recommendations

- 24. To express appreciation to the URC/NA for establishing Ecumenical Contact with us.*
- 25. To invite the ICRC representatives of the URC/NA to take opportunity to familiarize themselves with our churches in connection with the next ICRC in 2009.*
- 26. To send a delegate to the next synod of the URC/NA.*

3. Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand

Synod 2005 decided:

- 1. That the Interchurch Relations Committee have meetings with the Grace Presbyterian Church to investigate how the Grace Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand can seek closer bonds.*
- 2. That the Interchurch Relations Committee report to the sessions and synodical standing committees outcomes of its meetings with the Grace Presbyterian Church during the intersynodical period.*

Rev Bruce Hoyt had the opportunity to meet informally with Rev Peter Boyd in October 2005. At that meeting it was agreed that our two churches could cooperate in many areas and that we should seek to do so.

At our committee meeting in March 2006 we had opportunity to meet with Rev David Bayne (Stated Clerk of the GPC and member of their Finance Committee which deals with ecumenical relations) and also Rev Geoff McPherson (pastor of the EPC in Christchurch). The GPC has a desire to plant churches throughout NZ where there is no Reformed witness. Although they haven't discussed cooperation in church planting with the RCNZ, they did indicate that the GPC wants to find ways to cooperate with the RCNZ and that they have a desire to develop relations with the RCNZ. There was a favourable response to drawing up a brief basis of cooperation. As a first step in that direction Rev Bruce Hoyt and Rev David Bayne were appointed to draw up a proposed constitution for a fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in New Zealand. This has been done and is attached as Appendix 1. The GPC Assembly 2006 adopted this constitution and awaits the response of the RCNZ synod.

In our meeting with the GPC men the following suggestions for cooperation and interaction were made:

1. Pulpit exchange (Presbytery approval of each GPC minister should not be necessary in view of the confessional faithfulness of the GPC and the RCNZ synod's stated desire to cultivate relations with the GPC).
2. Informing each other of planned visiting speakers, conferences and camps.
3. Informing each other of planned home and foreign mission activity.
4. Encouraging as much local contact as possible: local church retreats, women's presbyterial meetings, church outings, camps, conferences, etc.

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We have also appointed Rev Dirk van Garderen and Rev Hans Vaatstra as fraternal delegates to the 2006 and 2007 Assemblies of the GPC. The report of Rev Hans Vaatstra on the 2007 assembly is attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendations

- 27. To adopt the Constitution and By Laws of the Fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in New Zealand.*
- 28. To direct the IRC to organise yearly meetings of the FPARCNZ in cooperation with the GPC.*
- 29. To encourage pulpit exchange between our two denominations without any requirement for a colloquium doctum for ministers of the GPC.*
- 30. To encourage local churches to have as much local contact as possible: local church retreats, women's presbyterial meetings, church outings, camps, conferences, etc.*
- 31. To use the meetings of the FPARCNZ as a means of informing each other of planned conferences as well as home and foreign mission activity.*
- 32. To authorise the IRC to appoint fraternal delegates to the GPC assemblies depending on the location of these.*
- 33. To direct the IRC to meet with the GPC ecumenical committee with a view to drawing up a basis for an appropriate ecclesiastical relationship with the GPC and report to Synod 2011.*

4. Korean American Presbyterian Church

A delegation of observers of the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), New Zealand Presbytery, introduced themselves to us at the Synod of 2005. Their moderator, the Rev K. Kim addressed the Synod pointing out that they were seeking fellowship with a faithful English-speaking church to help them integrate into New Zealand culture. (See 2005: 104,105, Appendix 8).

Rev Dirk van Garderen took up contact with these churches on behalf of our committee. Two Korean members of the Bucklands Beach congregation became involved as well.

The first meeting took place at Bucklands Beach on May 5th, 2006. Four KAPC representatives attended. The five New Zealand churches belonging to this denomination indicated that their isolation from the KAPC in North America had led them to seek integration with our churches. They indicated that their final goal was to seek cooperation 'under your leadership' and to become 'integrated with your denomination.'

A second meeting took place on July 29th, 2006 at the North Shore. Brs Hoyt and van Garderen as well brs Choi Sung Il and David Cho (Bucklands Beach) met with three delegates of KAPC (NZ). Two possible models for developing further relationships were discussed:

1. That KAPC churches remain a separate (Korean speaking) presbytery and therefore become a fourth presbytery in our denomination. It should be noted that this was not considered the better option.
2. That the five congregations of KAPC each become one of the congregations of Auckland Presbytery and function accordingly. (The rider being that it would then still be possible for the Korean congregations, now part of RCNZ, to have separate meetings if/as warranted, but that they **also** function fully within Auckland Presbytery.)

The second proposal would entail considerable work and adjustment on the part of both Korean and English speaking congregations, but, in the long run, could be workable – all the more if/as interpreters could be developed in this area.

1. The KAPC brethren took these proposals 'on board' and indicated that they would need to go back to their own leadership and members and 'think about it'. We certainly encouraged this.

2. That we meet again as soon as feasible to deliberate on the outcome of discussions at a local level.

Although there have been a number of attempts to continue discussions from that point onwards, there have been no responses from the Korean brethren. Our conclusion is that they no longer wish to pursue contact with us.

Recommendation

- 34. Unless the KAPC (NZ) initiates further contact, no further action be taken.*

D. Web Site

A significant overhaul and update to the RCNZ website took place during the last inter-Synodical period. The IRC appointed a review committee to redesign the website from the ground up, improve the interface and to provide new content. After reporting to the IRC, the review committee contracted Bryan Hoyt, who designed the website for Synod 2005, to make the technical and graphical updates recommended. Improvements included a new map-based method of locating churches, a new login system allowing each church a secure system to update their local details, and a much improved interface for accessing the sermon collection (now including audio sermons in mp3 format. Our website now features a concise gospel summary, as well as an outline of our main beliefs.

We also implemented a denomination-wide email forwarding system to provide permanent email addresses for each minister, clerk and deacons contact to facilitate easier communication between our congregations. This proved very successful and so, based on widespread request, the system was expanded to also provide contacts for the bulletin editor of each congregation. A request to each congregation; can you please ensure that you contact the website administrator when the email addresses of a local contact changes so that everything remains up to date!

As of the date of this report, seven of our congregations have taken up the offer to have their website hosted at no ongoing cost on denominational website servers. It had been envisaged that up to 10 megabytes would be available to each congregation, but advances and improved economics in website hosting during the period allowed that to be expanded to almost 10 gigabytes per site – more than enough storage space, at present rates, for each congregation to host more than ten years worth of their minister's mp3 sermons!

The Synodical budget for our website has remained at between \$600-\$650 per year for the last ten years. We recommend this be increased to \$1000 per year to allow for continued development and maintenance over the next inter-Synodical period.

A statement of income and expenditure for the website is attached.

Recommendation

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

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Statement of Website Income and Expenditure

Service	Description	Total Costs Jan 06 - Dec 06	Total Costs Jan 07 - Dec 07	Total Costs Jan 08 - Dec 08
Hosting costs	Hosting charges	\$163.01	\$163.01	163.01
	Domain renewals	67.00	67.00	67.00
Maintenance	Administration	150.00	150.00	150.00
	Design Web design		675.00	
Total Costs:		\$380.01	\$1,055.01	\$380.01

Synodical Budget	\$1,950.00
Total Costs Incurred	\$1,815.03
Income - Expenditure:	<u><u>\$134.97</u></u>

Appendix 1

Constitution of the Fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches In New Zealand

1. Name

The name shall be the Fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in New Zealand.

2. Basis of the Fellowship

Confessing Jesus Christ as only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the Fellowship to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, infallible and without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dordt, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. This basis provides the warrant for delegates from the constituent churches to meet in fellowship at least yearly to advise, counsel, and cooperate with one another and to promote the unity of the body of Christ in New Zealand.

3. Purpose and Function

1. Facilitate discussion and consultation between member churches on those issues and problems which they face in common.
2. Study matters of common interest and concern and advise the member churches on such matters.
3. Exercise mutual care and encouragement in the perpetuation, retention, and propagation of the Reformed faith.
4. Promote cooperation and the sharing of insights for the advance of the Gospel in New Zealand.
5. Promote cooperation wherever possible and feasible on the local and denominational level in national and foreign mission work, relief efforts, Christian schools, and church education.

4. Nature and Extent of Authority

All actions and decisions of the Fellowship are advisory in character and in no way curtail or restrict the autonomy of the member churches.

5. Membership

1. The founding members of the Fellowship shall be the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand.
2. Those churches shall be eligible for membership which profess and maintain the basis for fellowship expressed in Article 2 and that maintain the marks of the true church (pure preaching of the gospel, the Scriptural administration of the sacraments, the faithful exercise of discipline).
3. Admission to, suspension from, restoration to (after suspension), and termination of membership shall be proposed by Fellowship to the member churches by two-thirds of the ballots cast; this proposal must then be approved within three years by two-thirds of the member churches (acting in their major assemblies). A proposal to suspend or terminate the membership of a member church may be initiated only by a major assembly of a member church. A suspended church may send delegates to meetings of the Fellowship but they shall not vote nor may that church be represented on the Interim Committee.

6. Amendments

This constitution may be amended by recommendation of the Fellowship by two-thirds of the ballots cast and this recommendation must then be adopted by two-thirds of the member churches (acting in their major assemblies). An amendment recommended to the member churches is unamendable, it must be voted on as presented to the member churches.

Bylaws

1. Meeting of the Fellowship

1. The Fellowship shall meet at least once each year.
2. Before adjournment the Fellowship shall set the date and place for the next meeting.
3. All meetings shall be open to authorized observers and guests except when the Fellowship decides to meet in Executive Session. Observers and guests shall be limited to those invited by the Interim Committee.

2. Delegates

1. Each member church shall appoint no more than four delegates to each meeting of the Fellowship.
2. Each delegate shall be entitled to vote on items before the Council, except that voting on major decisions (as determined by the Fellowship) shall be one vote for each member church.

3. Officers of the Fellowship

1. Each meeting of the Fellowship shall elect its own officers, as follows: chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer. The vice-chairman shall normally succeed to the office of chairman, unless the Fellowship determines to conduct an election for a chairman.
2. The responsibilities of the officers shall be as follows:
 - a. Chairman – to preside at meetings of the Fellowship, to make required appointments, to see that business is conducted in an orderly manner.
 - b. Vice-chairman – to assist the chairman upon his request, and to succeed to the chairmanship at the next annual meeting after the opening of the session.
 - c. Secretary – to keep a roll of delegates, to record and distribute the minutes of the Fellowship, to carry on the correspondence for the Fellowship and to prepare the Agenda for the next meeting of the Fellowship. Agenda materials shall be in the hands of the Secretary at least six weeks prior to the meeting date of the Fellowship and shall be sent to delegates four weeks prior to the meeting of the Fellowship. Agenda materials received after the deadline may be added to the Agenda by a two-thirds vote of the Fellowship.
 - d. Treasurer – to receive funds and pay for the expenses of the Fellowship, to submit a yearly financial report to the Fellowship and to propose a levy on the member churches to meet the expenses of the Fellowship. The yearly written reports shall be required describing the nature of the accounts, the deposits made, the investments made, and the interest/dividends earned. The member churches shall be levied proportionately to the number of communicant members of each church. An internal audit shall be conducted each year by two delegates prior to the yearly meeting and a report given to the Fellowship.
3. Terms of office:
 - a. The chairman shall serve for a one year term, such term beginning with the annual

meeting at which he presides, and concluding after the opening items of the next meeting.

b. The vice-chairman shall serve a one year term and shall normally succeed the chairman after the opening of the next annual meeting and the election of officers.

c. The secretary and treasurer shall serve for one year terms, and shall be eligible for re-election.

4. Travel, housing and meal expenses shall be borne by the sending churches.

4. Items for Consideration by the Council

The Council shall deal only with:

1. Communications received from member churches.
2. Inquiries from churches for membership.
3. Reports produced by its committees.
4. Official documents from organizations in which member churches are cooperating.
5. And such matters as may by majority vote be declared properly before the Fellowship.
6. The regular Agenda of the meeting of the Fellowship shall be as follows:

1. Opening devotions
2. Roll Call
 - Member Churches
 - Invited Observers
3. Election of Officers: Chairman, Vice-chairman, Secretary, Treasurer
4. *Reports from Various Member Churches
5. Reports from Observer Churches
6. Adoption of Agenda
7. Approval of Minutes
8. Communications
9. Treasurer's Report
10. Interim Committee Report
11. Old Business
12. New Business
13. Arrangements for Next Meeting (place, time, invitees)
14. Adjournment

*This is a time when delegates share reports from their churches, talk about important issues raised, and pray with and for each other.

5. Committees

1. Committees of the Fellowship

The Fellowship may establish and appoint such committees as are needed. These committees shall continue until the matters assigned to them have been completed. However, if such committees are to represent all member churches, the delegates of each church to the current meeting of the Fellowship shall designate its representative. The Chairman shall designate a convenor for each

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Interchurch Relations Committee

committee.

2. Expenses

The expenses of Committees are to be borne by the member churches (including such items as: meals, travel, lodging, etc.). The cost for such items as duplication and secretarial aids is to borne by the treasury of the Fellowship.

6. Interim Committee

The Interim Committee shall consist of the Chairman, Vice-chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of the Fellowship, together with such others appointed by the member Churches as will provide one representative from each member Church. The Interim Committee shall meet prior to convening of the meeting of the Fellowship to conduct its essential business. Ordinarily only members of the Interim Committee shall attend Interim Committee meetings.

Its functions shall be limited to those specified below:

1. Make the arrangements for the meeting of the Fellowship.
2. Call special meetings of the Fellowship when unusual circumstances warrant.
3. Give counsel to the Secretary regarding correspondence and procedure.
4. Deal responsibly with all matters inadvertently overlooked which call for action before the next meeting of the Fellowship.
5. Advise the Fellowship on matters coming before it.
6. The participating churches shall bear the expenses of their members to Interim Committee meetings.

7. Amendments

These Bylaws may be amended or suspended by the Fellowship on motion passed by two-thirds of the voting delegates.

Appendix 2

Report on the 6th General Assembly of the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand

14th – 16th June 2007

The Synod Commenced with an opening service on the Thursday evening and the election of moderamen, adoption of assembly rules and welcoming of associating visitors of Assembly. Rod Peek served as moderator with David Bayne as Stated Clerk. Committee and other reports were dealt with by Assembly on the Friday and Saturday.

1. Report of the Administration and Finance Committee

Matters which normally occupy the AFC include interchurch relations and to date have involved varying degrees of contact with The Presbyterian Church in America, the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. The Assembly agreed to approve the constitution of a Fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches in New Zealand with the RCNZ and the GPCNZ as founding members. The moderator, stated Clerk, and two other members were appointed as delegates to meetings until the next assembly which is to be held in Christchurch 10th-12th July 2008.

The AFC also oversees the collation of church statistics. Currently the GPCNZ comprises 15 congregations with a total communicant and non-communicant membership of 693 persons, an increase of 19 over the previous year.

The assembly also passed a motion during this session to allow ministers from other denominations to be examined by Presbytery (rather than the general assembly) with two examiners from the other two Presbyteries in attendance.

2. Examination of Peter Reynolds as Teaching Elder in the GPCNZ

Peter Reynolds is a former pastor of a Reformed Baptist Church in Auckland but now a lecturer in Practical Theology at Grace Theological College. His examination was conducted in the presence of the entire assembly with Pastors David Bayne and Barry Swann the appointed examiners. Questions were confined to specific areas, chiefly Systematic Theology, Westminster Confession of faith and the Sacraments. When questioned on Infant Baptism He stated that he had no problem with it, The examination was sustained.

3. Home Missions Committee Report

This committee was delegated to take on Student Ministry, provide Biblical Principles for a previously adopted Church Planting Strategy; raise church planting funds from the denomination and develop a faith promise scheme to facilitate offerings for church planting.

The Assembly passed several motions including the following:

- To adopt the church planting strategy in principle.
- That applications for church planting funding come through Presbyteries.
- That the Faith Offering document be adopted for use in GPCNZ.
- That the Home Mission Committee continue to develop principles and plans to govern and grow effective student ministry within GPCNZ.

A presentation was also heard from Travis Scott a member of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in the USA. Travis plans to work as an evangelist in Central Auckland from 2008 in order to do church planting work for the GPCNZ and to lecture part-time in practical apologetics at GTC.

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Interchurch Relations Committee

4 Overseas Mission Committee

This committee was given the task of developing a missions policy handbook which the Assembly adopted at this meeting. The reporter acknowledged that the Reformed Churches of New Zealand Missions Policy Handbook provided a good basis for theirs.

The Assembly agreed that where Missionaries are sent from Grace Presbyterian Churches there needs to be involvement in selection and approval of such missionaries by Presbytery. Currently GPC are in the process of sending two Medical mission workers Andrew Ure and Martin Secombe, both of whom are working through an international mission agency.

5 Christian Education and Publications Committee Report

This committee oversees publications, Youth work, a women's subcommittee, the denominational news letter "Growing in Grace" and the Grace Theological College. Andrew Young reported on behalf of GTC of a quieter period of activity with only one ministry student preparing for ordination at present. He also advised the assembly of his preparations to go to the USA for a six month sabbatical from July this year.

In conclusion the Assembly was a pleasure to attend. Your RCNZ representative was graciously and warmly received, given the opportunity to address the assembly and given speaking rights during the sessions. GPCNZ are a small denomination with few resources but a wonderful vision, namely that every New Zealander have access to a vital, Bible believing Presbyterian or Reformed Church ministry.

Rev. Hans Vaatstra

Appendix 3

Report on the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America

From 13 to 18 July the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) met at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights (a suburb of Chicago), Illinois. This federation is made up of approximately 90 congregations in the US and Canada. I had the privilege of attending as a representative of the RCNZ. The URCNA was the denomination in which I served prior to coming to New Zealand. It was good to catch up with former colleagues and see the development of this federation as well.

Perhaps a little history would be helpful for you who are unfamiliar with this denomination. The URCNA officially began in 1995. Prior to this many of the churches that make up the URCNA had been members of the CRCNA. When the CRCNA began to compromise her submission to the authority of Scripture a number of the congregations departed. The individual churches were affiliated for a time and their relationship developed and deepened into a new denomination the URCNA. Since 1995 the denomination has been growing not only from other churches leaving the CRCNA, but also through a number of church plants. The congregations that make up the denomination were generally mature in the Reformed faith, but needed to develop their ability to work together and trust one another. This is something that requires time and cultivation. There was evidence of this developing at the recent Synod meeting.

At the meeting there were 164 delegates. Two from each congregation are required, though not all congregations were able to send delegates. The agenda was lengthy, 340 pages, and included 17 overtures, 1 appeal and a number of reports. The Community United Reformed Church of Schererville, Indiana was responsible for the oversight and organization of the Synod. In the URCNA there is not an inter-Synodical committee responsible for dealing with interim decisions. Instead this responsibility is entrusted to the Session that convenes the next assembly. The reason for this arrangement is the recognition of the primacy of the authority that lies with the Session. So, decisions about inter-Synodical matters and the agenda are under the convening Session's authority. This can be a daunting task for a local body, but the Synod was well organized, and the oversight was faithful. The facilities of Trinity Christian College exceeded the needs of the delegates.

The matters dealt with by the Synod were resolved in great harmony and it was enjoyable to witness the Lord working through His Spirit as some difficult issues were resolved amicably. There was much that had the potential to divide, but through discussion and deliberation a way was found to move forward. There are two issues that the URCNA is facing particularly. The first has to do with the confessional prerequisites for membership the second deals with a theological movement known as "Federal Vision". For both these issues a study committee was appointed and assigned the task of bringing clarity to these issues at the next Synod.

Regarding the first there are some struggles within the denomination as to how narrowly or broadly membership should be identified. The URCNA has begun to struggle with this in the context of the North American church life. Many evangelicals are tired of the programmatic activities geared solely for evangelism. They are yearning for more substantial preaching and teaching from the Bible. Many are coming to appreciate this not only in the URCNA but in other Reformed denominations as well. Some hesitation, not from the churches of the URCNA but from the visitors, exists regarding the teaching of infant baptism. This tension is not new. Many denominations have addressed this question throughout history. Generally, those with a continental polity require confessional agreement from her members. There are exceptions allowed, however, these are to be determined based upon the authority and pastoral discretion of the local Session. The Synods in times past have given some directions on this issue, though they have sought to recognize the pastoral sensitivity as well.

The request for an appointment of a study committee recognizes the delicate nature of this issue and the danger of making hasty Synodical decisions. It is one that calls for wisdom regarding the decisions

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Interchurch Relations Committee

that are made. The churches are seeking to remain faithful to God's word and are also striving to be united. Similarly, there is a desire not to be more restrictive than God's word and to guard against a Synodical proclamation which undermines the authority and pastoral sensitivity of a local Session. In this issue the study committee has a significant task ahead of it.

The second issue addressed is the error of Federal Vision. This is an undermining of justification by faith alone. This is something that many of the reformed denominations in North America are addressing. The URCNA formulated the following statement to demonstrate the commitment of the denomination to the truth of justification.

“Synod affirms that the Scriptures and confessions teach the doctrine of justification by grace alone, through faith alone and that nothing is taught under the rubric of covenant theology in our churches may contradict this fundamental error. Therefore the Synod rejects the errors of those:

1. who deny or modify the teaching that ‘God created man good and after His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness,’ able to perform ‘the commandment of life’ as the representative of mankind (HC 6,9; BC 14);
2. who, in any way and for any reason, confuse the ‘commandment of life’ given before the fall with the gospel announced after the fall (BC 14, 17, 18; HC 19, 21, 56, 60);
3. who confuse the ground and instrument of acceptance with God before the fall (obedience to the commandment of life) with the ground (Christ who kept the commandment of life) and instrument (faith in Christ) of acceptance with God after the fall;
4. who deny that Christ earned acceptance with God and that all His merits have been imputed to believers (BC 19, 20, 22, 26; HC 11-19, 21, 36-37, 60, 84; CD I.7, RE I.3, RE II.1);
5. who teach that a person can be historically, conditionally elect, regenerated, savingly united to Christ, justified and adopted by virtue of participation in outward administration of the covenant of grace but may lose these benefits through lack of covenantal faithfulness (CD I, V);
6. who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC 21, 60; BC 29);
7. who teach that Spirit-wrought sanctity, human works, or cooperation with grace is any part either of the ground of our righteousness before God or any part of faith, that is, the ‘instrument by which we embrace Christ, our righteousness’ (BC 22-24; HC 21, 60, 86);
8. who define faith, in the act of justification, as being anything more than ‘learning and resting on the sole obedience of Christ crucified’ or ‘a certain knowledge’ of and ‘a hearty trust’ in Christ and His obedience and death for the elect (BC 23; HC 21);
9. who teach that there is a separated and final justification grounded partly upon righteousness or sanctity inherent in the Christian (HC 52; BC 37).”

Other matters that Synod dealt with were less doctrinal and more practical. These also received substantial deliberation. Several overtures dealt with the Church Order. Some were merely tidying up the language. Others were more significant amendments. Those of significance dealt mainly with matters revolving around ecumenical relations. The URCNA works through a 3 phase mode to develop unity with sister congregations. The final phase would be a merger of the two denominations. The URCNA is moving gradually toward this with the Canadian Reformed Church. The overtures sought to clarify the process and put in a few more significant checks and balances in the process. There is always the danger that a Synod's decisions will force an unnatural merger which will not work at the local level. The churches sought through these clarifications and additional procedures to ensure that unity will arise from among the churches as well as from Synodical decisions.

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The URCNA is very willing to work with churches that are abroad. They have agreed to develop sister relations with the RCNZ and several other denominations. The ICRC is a helpful conference for the furtherance of the unity of the churches. This was apparent in the URCNA's commitment to continue to send delegates but also to the development of relations with churches that are members of the ICRC. What this looks like for the RCNZ is the development of the relationship through a two phase process. The first step is known as "Ecumenical Contact". In this phase the two denominations familiarize themselves with one another and seek to discuss matters of general concern. Both differences and agreements are discussed. Following favourable contact, the next step of the relationship would be "Ecumenical Fellowship." This is a full recognition of one another as faithful and true churches. This is the closest unity that can arise when there is significant geographical separation. Yet it is a complete recognition of our unity together.

The assembly closed on Friday, the churches of the URCNA were well served by the meeting. I was glad to see her mature. Hopefully, as our relationship grows we can learn from one another and share our blessings and burdens together in the work of the Lord. Our unity, while we are separated by many miles, is one which transcends time and space. It is that of the truth of the work of Jesus Christ. It was a privilege to represent that to the Synod of the URCNA and report on that to the RCNZ.

Rev. Peter Kloosterman

Appendix 4

Report on the CanRC Synod 2007

Smithers, British Columbia, Canada. Where is that? I know where Vancouver is but that is the only city I know the location of in BC. These days you go to google maps to find out. Well, it's a small town of about 5500 population, located 650 Km NNW of Vancouver as the crow flies, and more like 1100 Km by winding road if you drive.

Since I had only limited time, I decided to fly. Ouch! \$800 just to get a return flight from Vancouver to Smithers. That comes out of my pocket since Synod 2005 decided that we should send a delegate if it could be done at no cost to Synod. I was going to Chicago for an ICRC Interim committee meeting so attending the CanRC Synod was a little jog from LA to Smithers and then on to Chicago. (The CanRC delegates very graciously passed the hat and provided me with a gift which went a long way toward covering my travel expense.)

The long side trip was worth it! The view even from 17,000 feet going north over BC shows a country that beats New Zealand for scenery! As a Kiwi by choice I hate to say it, but that's the way it is. Mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes, forests, and game of all kinds—an outdoorsman's paradise. Just in my few days around the small town of Smithers going to and from my host's home to the Canadian Reformed Church in Smithers I saw a bear, a moose, several deer, a couple eagles, and two species of humming birds at the feeder outside the window of my host's lounge. It was late spring (Synod met from 9-22 May), so the ski fields were closed but there was still plenty of snow on the mountains surrounding Smithers.

However there was work to do. Plenty of it. I was glad to be an observer rather a delegate since the reports to be studied by the delegates amounted to over 600 pages bound in three volumes and that doesn't count 145 letters from individual churches as well as 3 overtures and 18 appeals. I frankly didn't see how they could finish in two weeks. But they did! The amount of work they accomplished makes our synod's agenda look like a picnic by comparison.

There are 49 Canadian congregations and 4 American congregations totalling 16,000 members that comprise the CanRC. These churches make up 8 classes and 2 regional synods. Each regional synod sends 6 elders and 6 ministers as delegates to the general synod. Most of their ministers are currently trained at the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario. The CanRC also fully support a teacher training college and are involved in mission work in Quebec, Brazil, East Timor, and Papua New Guinea. They have sister relations with Reformed churches in Scotland, USA, Korea, Holland, South Africa, Australia and now New Zealand.

I say "now New Zealand" because this synod decided with a 21-3 majority to accept our offer of sister-church relations. Our previous two Synods (2005 and 2002) had extended this offer because our synod has seen the CanRC churches to be faithful, confessional churches with which we may cooperate in many ways for our mutual strength and for the advance of the Gospel. For several years we have been working closely with the CanRC in the mission in PNG supporting that work through sending the Hagoorts and by our financial assistance. Rev. Steven 'tHart has been warmly received when he has visited our churches. We look forward in less than a year to the commissioning of Rev. Alan Douma for work with Rev 'tHart in PNG.

In recent years we have been helped by the CanRC: at our 2005 Synod it was decided to give provisional approval to the CanRC versions of the Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession to replace our present versions. Some of our elders have read sermons prepared by CanRC ministers and several of our sessions use catechism material developed by men in the CanRC. We have also received members from time to time from the CanRC. [I am not aware of any RCNZ members who have migrated to the CanRC.]

The CanRC Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad recommended that the Synod accept our offer of sister relations. Two of the committee members had visited our churches and had discussions

with our Interchurch Relations Committee. They noted that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia had not been able to enter sister-relations with us because of their difficulty with our sister-church relationship with the CRCA. However the FRCA has made it clear that they have no problem with the CanRC entering into sister-relations with us. There were 16 churches that sent letters of concern to the CanRC synod about our request for sister relations. Most of these referred to our relationship with the CRCA as a potential problem. Their committee however noted that we were seeking to deal faithfully with our Australian sister churches.

In my speech to the CanRC synod I emphasised the value ecclesiastical relations with them would have for us and also assured them that we seek to conduct our ecclesiastical relations with the CRCA in a faithful manner.

After considerable discussion the CanRC Synod decided:

1. To recognize that the RCNZ is a faithful church of God and accept the invitation of the RCNZ to enter into sister-church relations according to the established rules.
2. To write a letter addressed to the next Synod of the RCNZ communicating this decision and including the request that the RCNZ take note of and take seriously the concerns of the FRCA regarding the CRCAustralia.
3. To send a delegate (delegation) to the next Synod of the RCNZ in order to present this letter to formalize relations and visit the churches.

At this Synod it was clear that the CanRC takes ecclesiastical relations with churches abroad very seriously and values them greatly. Much time was spent discussing their concerns about schism in Holland where a small group has split from the GKN-lib. Despite a request from this group, the CanRC decided not to enter ecclesiastical relations with them because they believe their action was schismatic.

The CanRC continues diligent work with the URC/NA as they take steps toward uniting. Specifically they are working toward a common Church Order, a common Psalter Hymnal, common liturgical forms and confessions, and a common approach to theological education for ministers. All the decisions relating to the URC/NA were unanimous. Clearly there is a real desire to proceed with this union between the CanRC and the URC/NA. However no definite date can yet be set.

The CanRC Synod affirmed its previous recommendation of the NIV for use in the churches but also permitted the use of the NKJV, the NASB and the ESV.

Synod agreed to a request to study the issue of women voting. The present practice is that women do not vote in congregational meetings.

Although the CanRC Synod conducts its business differently from our Synod, it considered a huge amount of matter and did so with a calm and deliberate spirit that evidenced the presence of the Spirit of God in their midst guiding them throughout.

We can look forward to cooperating with the Canadian Reformed churches in the years ahead to the glory of God and the advance of the Good News of Christ.

Rev. Bruce Hoyt

Appendix 5

Meeting The OPC North America

From the perspective of our denomination in New Zealand, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church [OPC] in North America is a **big** sister! There were approximately 140 delegates representing 19 presbyteries who attended the 74th General Assembly (GA). The meeting took place at Dordt College (Iowa) from June 13–20. I found being there both a huge responsibility and a rare privilege.¹

‘Big’ is a relative term. Check out the statistics compared with our own in New Zealand and she seems huge. The OPC’s statistician, in his report to the GA, pointed out that they consist of 255 local churches, 57 unorganised mission works and a total membership of 28,445. Total offerings for the year were \$45.9 million (an increase of 12.6% over 2005). There are 462 ministers, (surprisingly) 1,028 ruling elders and 758 deacons.

However, in North America, the OPC is small when compared with her closest sisters in that country. There are 12 denominations in North America with which the OPC has official ‘fellowship’.² The *Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church* [ARPC] (in which the Rev Frank van Dalen services as the Executive Director of World Missions) has a total of 45,573 members (2005). The *Presbyterian Church in America* [PCA], in many respects the OPC’s closest sister in America, has 331,126 members with \$595,293,060 income (with only 49% of churches submitting reports). The *Reformed Church in the United States*, at its 260th Synod (!) reported that it consists of a ‘mere’ 16,000 members! The *Korean-American Presbyterian Church* has 45,350 communicant and 9,930 non-communicant members, 950 ministers serving in 23 presbyteries. They grow at an average rate of 5% p.a.³ Keep in mind that this is only the tip of the proverbial (theologically reformed) iceberg.⁴

¹ ‘Rare’ is an understatement. Checking through the records, I found that our denomination’s first contact with OPC was a letter date 1 Feb 1954 when Mr Bill van Rij wrote asking that we ‘open our doors to each other’s ministers...’. The OPC responded by enabling men like Williamson, Zorn, Tyson, Nilson and more recently Sawyer to come over. Some of these men had a profound influence on the confessional shaping and development of our churches in the 1960s. This led GI Williamson, in a meeting I attended in 1995 in Mangere, to address us as the OPC’s ‘*closest sister*’, a description still accorded to us today.

We in NZ have only had fraternal delegates at the OPC’s General Assembly on two previous occasions. In 1978, Prof R.O. Zorn, then principal at Geelong, was asked to represent our churches and the Reformed Churches of Australia. This was possible because he happened to be in North America at that time. In 1994 the Rev Jack Sawyer, who had returned from NZ weeks before, represented us as well. I was the first person to be sent specifically as a representative of our churches!

² There are 3 tiers or layers of fellowship.

1. *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*: where churches are Reformed in their confessional standards, church order and life. (There are five North American denominations as well as 13 overseas ones in that category.)

2. *Corresponding Relations*: where contact is being taken to get better acquainted with a view to entering into category A. There are 6 American denominations in that category.

3. *Ecumenical Contact*: where mutual contact is maintained via the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

³ Interestingly there is a ‘New Zealand Presbytery’ of KAPC as well. There are about 5 congregations (Auckland and Hamilton). Some preliminary discussion has taken place with them as a result of their request to *merge* with our denomination.

⁴ By way of example, my daughter Delinda worships at a church in Columbia (Missouri) called *The Crossroads*. This church, a part of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in North America, has well over 2,000 people attending. There were 400 in the new members class during 2006. A third (morning) service will commence in September this year to cater for an expected 3,000 worshippers! This in a city no larger than Hamilton! I found this church to be overtly reformed, embracing, teaching and loving Reformed doctrine with joy and enthusiasm.

The 74th General Assembly

Procedures and Protocol

There was the parliamentary protocol on the floor of the assembly. Because of the sheer size (and I suspect tradition) of the GA, *Roberts Rules* (a book of biblical dimensions!) is carried by most 'commissioners' (delegates). Procedures and protocol were extremely strict and rather overwhelming to someone like me used to small presbytery and synod meetings where almost everyone intimately knows everyone else. The GA regularly had to consult its resident expert and *Robert's Rules* when it came to determining how and in what manner an issue should be dealt with. I found this both helpful and frustrating at the same time. Helpful because it structured discussions, especially on those occasions when many wanted to speak (some more than once!). Complex procedural motions limited and defined the manner and the time allowed for presenting an issue. Such procedures, once agreed, were adhered to with great strictness. It was also frustrating. Much time was spent on determining protocol and procedures, especially at the beginning of the GA. Points of order were taken regularly. These often wasted time and interfered with the flow of debate.

What I appreciated was that the first day and a half of the Assembly was spent in temporary Advisory Committees whose task it was to address the reports, overtures and appeals and formulate procedural motions for dealing with the issues and propose amendments (with grounds) when this was considered desirable.

Foreign Missions

The highlight of the GA for many of us was the report of the *Committee of Foreign Missions*. The report, or rather presentation, was dramatic in every sense of the word. Pictures and video clips illustrated what is happening in each of the fields. Various missionaries who were present at the assembly used this time as an opportunity to describe what is happening and the challenges and needs facing them. Mr Wingard, a long term missionary, reported on recent events in Eritrea. A very moving account of recent persecution was given. An entire congregation (including OPC missionaries) was recently arrested and imprisoned on a Sunday morning while at worship. There were also reports on the work in Ethiopia (Mr Curto) and Uganda (Mr Proctor and deacon Mr Robert Wright) where Barry and Anne James are currently serving another term and where John and Cheryl Rogers hope to go later on this year.

The most moving part of the report that brought tears to my eyes concerned the death of a young missionary worker, the Rev Matthew D Bell in Haiti. Mr Bell, a very gifted linguist working in one of the world's most troubled and violent countries, was killed as a result of a motorcycle accident on May 4, 2006. He left behind a wife and five children. It is sometimes difficult to understand God's ways. I was also deeply touched that the OPC had asked for gifts to support Mr Bell's widow and children. In excess of \$1 million dollars was raised for this purpose.

The Directory for Public Worship

The anticipated highlight of this GA was to be the finalisation of the proposed revised version of the OPC's *Directory for the Public Worship of God*. The revised directory has been in the making since - wait for it!-1948 but very intensely since 1989! The hours spent on it are just about impossible to calculate. The *proposed revised version* needed to be ratified by the General Assembly before being given into the hands of presbyteries for what amounts to provisional use. More than a day was spent on this. Those who were there became noticeably exhausted during those long, weary hours.

The result? Well, apart from a few proposed amendments (which were endlessly amended and debated and, usually, rejected!) little progress was made. It is back on the agenda for 2008 (and who knows, for a few years to come!). Why did this happen? One reason is the very nature of an assembly of this size. There is a real danger of doing the work of the committee all over again during its plenary sessions. Another reason is more fundamental. The attention to *detail* found in the *Directory*, detail which, on paper at least, determines *everything* that shall, will, should, ought to or is advisable, appropriate, well, fitting, permissible in a worship service is *enormous*. The basic issue, it seems to me, is between those who do *not* want these kinds of directions and prefer more general principles,

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and those who, for the sake of denominational *uniformity* (as opposed to unity) do. You can imagine the kind of discussions I heard and was a part of at meal times.

Christian Discipline

What struck me was the seriousness with which this denomination takes the third mark of the true church – discipline. An entire day was spent on three cases. The major one that took something like 7 hours concerned a young man who, in spite of worshipping twice on the Lord's Day and attending mid-week activities, was nevertheless *excommunicated* for his steadfast refusal to participate in the Lord's Supper as the OPC celebrates it. In fact he has not, in good conscience, been able to find *any* church on earth where he could partake. He appealed the sentence passed on him by the Presbytery. Is a refusal to participate in this means of grace and thus to undermine the unity of Christ's body indeed censurable to this extent? Would the OPC do the same to someone who refused the *other* sacrament (covenant baptism) for themselves or their children? It does *not!*

What was striking, to me at least, was that these disciplinary sessions were never 'closed'. Anyone was welcome to witness was what being said – including the persons appealing or complaining. I found this both challenging and refreshing in its openness and frankness as compared to what I have experienced in our denomination.

Illegal Aliens in the USA

The final part of the proceedings that produced a fine report and debate had to do with an issue that truly vexes the U.S.A. today – the question of what to do about the millions of illegal aliens in that country and, specifically whether they can be accepted as church members and the offices. While this matter was not resolved, the effort made by the OPC in dealing with this issue biblically is commendable indeed.

For me, attending the GA was a wonderful and challenging experience. I am thankful for the opportunity that was given to me.

Rev. Dirk van Garderen

Appendix 6

Précis of Report on the 2006 Synod of the GKSA

The Synod met from 4th to 15th January, 2006. The following is a précis extracted from John Rogers' report in FF. (If this seems a little cryptic, please refer to the full report which appeared in FF.)

In 2003 the GKSA Synod opened the office of deacon to women and also set up a committee to study a whole range of matters surrounding this issue, both of an exegetical and CO nature. This committee came back to 2006 with a Majority Report recommending all Church offices be opened to women, and a Minority Report to the contrary. Furthermore, the Synod was presented with thirteen appeals against the 2003 decision, from individual churches, classes and particular (regional) synods, all of which focused on how the matter was brought to the table in an un-Church-Orderly way, and secondly, that the decisions of 2003 contravened 1988, which decisions have not been restudied and demonstrated contrary to Scripture and hence still stand.⁵

In GKSA Synods, any matter, after having been introduced to the Synod, is dealt first in an advisory committee, which will then deal with everything related to that particular matter. The first item to come back from the advisory committee to the table of the full Synod related to this subject was the beswaarscrief (appeal) from Particular Synod Bosveld and it was upheld: 2003 was contrary to the CO. Another advisory committee was set up to recommend to the Synod how to proceed from this point, with twelve further appeals and the two reports from the Study Committee left hanging. The following were the final decisions:

- i) *The result of the decision of Synod 2006 concerning the petition of Part. Synod Bosveld is that the decision of Synod 2003, wherein the eligibility of women to the office of deacon was granted, should not have been taken, in light of CO.46.*
- ii) *The fact that the petition of Part. Synod Bosveld was successful means that all other matters resulting from the report of 2003 can no longer be handled by Synod 2006.*
- iii) *A Study Committee is appointed to offer Scripturally grounded advice to the next synod on the question of whether women should be allowed to serve in the office of deacon and/or other organized forms of diaconal works of service, or not. Relevant material, including that which was on the table at Synod 2006, as well as the content of the report to Synod 1988, should be kept in mind. This study must provide clear grounds to substantiate any recommendation it offers that a synod decision must be changed, so that a fixed and binding decision can be made on this matter at the specific synod.*
- iv) *Since some women, on the grounds of the Synod 2003 decision, have already been elected and ordained to the office of deacon and are delivering this service with conviction, Churches, in the light of CO.30⁶, are advised to take the following into account:*

⁵ The relevant articles here are: **Article 31**; *A decision reached at a church assembly by a majority of votes shall be considered fixed and binding, unless it is subsequently proved that it conflicts with the Word of God or the articles of the church order. If someone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major assembly, up to the national synod. An appeal from a national synod to a general synod is possible only when the appeal is made to the Bible, confession, church order or a verdict of the general synod. And Article 46*; *Matters to be dealt with in major assemblies shall not be prepared for discussion until the decisions of previous synods regarding these matters have been studied, in order that matters which had already been finalized were not tabled yet again unless it be considered necessary to review such matters.*

⁶ Article 30 reads; "Church assemblies shall deal only with ecclesiastical matters and shall do so in an ecclesiastical manner. Major assemblies shall deal only with matters that could not be finalized in minor assemblies or that concern all the churches in question collectively." This is the information I have on a paper provided at Synod; I wonder if the reference should actually be to Art.31.

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- a) *that the matter of women elected to and serving in the office of deacon, on grounds of the 2003 decision, must be handled with utmost care;*
- b) *that women already ordained in the office should receive the opportunity to carry on with their work of service while waiting for Scripturally founded resolution from the next synod;*
- c) *that Churches, in their decisions on the further handling of the calling of women to the office of deacon, should bring into account the fact that the decisive, Scripturally founded resolution on this matter will only be given at the next synod, God willing.*

In my speech to the full Synod I had conveyed our Synod's concerns with the 2006 decisions and briefly spoke to some areas of the Majority Report that I (in consultation with M Flinn) considered deficient. I spoke freely and at some length to the Advisory Committee and in both settings they accepted our expressions of concern very graciously. Very many of them feel exactly the same way, of course.

There was, to my mind, a fairly confused and confusing discussion in regard to the Lord's Day. Synod 2003 approved a set of guidelines designed to give members help on how to keep the Lord's Day, although, due to concern over casuistry the term guideline may connote, these were accepted as "*perspectives.*" Among the grounds of the 2003 Sabbath/Sunday decisions, was the following:

In the New Testament there is no command to stop working but there is a command not to stay away from the assembly of the congregation (Heb.10:25). Sunday is not a day of rest first, but a day of worship to celebrate Christ's victory. Yet, each believer has the duty to rest – also on a Sunday. By resting from your work the believer indicates his mastery over labour and that the life in Christ is more than labour.

An appeal was presented to 2006 focusing on the question: was the Sabbath established at creation, hence the emphasis lies on rest and the sanctity of the day; or is it a Sinaitic institution, the emphasis therefore falling on salvation from slavery? For the viewpoint one chooses has consequences for the meaning of the Sabbath for the believer of today. The 2003 Report chose the latter, believing it to be "*the most acceptable viewpoint, as well as the viewpoint with the strongest Biblical grounds...*"

The appellants were concerned that it was never argued why that viewpoint was the most acceptable with the strongest Biblical grounds. Nor was it shown that the other was weak or on what Biblical grounds. Nevertheless, the choice having been made, "*the balance that God created between the rest on the seventh day (Ex.20:11) and the salvation from Egypt (Deut.5:15) is being ignored. The content of viewpoint one – the emphasis on the sanctity and rest, given in Ex.20:11 – is even, to a large extent, left behind, as if it is of less importance.*"

Furthermore, 2003 stated that "*no command is given*" in the New Testament to stop working.... Yet, rest is the duty of every believer – on Sundays as well! The appellants believed this indicated "*an internal contradiction. If no command can be found in Scripture, on what grounds is this duty to rest based?*" In the view of this observer, this and other questions were not really answered. Nevertheless, the appeal failed. One wonders if this matter might be on the agenda again in the future.

The GKSA sustains sister Church relations with quite a number of Churches, including the Reformed Church of Botswana, the Confessing Reformed Church of the Congo, the Christian Reformed Church of the Netherlands, the Free Church of Scotland, the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Sister Church relationships were forged at this synod with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of the US.

The relationship with the Christian Reformed Church NA is on hold because of concerns re women in office, liturgy; and that, reportedly, the matter of homosexuality is beginning to be more openly discussed and defended.

So far as the RCNZ is concerned, our sister-Church relationship was reaffirmed and gratitude expressed "*for the cooperation between the GKSA and the RCNZ, for the trouble the RCNZ has gone through to integrate our ex-members and other ex-South Africans, and for the fact that this small denomination has sent a delegate to our Synod.*" Also, "*The Synod mandates the Deputies for*

Ecumenicity Abroad to help the RCNZ wherever possible with the outreach to and integration of ex-South Africans in New Zealand;" ... noted "that the RCNZ has encouraged the GKSA not to undertake a Scripture critical path; ... Deputies will be delegated to the next RCNZ Synod."

They are very proud of their Theological School and apparently, measured by scientific research and publishing (on average, three items in academic journals per professor pa), it is the most rigorous faculty of the entire Potch University. PU is now a campus of North-West University, the other campus of which is only something like 10% of the size of PU but has equal votes on the council. Not a happy situation and how long they still have real control over the teaching philosophy at PU remains to be seen. The present agreement the Theological School has with the NWU still acknowledges the TS's independence.

A very significant decision was made on the final afternoon. A proposal to dismantle the three National Synod structure (Afrikaner, Middelande and Soutpansberg) and instead all the Churches unite at classis level was accepted by about a two-thirds majority. This is subject to acceptance by the Middelande and Soutpansberg synods, with which there had been discussion beforehand.

This was a pretty brave move and something that has not been achieved by either of the other two Dutch Reformed families of churches. It is fraught with all sorts of questions: for example, what language should be used to ensure that everybody understands proceedings clearly? do decisions of previous national synods bind all the constituents of the new classes & synods? what effect may differences in theological training have? the possibility of conflicting decisions between each national synod (Soutpansberg, particularly, has concerns about this, eg, re women in office). With some hiccups, this was brought into effect in November, 2007. The 2009 Synod should be a very interesting and different event as a consequence.

Rev. John Rogers