

Report of Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad

Main Report with Appendices

January 2021

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1 General

As instructed by Synod Soshanguve North of 2017, Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA) herewith submit to Synod Belhar 2021 their report for the period 2018-2020 and their recommendations for the period 2021-2023.

1.1 Mandate

The mandate given by Synod Soshanguve North 2017 to the DRCA can be found in detail in the Acts of Synod 2017, Arts. 20 and 44, with a summary of all individual mandates in Art. 44. §40. This paragraph is reproduced below. The mandate for each separate task is again presented at the beginning of each section dealing with this task in this report.

Synod Soshanguve North specified the following mandate for the DRCA (Art. 44. §40):

40.1. To maintain sister church relations with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) according to the adopted rules.

40.2. To send a delegate to Synod Bunbury during mid-2018 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

40.3. To maintain sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) according to the adopted rules.

40.4. To send a delegate to Synod Edmonton 2019 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

40.5. To maintain sister church relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCNL) according to the adopted rules, but with limitations on rules 5 and 6.

40.6. To continue monitoring the developments in the RCNL, especially in the areas of concern, and to participate in further direct dialogue with the RCNL and other churches on these matters, if such opportunities arise (e.g. under the auspices of the ICRC or as part of the ICRC 2021 conference) and to search actively for opportunities to address the concerns and debate the underlying hermeneutics with the RCNL.

40.7. To send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCNL in 2020.

40.8. To report to the next FRCSA synod 2020 (now 2021) with recommendations on the future of sister church relationship with the RCNL.

40.9. To send a copy of the synod decisions of the FRCSA Synod 2017, regarding the RCNL, to deputies BBK of the RCNL and to other sister churches.

40.10. To maintain contact and continue discussions with De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands, but not to progress to ecclesiastical fellowship with this church federation.

- 40.11. To inform the DGK in writing about the decisions concerning them.
- 40.12. To maintain contact and continue discussions with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), but not, as yet, to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with this church federation.
- 40.13. To inform the GKN in writing about the decisions concerning them.
- 40.14. To maintain contact with the RCNZ at the present level of exchanging information, so that we may remain informed about developments in their churches.
- 40.15. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in Northern America through the CanRC.
- 40.16. To continue membership of the ICRC.
- 40.17. To send two delegates to the next ICRC meeting.
- 40.18. To uplift the ICRC profile in the FRCSA.
- 40.19. To remain in contact with the ICRC regarding future African regional ICRC conferences.
- 40.20. To co-ordinate the delegation of the FRCSA to the next Africa regional conference.
- 40.21. To keep the booklet Introducing the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa up to date, to adjust it when specific needs arise, and to publish it electronically through the FRCSA website, in co-operation with the webmaster.
- 40.22. To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
- 40.23. To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad.
- 40.24. To submit an interim report for discussion during an Indaba to be held more or less halfway between Synod 2017 and Synod 2020 (now 2021).
- 40.25. To report to the next Synod and propose recommendations according to the Synod Rules as adopted by Synod 2017.

It is accepted that with the approval of the DRCA report and in line with the DRCA mandate, Synod Soshanguve North 2017 also approved the DRCA budget for the period 2017 to 2020 of R 98 000.

1.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to Synod Belhar 2021.

1. To continue the sister-church relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), according to the adopted rules.
2. To send one delegate to the FRCA Synod Albany during 2021 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

3. To continue the sister-church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), according to the adopted rules.
4. To send one delegate to the CanRC Synod Guelph-Emmanuel during May 2022 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.
5. To consider three scenarios and related decisions towards the termination of the sister-church relationship with the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands - RCNL). A letter to the RCNL or her members is to be written by Synod.
6. To maintain ecclesiastical contact with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) and Die Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands and specifically to monitor their progress with unification.
7. To maintain ecclesiastical contact with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ).
8. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in Northern America through the CanRC.
9. To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad, e.g. through a *DRCA Newsletter* or through *Kompas*.
10. To continue membership of the ICRC.
11. To send two delegates to the next international ICRC conference, scheduled for 13 to 19 October 2021 in Windhoek, Namibia.
12. To remain in contact with the ICRC regarding future African regional ICRC conferences and send one delegate to the next conference.
13. To uplift the ICRC profile in the FRCSA by regular feed-back on ICRC activities to the churches, e.g. through a *DRCA Newsletter* or through *Kompas*.
14. To submit an interim report for discussion during an Indaba to be held more or less halfway between Synod 2021 and Synod 2024.
15. To report to the next Synod and propose recommendations according to the Synod Rules as adopted by Synod 2017.

1.3 Deputies

Synod Soshanguve North 2017 appointed the following brothers and sister as Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA): Rev J Bruintjes, Rev P Kgatle (for the ICRC), br J Moes (convener), br JF Raimond and sr G van den Berg. Deputies co-opted br H Luijk as an additional young member. These five brothers and one sister have served as deputies for the full period of three years.

1.4 Activities

To spread the workload, the deputies assigned geographical regions to the members as follows:

ICRC	: Rev P Kgatle (as instructed by Synod 2017)
Europe	: JF Raimond, assisted by Rev FJ Bijzet
Australia	: G van den Berg
North America	: Rev J Bruintjes
FRCSA Website updates	: G van den Berg and H Luijk
Convener / secretary	: J Moes

Deputies met ten times, more or less quarterly, i.e. on 27 March 2018; 12 June 2018; 28 August 2018; 22 November 2018; 19 February 2019; 18 June 2019; 10 September 2019; 5 December 2019; 27 February 2020 and 30 September 2020 (the latter was an “email-meeting” due to Covid-19). The meetings were attended by Rev Kgatle through Skype. The minutes of these meetings are available in the Synod Archives.

In line with Art. 40.2 of the mandate given by Synod 2017, the DRCA delegated Rev P Kgatle to attend Synod Bunbury of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), from 18 to 26 June 2018. The Synod Press Release and Rev Kgatle’s report are attached as Appendix A.1 and A.2, respectively.

In accordance with Art. 40.4 of the mandate given by Synod 2017, the DRCA delegated br J Moes to attend Synod Edmonton of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), from 14 to 23 May 2019. The Synod Press Release and br Moes’ report are attached as Appendix B.1 and B.2, respectively.

In line with Art. 40.7 of the mandate, the DRCA delegated besides br JF Raimond, also Rev FJ Bijzet, to attend the “Buitenlandweek” (Foreign Delegates Week) of Synod Goes of the RCN, which was held from 7 to 11 January 2020. Their report is attached as Appendix C.1.

Together with delegates from the CanRC and the FRCA, Rev FJ Bijzet, on behalf of the FRCSA, had a meeting with representatives of De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands, on 9 January 2020, in line with Art. 40.10 of Synod 2017. The minutes / notes of this meeting are attached as Appendix C.2.

Since the past Synod 2017, no ICRC conference has been convened. The next conference is scheduled for 13 to 19 October 2021 in Windhoek, Namibia. The Africa Regional Mission Conference of the ICRC, which was scheduled for 4 to 7 August 2020 in Nairobi, Kenya, had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is scheduled for some future date.

In accordance with Art. 40.22 of the mandate given by Synod 2017, Br J Moes provided feed-back on progress with the work of the DRCA at the Indaba in Johannesburg on 1 and 2 March 2019 and submitted an interim report, attached as Appendix D.

1.5 Compilation of this report

The main body of this report was compiled with inputs from all deputies, where each deputy focused on his/her specific area of responsibility. The appendices are compiled by and the responsibility of the respective authors.

1.6 General recommendations

DRCA requests Synod to adopt the following general recommendations:

- 1) To appoint new deputies for the 2021 – 2023 period, until the next Synod.
- 2) To appoint the following brothers and sister as deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad for the 2021 – 2023 period: Rev J Bruintjes, sr G van den Berg, br JF Raimond, br J Moes, as well as Rev P Kgatle and Rev C van Wyk (both for the ICRC), all as continuing members of the previous deputies, except for Rev van Wyk.
- 3) DRCA should provide regular feed-back to the churches on developments in our sister churches and the ICRC, e.g. through a half-yearly *DRCA Newsletter* and/or through *Kompas*.

Grounds

- 1) Continuity within the DRCA is important to maintain active sister church relationships and stay aware of each other's ecclesiastical developments.
- 2) The deputies should preferably be located in the same area so that meetings can be held with physical presence of the majority of members.
- 3) The work of the DRCA is only useful for the churches (who carry the costs) if regular information / feed-back is given to the churches. This requires a profound interest in church matters and good reporting skills.
- 4) The activities of the ICRC become more and more prominent in our international ecclesiastical relationships. Many of its activities are related to mission work. Therefore, the task to stay actively involved in the ICRC requires a stronger presentation in the DRCA from missionaries.

2 Contact with sister churches

This chapter describes what deputies did to carry out the mandates of Synod Soshanguve North 2017 to maintain relations with our three sister churches.

2.1 Rules for sister church relations

DRCA are carrying out their tasks in line with the new version of the Rules for Sister Church Relations, as adopted by Synod Bethal 2014 (Acts Bethal, Art. 25, § 2.1).

2.2 Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.1 and 40.2)

- 1) To continue sister-church relations with the FRCA according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To send one delegate to attend Synod Bunbury 2018 of the FRCA and to instruct this delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

2.2.1 Activities

The FRCA has a total membership of about 5 000, with 16 churches and with 14 pastors in active service. Deputies delegated Rev P Kgatle to attend Synod Bunbury 2018 of the FRCA, held from 18 to 26 June 2018, and to give a presentation on the FRCSA. The Press Release of Synod Bunbury is attached as Appendix A.1. The full Acts are available on website https://synod.frca.org.au/2018/acts/Acts_Of_FRCA_2018_Synod.pdf . Rev Kgatle addressed the synod meeting on 22 June 2018 (text in Appendix A.2), where he transferred the cordial greetings of the FRCSA.

Developments in the FRCA are being followed mainly via personal contacts and the *Una Sancta*, the FRCA church journal which is sent to us monthly in electronic format. Classis reports are also published in this journal.

2.2.2 Decisions of Synod Bunbury 2018

Relations with Churches Abroad

The Synod commenced on the 18 June 2018 at 7:30 pm at the Free Reformed Church of Southern River. The opening service was led by br Case Visser from the convening church of Bunbury.

The Synod started with examining the credentials of foreign delegates. The credentials of delegates of the following churches were examined:

1. Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)
2. United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA)
3. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
4. The Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (RCNL)

5. Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)
6. The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)
7. Korean Presbyterian Church Kosin (KPCK)
8. The Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia (GGRI)

It was proposed and decided that Rev J Sawyer of the **OPC in the USA** be invited to address Synod, to give greetings from the OPC. Synod adopted a proposal for initiating ecclesiastical contact with the OPC, with a view to establishing sister-church relations. This was based on the following facts: they are a faithful church, have a similar heritage, are in a sister-church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, are well known to the Australian churches and they desire such a relationship with the FRCA.

a) Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (RCNL)

Before the discussions commence, the chairman invited Rev Dr MH Oosterhuis, the chairman of Synod Meppel 2017, to present an address about the decisions of the RCNL, especially concerning the decision of Synod Meppel on the topic of women in office.

Synod considered that the relationship with the RCNL had become untenable due to their use of “new hermeneutics” – principles allowing the current cultural context to play a determining role in explaining Scripture. This has allowed the RCNL to turn away from clear instructions in God’s Word and to show unfaithfulness by lack of submission to that Word. This is evident from the recent decision of the RCNL (Synod Meppel 2017) to allow women to the office of deacon, elder and minister. There has been no adequate response, let alone repentance, to earlier letters of admonition.

Synod, therefore, decides to terminate the sister-church relationship with the RCNL

The chairman notes that this decision is made **with great sadness**, and closes in prayer.

b) De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)

Material:

The report of Deputies for DGK and GKN.

A letter from the General Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), requesting sister-church relations with the FRCA.

A letter from FRC Darling Downs, requesting Synod to mandate deputies to investigate whether there is a lawful continuation of the RCNL, and in this investigation to consider both the DGK and GKN, noting that the DGK lay claim to being the continuation of our Dutch sister churches.

A letter from FRC Byford, proposing to continue to monitor developments in the RCNL, DGK and GKN.

Letters from FRC Albany and FRC West Albany, proposing that Synod mandate deputies to continue to monitor developments in both the DGK and GKN.

Synod decided to appoint new deputies with the mandate to:

- Continue to monitor developments in both the DGK and GKN;
- Encourage the DGK and GKN to work towards unity with each other;
- Maintain contact with the DGK and GKN;
- Report back to the next Synod.
- Await recommendations from the churches on how to proceed with these relations.
- Monitor the relationship that exists between the DGK and the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford, working in close contact with the CanRC deputies regarding these developments.

c) Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Synod expresses thankfulness for the sister-church relationship with the CanRC and for their continued faithfulness to the Word of God and their love for the gospel. It is a valued relationship of much benefit to both church federations.

Synod decided to:

- Mandate new deputies to continue to monitor developments in the CRC which would benefit the FRCA. The understanding and support which exists between the two churches assists in dealing with matters that the respective federations face.
- Continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules.
- Send two delegates to the next CanRC General Synod in Edmonton during May 2019.

d) Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA)

The chairman invites Rev P Kgatle to present his address on behalf of the **FRCSA**. Rev A Hagg is then invited to respond to the address, after which he leads the meeting in prayer for the sister churches in South Africa. The sister-church relationship with the FRCSA will continue, with thanksgiving for their continued faithfulness to the Word of God and their love for the gospel. This relationship has flourished in recent years and mutual visits have proven beneficial, supportive and encouraging.

Synod also decided to:

- Request the Deputies Auditor for Synod Treasurer to audit the financial records of the support provided to the FRCSA and report to the next Synod.
- Appoint new deputies with the mandate to:
 1. Maintain the sister-church relations according to the adopted rules;
 2. Send two delegates to the next FRCSA synod in 2021;

3. Coordinate responses to any requests for support from Deputies within the FRCSA (including either Needy Churches or Theological Training) and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate; and
4. Keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via *Una Sancta*.

Grounds:

- The FRCSA give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order.
- Our visits to South Africa and their visits to us have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.
- The South African churches request ongoing financial support as they continue on a road to self-sustainability. Whereas in the past this support was required for needy churches, due to the increase in vacancies the need for support has shifted to include theological training. Such support should be coordinated by deputies and the churches kept informed, e.g. through *Una Sancta*. Financial accountability of the support provided is important.

e) Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)

The sister-church relationship with the RCNZ will continue, with thanksgiving for their continued faithfulness to the Word of God and their love for the gospel. In many ways, the relationship with the RCNZ is growing and maturing in a natural way. For a sister-church relationship to function in a meaningful way, it is important for the membership to become acquainted, and given that the relationship is still in its infancy, continued growth is needed to strengthen these bonds in practical ways.

There is one point, however, that deputies identified as requiring further thought and consideration, which is the matter of coordinating financial arrangements for retiring ministers. Deputies have been mandated to help overcome this obstacle, so that, also in this respect, the bond with the RCNZ may be strengthened.

There is a need for greater co-operation and understanding. Therefore, deputies are to meet with the RCNZ Inter-Church Committee during the inter-synodical period, subject to finances, and send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCNZ. They should also promote familiarisation of the memberships of the RCNZ and FRCA.

Deputies should continue to monitor the RCNZ's relationship of Ecumenical Fellowship with the CRCA, encourage them to continue their warnings, and to be consequential in this relationship in light of the concerns expressed in the report to Synod Baldivis 2015; they should also encourage the RCNZ to be vigilant in its approach to theological training.

f) Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI)

The sister-church relationship with the GGRI will continue, with thanksgiving for their continued faithfulness to the Word of God and their love for the gospel. Synod Armadale 2012 noted that “this is now a larger federation as a result of the union in February 2012 of what were previously three federations, namely the federation of GGRI-NTT (our original sister church), the federation of churches in Papua, and the federation of churches in Kalimantan Barat”. This synod mandated the deputies to report to the churches with more information concerning this larger federation with its three regional synods.

This mandate has been renewed, since it was decided that not enough has been reported about the Reformed character of these federations. Deputies are asked to pay particular attention to the areas of church polity and liturgy and to, where necessary, monitor, evaluate and advise.

Contact with the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia (**GGRC**) was continued, while synod also mandated deputies to establish official contact with a newly-formed federation in Indonesia, the **GGRI-Timor**. This is a federation that came into existence in 2016 and was the result of mission work sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville, Ontario. The relationship between these three federations is not always easy to work with, yet deputies were also tasked with encouraging the GGRI in their efforts to work towards federative unity with the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor.

The Theological College of the GGRI is supported by funding from the FRCA. Synod mandated deputies to continue to support theological training for the GGRI, as well as finding a local church to assume responsibility for the financial support of theological training for the GGRI, following Synod 2021.

g) First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC)

The sister-church relationship with the FERC will continue, with thanksgiving for their continued faithfulness to the Word of God and their love for the gospel. This relationship has grown richly in the last three years.

In the inter-synodical period the interaction between the two federations has increased. The Lord has blessed the FERC with the establishment of a sister church relationship with the Covenant Grace Church of Penang (Malaysia), a small instituted church which is the result of years of mission work by the FERC. At the same time, there are challenges associated with being a single-church federation. For this reason, they have sought support from the FRCA by requesting ministers from the FRCA to teach and preach in their midst.

Deputies were mandated to visit Singapore twice in the next three years, give timely reports concerning the FERC to the membership in the FRCA and to offer assistance to the FERC of Singapore, where requested and feasible.

h) Korean Presbyterian Church Kosin (KPCK)

Synod **decided** to continue sister-church relations with the KPCK according to the established rules and to appoint new deputies with the mandate to send two delegates, including (if possible) one Korean speaking delegate, to the KPCK General Assembly in 2019. Deputies should investigate whether members of this sister church are living in the Perth metro area, with a view to improving contact and cooperation with them.

i) Southern Presbyterian Church and Evangelical Presbyterian Church

Classis North proposed to Synod to investigate the possibility of **ecumenical relations** between the FRCA and the **Southern Presbyterian Church** as well as the **Evangelical Presbyterian Church**. Both of these churches have congregations within the Launceston/Legana region, with whom the churches of Launceston and Legana have had contact. A deputyship was established to investigate these two churches and report back on the feasibility of further ecumenical contact. For this to proceed, their doctrine, history, including the reasons for their split and continued separation, and their respective national and international contacts need to be investigated. Deputies should show that the marks of the true church (Art. 29 BC) are present.

j) ICRC

Two proposals have been received from FRCA churches. The FRC Launceston notes that the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad received an invitation to attend the last ICRC meeting in 2017. Because attending the ICRC was not a part of their mandate, the deputies were unable to interact with this letter. Launceston, acknowledging the controversy of some years ago, feels that this should not be an obstacle to observing the proceedings of the ICRC today, and so requests that Synod mandate deputies to accept an invitation to attend as observers, especially when the ICRC is scheduled to hold meetings in the Asia-Pacific region.

The FRC Baldivis notes with interest the same comments in the deputies report that Launceston does, placing this within the context of the impossibility of maintaining meaningful sister-church relationships with reformed churches all over the world. Therefore, they too request that Synod mandate deputies with the mandate to attend the next two meetings of the ICRC and to report this to the churches, and then to await a proposal from the churches should it be deemed beneficial to apply for membership of the ICRC.

Synod declares the proposals to mandate attendance of the next ICRC meeting **inadmissible**.

k) Training for the Ministry

Deputies for Theological Training presented Synod Bunbury with two proposals in connection with the feasibility of an Australian theological seminary. One proposal recommended the establishment of an Australian theological seminary in the short term, while the other recommended that Synod decide “that it is not feasible to establish a Free Reformed Theological Seminary at this time.”

Synod decided not to pursue the establishment of an Australian theological seminary at this time. A number of reasons were given for this decision, including the lack of broad support among the churches for this initiative, the understanding that Article 17 of the Church Order does not by definition require the establishment of a local seminary, and acknowledgement that concerns expressed by the CRTS Board of Governors were significant.

Synod recognised that among some of the churches in the federation there is support for the establishment of an Australian theological seminary in the medium to long term. However, an Australian theological seminary should only be considered within the context of the broader Asian-Pacific community, which includes the sister churches in the region. For now the FRCA will, with thankfulness, continue to send students to the CRTS in Hamilton.

Synod mandates **new deputies** to

- Develop and submit to the next synod a strategic long term plan for a future Australian theological seminary that will:
 1. be an accredited seminary to train our men for serving as ministers and missionaries;
 2. have the potential to serve our sister churches and other churches in the wider Reformed community in the Asia-Pacific region (e.g. the Philippines, New Zealand, Indonesia, Singapore, South Africa);
 3. have the potential to serve the needs of the broader FRCA community including office bearer training, teacher training and enrichment courses for the members.
- Solicit the churches’ input regarding an Australian theological seminary that could serve the wider Reformed community;
- Continue to monitor the factors that have been identified by the churches as reasons for not establishing our own theological seminary at this time;
- Make use of the expertise of CRTS as necessary;
- Consult with our sister churches, and other churches in Australia and the Asia Pacific region with whom local FRCs have contact, regarding the potential benefits of an Australian theological seminary as described above;
- Consult with the CRTS for opportunities to co-operate in an Australian theological seminary; and
- Provide a recommendation regarding the execution of this strategic plan and an associated implementation timeline. This should include the consideration of utilising existing infrastructure.

l) Book of Praise

There is merit in keeping the Australian version of the Book of Praise as similar as possible to the Canadian Book of Praise so that they can be used interchangeably by the members, and so that our book closely resembles that used by our Canadian sister churches.

Some changes have been made to the psalter which Australia and Canada share. To reflect greater ownership, some uniquely Australian additions have been adopted. The name will now be 'Australian Book of Praise, Anglo-Genevan Psalter'.

Nineteen new hymns have been approved for use in the churches, in addition to the 65 hymns already in use. The English Standard Version Bible translation is used in the church services and this translation will be used for any quotations and references in all the church confessions (Three Forms of Unity) and all the liturgical forms. The personal pronouns for God will not be capitalised as this is not done in the original Greek, Aramaic and Hebrew.

m) Website

Synod had received a letter of the FRC Launceston concerning a reinvigorated **FRCA website**, including news items and press releases from the churches. It was stressed that the churches would be well served by a regularly updated and revamped website. An attractive website will serve to promote the churches in the local and wider community.

Synod appointed a new deputyship of four members, some having technical expertise, with the following mandate:

- To maintain the existing content on the FRCA website and the associated technical functions.
- To update the look and functionality of the FRCA website and to make it mobile friendly.
- To invite the churches to send news items and press releases to the website committee for inclusion on the FRCA website.
- To allocate a \$2,000 interim budget.
- To serve Synod 2021 with a report of their activities, a financial statement, a proposed budget, and any recommendations regarding additional content or functionality.

n) Indexing Synod Decisions

A request was received from FRC Launceston that all Acts of Synod of the FRCA are made publicly available online, in searchable pdf format.

Synod decides to appoint deputies with the mandate to:

- Collate the decisions of Synod Bunbury 2018 as they relate to articles of the Church Order;
- Publish these decisions on the official web page of the FRCA;

- Place one bound paper copy in the archives after the decisions of Synod Bunbury 2018 have been indexed;
- Make all the published Acts of the Synods since the start of the FRCA available on the FRCA website, without password protection, in searchable pdf format.
- Place an updated copy of the Church Order on the FRCA website and publish it in a format which can be inserted into the Canadian version of the Book of Praise.

2.2.3 Conclusion

It can be concluded from the decisions of Synod Bunbury 2018 and from other information on the churches that the FRCA want to remain faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions.

2.2.4 Recommendations

DRCA recommends to **Synod Belhar to decide** the following:

- 1) To continue the sister church relation with the FRCA according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Albany mid-2021 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.
- 3) To provide regular feed-back to the churches on developments in the FRCA.

Grounds

- 1) The FRCA give evidence of continued faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
- 2) Personal visits are an effective means of developing, maintaining, and building good sister church relations.
- 3) Both the FRCA and the FRCSA are small church federations with a similar background and some similar challenges. By maintaining good contacts and by learning from each other, both church federations will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of Christ in a secular world.

2.3 Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.3 and 40.4)

1. To maintain sister church relations with the CanRC according to the adopted rules.
2. To send a delegate to Synod Edmonton, Alberta, 2019 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

2.3.1 Activities

Deputies maintained the sister-church relationship with the CanRC by attending their Synod Edmonton and meeting with some of their deputies. Deputies have also tried as much as possible to stay updated on the cultural and theological discussion in the churches by reading their magazine publication, *Clarion*, as well as regularly checking the homepage of the federation for further news. As of July 2020, the CanRC have 64 congregations, 19 336 members, 63 pastors and 5 professors in active service.

In accordance with mandate 2 above, br J Moes was delegated to attend Synod Edmonton, which met from 14 to 23 May 2019. Br Moes brought our greetings and addressed synod. He expressed our gratitude for the unity of faith and the assistance that the FRCSA receives from the CRTS in theological training. He also spoke to the need for financial support for mission projects in South Africa. Unfortunately, time constraints did not permit to give a PowerPoint presentation on the FRCSA.

Br Moes wrote a report documenting the major decisions of Synod Edmonton. This is attached as Appendix B.1 and is based on the daily press releases of this Synod. Section 2.3.2 below is a summary of the decisions that are relevant to our churches. The official Acts of Synod Edmonton 2019 can be found on website: <https://canrc.org/documents/8804>.

2.3.2 Decisions of Synod Edmonton 2019

a) Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

With gratitude for all his work over the years, particularly with the accreditation process of CRTS, synod approved the retirement of Dr. Gerhard Visscher as professor of New Testament. He served as Principal of the CRTS for nine years. Dr. William den Hollander was appointed as the new professor of New Testament. He studied in Canada and has also been a research fellow at the University of Pretoria in 2015. He graduated from CRTS in 2016 and then was then called as a minister to Langley.

Synod instructed the Committee for Pastoral Training Program Funding to continue with its present mandate by funding one full-summer internship for each M.Div. student of CRTS who aspires to the ministry in the CanRC. The internship could occur after the second or third year of a student's studies. This will also be beneficial for FRCSA students who will, the Lord willing, do their internships in South Africa.

b) Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

The CanRC and FRCA enjoy a special relationship through the frequent exchange of pastors and students for the ministry and the common language. In the past few years, several pastors have accepted calls and moved across, or vice versa.

Theological students from the FRCA receive their training at the CRTS. The FRCA contribute financially (equally per church member) to the college. The CRTS professors regularly visit the Australian churches for teaching and speaking engagements. Even so, the FRCA are exploring the option of starting their own seminary. Synod asked CRTS board of governors to continue contact with the theological education deputysip of the FRCA, particularly in matters pertaining to FRCA desire to start a seminary in the medium to long term.

Although on opposite sides of the world, the relationship between these two federations is strong. And although the FRCA are growing more independent and self-sustaining (moving to establishing a seminary and publishing their own Book of Praise) the bonds between the two federations are valued and do not appear to show any problems.

c) Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

Synod decided to continue the sister-church relationship with the FRCSA and to mandate the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to send a delegation to our next synod, like they did in 2017. They look forward to even closer ties with the FRCSA and cooperation where possible.

They also decided to recommend the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of continued and increased prayerful and financial assistance, to help them with their extensive mission work as well as the compassionate pursuits among the disadvantaged.

Synod was positive towards CRTS supporting the training of theological students, also from South Africa. Over the past three years CRTS has been supporting theological education in the FRCSA through the use of online lectures, as well as guest lecturers from CRTS. It was also noted that the financial needs of the FRSCA continue to be substantial and merit attention.

d) United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

The CanRC and URCNA continue to be in “Phase 2” of federated unity. Synod encouraged the churches to continue to foster relationships with the local URCNA churches. These activities could include, but are not limited to, pulpit exchanges, joint community and mission projects, and joint study opportunities.

Nevertheless, several decisions made by the URCNA synods seem to have put “Phase 3”, i.e. federative unity, out of reach for the near term. In fact, the recent URCNA synod decided to “table indefinitely” any encouragement to move towards proposing the churches to enter “Phase 3A” relationship. There is still a difference in church polity

matters. Furthermore, in 2018, the URCNA published a song book together with the OPC churches called the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal (TPH)*. This Psalter has been accepted with gratitude and is already in use in over 90% of the URCNA churches. There were several overtures at Synod Edmonton to also adopt the TPH for use in the CanRC.

URCNA delegate Pols address spoke to some of the difficulties in moving toward Phase 3A:

It was observed that matters of church order are possibly the largest remaining hurdle in the path of our relationship with each other... We cannot overcome the real differences without growing clarity and understanding about their nature. As to the work of this synod, you are facing the far reaching significance of dealing with overtures for the adoption of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal for use in your churches. Having perused the letters from your churches on this matter, it is clear that this may be no easy matter to address.

Because of this Synod decided to not reappoint the Committee for Church Unity – including the coordinators, the sub-committees, and related committees (Church Order, Theological Education, Common Songbook, and Creeds and Forms). This decision shifted the churches focus toward first working more at unity at a local level where possible.

The URCNA also decided “to discontinue the relationship of Ecumenical Contact with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCNL) due to their decision to open all offices in the church to women, regardless of many and repeated admonitions.”

The CanRC has four congregations in the USA (officially, the church federation is called ‘The Canadian and American Reformed Churches’). These congregations are found in Lynden, Washington; Nooksack, Washington; Denver, Colorado; and in Grand Rapids, Michigan. For the future, the process of getting to know each other better continues. Where URCNA and CanRC churches are in the same area there is generally very good contact.

e) Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCNL)

Concerning the RCNL, Synod Edmonton 2019 unanimously decided “With sadness to discontinue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCNL) and to implore the CanRC’s to continue in prayer for the RCNL.” After more than sixty years of close association and cooperation, it was painful to feel this separation from what is historically their “mother church”.

Synod also took the extraordinary step to “send a letter (in English and Dutch) to all individual RCNL congregations explaining the decision to terminate the sister-church relationship with the RCNL.” This letter is attached as Appendix B.3. The letter included a call to them to appeal at the next synod of the RCNL (Goes 2020) to the decisions taken on women in office at their Synod Meppel 2017, but, if this was unsuccessful, to separate from the RCNL, in line with Art. 28 BC.

f) Relations with other churches

The CanRC continue to be part of the NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches) locally, as well the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches) internationally. They also have some form of church relationships around the world. Since their last synod four churches have asked to interact with the CanRC.

g) Book of Praise (BoP) / Trinity Psalter Hymnal (TPH)

At Synod Dunnville 2016, the Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP) received the following mandate “to monitor the development of a joint OPC/URCNA songbook and when possible to provide the churches with a sense of this new song book’s composition, quality, and theological accuracy.” It was decided not to accept the TPH for use in the churches.

Rather, regarding the Psalms,

to seek input from the churches as to which non-Genevan renditions of the Psalms could be added to enhance the Psalm section of the BoP; to compile a list of suitable additional Psalm renditions for possible inclusion in the BoP, using the TPH as a primary resource.

Concerning the Hymns, it was decided,

to seek input from the churches concerning replaceable and additional hymns for the 2014 Book of Praise, using the TPH as a primary resource; to compile a list of such hymns keeping in mind that at this time the final number of hymns in the Book of Praise should not exceed 100 (as per GS 2004), and being flexible with the structural template (Apostle’s Creed) of the hymn-section of the 2014 Book of Praise.”

h) Bible Translation

In terms of Bible Translation, the Synod continues to recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) for use in the churches.

2.3.3 Conclusion

What deputies have heard and is compiled in the last three years, as well as what is evident in the Acts of Synod Edmonton (Emmanuel) 2019, gives confidence that the CanRC remain faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions. Therefore, we submit to Synod Belhar the following recommendations.

2.3.4 Recommendations

Synod decides:

- 1) To maintain sister-church relations with the CanRC according to the adopted rules.

- 2) To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.
- 3) To provide regular feed-back to the churches on developments in the CanRC.

Grounds:

- 1) The CanRC give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed confessions, and the Church Order.
- 2) Personal visits are an effective means of developing, building, and maintaining good relations.
- 3) Both the CanRC and the FRCSA are church federations with a similar background and some similar challenges. By maintaining good contacts and by learning from each other, both church federations will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of Christ in a secular world.
- 4) We share CRTS as a centre for theological training for our students.

2.4 Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCNL)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.5 - 40.9)

- 1) To maintain sister church relations with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCNL) according to the adopted rules, but with limitations on rules 5 and 6.
- 2) To continue monitoring the developments in the RCNL, especially in the areas of concern, and to participate in further direct dialogue with the RCNL and other churches on these matters, if such opportunities arise (e.g. under the auspices of the ICRC or as part of the ICRC 2021 conference) and to search actively for opportunities to address the concerns and debate the underlying hermeneutics with the RCNL.
- 3) To send two delegates to the next Synod of the RCNL in 2020.
- 4) To report to the next FRCSA synod 2020 with recommendations on the future of sister-church relationship with the RCNL.
- 5) To send a copy of the synod decisions of the FRCSA Synod 2017, regarding the RCNL, to deputies BBK of the RCNL and to other sister churches.

2.4.1 Activities

a) Activities after Synod Meppel 2017

The main decisions taken by Synod Meppel 2017 of the RCNL have already been reported in the DRCA Report of April 2017 and in the Addendum Report of July 2017 to Synod Soshanguve North, of 7 to 11 August 2017. Synod Meppel was held from from 27 January initially to 30 June (when proceedings closed for the summer holidays) and finally to 24 November 2017. The main controversy for the FRCSA and other sister churches was the decision of Synod Meppel 2017 to open all ecclesiastical offices to women. The full Acts of Synod Meppel (in Dutch) are available through website: <https://www.RCNL.nl/bibliotheek/generale-synode-meppel-2017/> .

Developments in the RCNL were monitored mainly through reading the monthly Dutch journal “Nader Bekeken”, as well as by following publications on the website “eeninwaarheid.info”.

The DRCA received a letter from BBK of the RCNL, dated 2 May 2018, with a request to the FRCSA and a few other churches to assist with the organization of hosting an international conference on hermeneutics, scheduled for early in 2019. In accordance with our mandate our response to this request was supportive, but we gave as our opinion that the conference should be held in the Netherlands, so that our Dutch brothers and sisters had the opportunity to participate in such a conference. Our response letter was sent on 13 June 2018 (enclosed as Appendix C.1).

Deputies had an informal meeting on 28 April 2019 in Bellville with Rev Joop Schreuder, member of deputies BBK of RCNL, who himself was also concerned about the developments in the RCNL.

Deputy br Raimond compiled three articles, while Rev. Bijzet added one article for “*Kompas*” to inform the members of our churches about the developments in the RCNL. These articles were published in the *Kompas* issues of May, June, October and November 2020.

b) Synod Goes 2020

Br JF Raimond and Rev FJ Bijzet (as previous member of the DRCA and emeritus of the church of Cape Town) were delegated to attend the “Buitenlandweek” (Week of foreign delegates) of Synod Goes which was held from 7 to 11 January 2020 at the Mennorode Conference Centre in Elspeet, the Netherlands, where also the synod convened. The greeting message of our churches was handed in beforehand (attached as Appendix C.2) and was included in an information booklet for the delegates of Synod Goes. The delegates made use of the opportunity that was offered to address the synod itself in its meeting on Friday 10 January 2020 (the text of the address is attached as Appendix C.3).

The delegates attended and took part in the discussions on the following subjects:

- Report of “Deputaten Kerklike Eenheid” (Deputies for Church Unity),
- New Church Order (needed after unification of the RCNL with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken - NGK).
- Women in Office

The report from the delegates who attended the “Buitenlandweek” of Synod Goes is attached as Appendix C.4.

c) Woman in church offices

Synod Goes received revision requests from churches on the decisions on allowing women in all church offices, taken by Synod Meppel 2017.

- Twenty three RCNL churches had requested that the decisions of Synod Meppel with regard to women in office be withdrawn, and a further twenty one had requested a revision of the grounds for those decisions.
- The synod meetings dealing with the revision requests followed directly on the “Buitenlandweek”. A few times these meetings were held in private, which is against the synod rules on openness. Furthermore, a “framework document” was discussed that was not made public. This is also against synod rules on openness.
- The meetings of Synod Goes were suspended on 4 April 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic. At the time of suspension the revision requests had not been dealt with. Synod meetings, dealing with these requests, were resumed on 4 and 5 September 2020. However, the synod meetings with the Nederlands

Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK), with the purpose of working towards unity, were continued virtually after the suspension on 4 April.

- On 3 July the synod commission that was appointed to advise Synod Goes on the revision requests, released their report called “*Elkaar van harte dienen*” (*Serving each other heartily*). The English version of this report can be found using the following link : <https://lv-gs2020.nl/download/1548> .

This commission report, however, does not deal with the objections of the churches against the decisions of Synod Meppel in a substantial way, as outlined below.

- i) The way in which the objections of the churches are reproduced in the report is a caricature of what they are really saying.
- ii) Instead of testing the objections and deciding whether these churches correctly or incorrectly say that the decisions of Synod Meppel 2017 are against the Word of God, the report offers a different interpretation of the Bible texts.
- iii) The report dedicates a separate chapter to “*Vrijheid van exegeze*” (*Freedom of exegesis*), in which the committee concludes that one can have different (even contradicting) interpretations of the Bible alongside one another, as long as the interpretations come from people who acknowledge the authority of the Bible as a whole.

Generally this report shows clear signs of the new way of reading and interpreting the Bible that is influenced by the “new hermeneutics” of the RCNL.

On 4 September 2020 Synod Goes decided unanimously to reject the requests of the churches who asked for revision of the decisions of Synod Meppel regarding women in office. The decision of synod was published in the “Nederlands Dagblad” (translated): ***“The RCNL upholds the opening of church offices for women - hoping to still stay together. Unanimous and with thankfulness, the 32 members of Synod Goes upheld the decisions of Synod Meppel 2017 to open all church offices for women”.***

d) Unification with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK)

Four churches requested Synod Goes 2020 to revise the decision of Synod Meppel 2017 to strive towards unification with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK). These revision requests were unanimously rejected by Synod Goes on 8 February 2020.

The schedule of meetings of Synod Goes shows that they plan to start discussions with the NGK on a new mutually accepted Church Order for after the unification with the NGK, in December 2021. The decisions on the Church Order, as well as the new name of the united churches, should be finalised by 20 March 2021. These discussions are held during joint meetings of Synod Goes and the “Landelijke Vergadering” (National Assembly) of the NGK.

On 23 September 2020 DRCA received an email from BBK of the RCNL, asking for our comments on a draft Church Order which is proposed for use after unification with the NGK. DRCA responded by letter of 21 October 2020 that we did not consider it useful to provide comments (latter attached as Appendix C.5).

2.4.2 Conclusions

What has been published in formal and informal documents during 2020, what deputies have noticed and experienced and what has been observed in the recent practice in the RCNL, indicate that the RCNL has not remained faithful to the Word of God in accepting its authority over the life and practice of believers and the church. This is particularly clear in the report “Elkaar van harte dienen” where assumptions from outside a Bible text are given a decisive role in the exegesis of the text. The decisions of Synod Goes also have as a consequence that the Word of God can be interpreted in different and contradicting ways. Such serious deviations from the authority of the Word of God are considered unhealthy for a reformed sister-church relationship, as it may lead to undesired influences on our own acceptance of Biblical authority.

It is also noted with concern that the RCNL intend to move toward a broader ecumenical brotherhood, such as the World Council of Churches (see Appendix C.4). Apparently, the present range of Reformed and Presbyterian churches and organisations, with whom the RCNL have ecclesiastical contact, are too narrow.

It is concluded that the many substantiated admonitions from within the RCNL and from sister churches over the past decade, to not continue with the present developments, have not had any effect whatsoever. The present developments in the RCNL appear to be irreversible humanly speaking. This means that a sister-church relationship, wherein we strengthen and encourage each other in accepting and implementing the (authority of the) Word of God, will no longer be feasible.

2.4.3 Recommendations

On the basis of the above conclusion, DRCA has tried to come to a unified recommendation to Synod, but this was not fully achieved, although there is agreement on principle. Therefore, alternative recommendations are submitted to Synod for their consideration and decision. The first one, the most far-reaching, is to terminate our sister-church relationship with the RCNL. The other recommends a more gradual approach.

Alternative Recommendation 1

Over the past decade, the FRCSA has consistently admonished the RCNL to change the theological and ecclesiastical direction they are pursuing. This has not had any effect whatsoever. Further efforts in this regard would appear to be fruitless and, unfortunately, we have now reached the end of the road.

Therefore, **Synod decides:**

- 1.1 To terminate our sister-church relationship with the RCNL.
- 1.2 To write a letter to the RCNL, explaining the background of the decision.

Grounds for alternative decisions 1.1 and 1.2:

- 1.1 The ‘new hermeneutics’, that is accepted in the RCNL as a basis for their decision to allow women into all ecclesiastical offices, does not do justice to the authority of the Word of God.
- 1.2 The RCNL has been warned extensively by their own concerned members and by their sister churches about this dangerous path in their theology and church practice.
- 1.3 The authority of the Word of God is precious to the FRCSA and a sister-church relationship should support and strengthen and not weaken this.
- 1.4 By continuing our sister-church relationship with the RCNL, we may create the impression that allowing women in ecclesiastical offices, and the underlying “new hermeneutics”, is only a matter of acceptable reformed opinion.

Alternative Recommendation 2

There are a number of concerned members and ministers in the RCNL who are still deciding on their ecclesiastical future. They may get the impression that we are leaving them to their own troubles if we terminate a sister-church relationship with the RCNL. The RCNL appears to be in an irreversible process to reach unification with the NGK, under a new federal name.

Therefore, **Synod decides:**

- 2.1 That the RCNL, by the decisions of Synod Goes regarding women in office, have deviated from the Word of God and undermined its authority.
- 2.2 To maintain the present restricted sister-church relationship with the RCNL in order to support concerned brothers and sisters as well as church councils within the RCNL who do not agree with the course of Synod Goes.
- 2.3 To automatically terminate our sister-church relationship with the RCNL at the moment of their unification with the NGK.
- 2.4 To write an “open letter” to our brothers and sisters and church councils in the RCNL, in the form of an advertisement in the newspaper “Nederlands Dagblad”, warning them of deviation from the Word of God in their churches, ensuring them of our support and prayer and encouraging them to hold fast to the authority of the Word of God and commitment to their confession.

Grounds for alternative decisions 2.1 to 2.4:

- 2.1 The FRCSA has a sister-church relationship with the RCNL, which carries responsibilities.

- 2.2 New hermeneutics have been accepted by the RCNL through which the authority of the Word of God is undermined.
- 2.3 The NGK, with which the RCNL is busy unifying, is not a bond of churches with which our churches wish to have a sister-church relationship.
- 2.4 From the observations of the FRCSA delegates to Synod Goes, as well as the report “Elkaar van harte dienen” it appears that the church leaders wish to retain as many of their members on the road they have taken.
- 2.5 Many of the faithful and concerned members of the RCNL believe that there is room for a different conflicting interpretation of the Bible and they are not aware that this undermines the authority of the Word of God.
- 2.6 At the unification of the RCNL with the NGK our concerned brothers and sisters in the RCNL will have to decide on their church membership and church councils will have to decide whether they can join the new bond of churches. It is in that situation that they can benefit from the support and guidance from the FRCSA.
- 2.7 Neither a letter from our synod to the RCNL synod, nor a letter from our synod to all the RCNL church councils (such as sent by our CanRC sister churches), seem to reach the church members concerned.
- 2.8 Exceptional circumstances ask for exceptional measures, such as an “open letter”. Our communication needs to be direct with our RCNL brothers and sisters, who are often confused and are given wrong guidance by their own church leaders. The newspaper “Nederlands Dagblad” is read by many RCNL church members.

3 Contacts with other churches

This chapter describes what deputies did to carry out the mandates of Synod Soshanguve North 2017 to maintain contact with other reformed churches.

3.1 De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.10 to 40.14)

40.10. To maintain contact and continue discussions with De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands, but not to progress to ecclesiastical fellowship with this church federation.

40.11. To inform the DGK in writing about the decisions concerning them.

40.12. To maintain contact and continue discussions with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), but not, as yet, to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with this church federation.

40.13. To inform the GKN in writing about the decisions concerning them.

3.1.1 Activities

The activities concerning the DGK and the GKN are combined in one section, since these churches are working towards unity.

- The synods of the DGK and the GKN have stated that they recognize each other as churches of Jesus Christ: the DGK at a special synod at Lutten in July 2019 and the GKN at their Synod Hardenberg in November 2019.
- Since January 2020, the deputies of both churches have started meeting with the purpose of working towards unity as soon as possible.
- During the “Buitenlandweek” of Synod Goes of the RCNL, deputies of the FRCA, the CanRC and the FRCSA met with representatives of the DGK, while the delegates of the CanRC and the FRCA also met with the GKN. Rev. FJ Bijzet attended the meeting with the DGK as representative of the FRCSA, but we received minutes of both the meetings (see Appendix C.6 and C.7). The CanRC representatives remarked at the end of the meeting with the DGK that they had noticed with gladness that there had been a totally different atmosphere and attitude of the DGK representatives than during their meetings in previous years. Rev. Bijzet experienced this in the same way.

The rigorous “back-or-white” attitude had disappeared. The demand of the DGK to the CanRC to acknowledge that the church of Abbotsfort (LRCA) had rightly separated from the CanRC, was abandoned, while that act of separation was now judged more critically. A **strong desire to unite** with the GKN was apparent. One of the representatives of die DGK even gave the remarkable advice to the FRCA to not yet enter into a sister-church relationship with the DGK, but to wait until the DGK and GKN had united. The reason for this advice was to not add confusion if

the FRCA would decide to enter into a sister relationship with the DGK and the CanRC would enter into a sister relationship with the GKN.

Call for a “Regrouping of church federations”

This is an expression used by prof dr HJ Selderhuis of the “Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken” in the Netherlands, in an interview that was published on 6 October 2020 in both the “Nederlands Dagblad” and the “Reformatorisch Dagblad”. Prof Selderhuis pointed out that the crisis in connection with the authority of the Word of God and the confessional basis is not limited to the RCNL, but runs through various bonds of churches. He appealed to start talks between those who want to be reformed and committed to the confessions to come to, what he called, a *Regrouping of church federations* (“Herverkaveling van Kerkverbanden”). This would imply giving up existing bonds of churches and regrouping local churches in more homogeneous church federations. This idea was noted with interest in some of the “concerned” circles within the RCNL, as the interview was also published in the November issue of “Nader Bekeken”.

3.1.2 Recommendations

Synod decides to instruct DRCA:

- 3.1.2.1 To maintain contact and to continue discussions with De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands as well as with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), but not to progress towards ecclesiastical fellowship with these church federations.
- 3.1.2.2 In case of members from these federations coming to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests at the Lord’s Supper – should they make such a request – only after an agreeable discussion with them.
- 3.1.2.3 To inform the DGK and the GKN in writing on the decisions concerning them.
- 3.1.2.4 To monitor the developments in any regrouping of churches and advise the next synod on relevant progress.

Grounds:

- 1) At this time the FRCSA have a responsibility towards the RCNL.
- 2) The FRCSA wish to observe the developments in the discussions between the DGK and the GKN as Reformed churches.
- 3) Members of the DGK and the GKN were in a sister church relation with us before and did leave the RCNL because they wished to remain reformed. This urges us to continue striving to restore unity.
- 4) The appeal for a “Regrouping of church federations” is aimed at gathering together those who have the same confessional basis and may lead to a new bond of churches which could become the home of many in the RCNL who may leave them in the near future.

3.2 Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.14)

40.14. To maintain contact with the RCNZ at the present level of exchanging information, so that we may remain informed about developments in their churches.

3.2.1 Activities

Information about the RCNA can be retrieved from their website: www.rcnz.org.nz. The last synod of the RCNZ was held in 2017 and the next one scheduled for 2020. But it is unclear whether this 2020 synod was convened due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The RCNZ publishes a monthly magazine called “Faith in Focus”. This magazine contains stimulating and edifying articles on subjects relevant to reformed Christians in New Zealand and abroad. Issues are accessible through the website <http://faithinfoocus.org.nz>.

Information about developments in the RCNZ is also obtained from deputies’ reports and proceedings of synods of our sister churches in Australia (the FRCA), of which the RCNZ is a sister church (see Section 2.2.2.e). The RCNZ is a sister church of two of our sister churches (the FRCA and the CanRC), as well as of the RCSA (GKSA) and they regularly send delegates to the RCSA synods. The RCNZ is also involved in mission work in Papua New Guinea and on Sumba, together with the FRCA and the CanRC, respectively. They have terminated their sister-church relationship with the RCNL, after the RCNL accepted women in office. The RCNZ is also a member church of the ICRC and FRCSA representative on ICRC committees regularly interact with their RCNZ counterparts.

By email of 7 November 2020, we have advised the Stated Clerk of the RCNZ that our next synod will be held in Belhar, during April 2021. No response has been received to date.

3.2.2 Conclusions

Based on the information obtained, the RCNZ appears to be a church federation which wants to be faithful to the Holy Scriptures and the Reformed confessions. When members of the FRCSA move to New Zealand, it can be recommended that they join one of the RCNZ congregations.

3.2.3 Recommendations

- 1) To mandate DRCA to maintain contact with the RCNZ at the present level of exchanging information, so that we remain informed about the developments in their churches.
- 2) To instruct the DRCA to remain informed about the ecclesiastical relations between the RCNZ, the FRCA and the CanRC.

Grounds:

- 1) The RCNZ is a sister church of two of our sister churches and a co-member of the ICRC.
- 2) With our limited resources, the FRCSA should focus on our own region for ecclesiastical contacts.

- 3) The FRCA and CanRC are in a better position to maintain more intensive contacts with the RCNZ and cooperate on mission work in Papua New Guinea and on Sumba.
- 4) For the sake of emigrants from our churches who wish to settle in New Zealand, it would be wise to remain informed about developments in the RCNZ.

3.3 Reformed Churches in North America

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.15)

40.15 To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in North America through the CanRC.

3.3.1 Activities

Information about developments in Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America is obtained from deputies' reports and proceedings of synods of our sister churches in Canada and the USA (the CanRC), who have four congregations in the USA. Relevant information, obtained from attending Synod Edmonton of the CanRC, is reported in Sections 2.3.2.d and e.

Several churches in North America (i.e. the CanRC, OPC, URCNA, FRCNA, HRC, RCUS and RPCNA, that is, 7 of the 29) are member churches of the ICRC and FRCSA representative on ICRC committees regularly interact with their counterparts from these North American churches.

3.3.2 Conclusions

There are no issues for consideration by Synod Bethal 2021 related to Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America.

3.3.3 Recommendations

To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in North America, mainly via the CanRC and the ICRC.

Ground:

According to the policy adopted by Synod Bethal 2000, the FRCSA should focus on our own region. It is better to leave more intensive contacts related to Reformed churches in North America to the CanRC.

4 ICRC

This chapter describes what deputies did to carry out the mandate of Synod Soshanguve North 2017 to stay in contact with the activities of the ICRC.

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.16 - 20)

Mandate regarding contacts with the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC):

40.16. To continue membership of the ICRC.

40.17. To send two delegates to the next ICRC meeting.

40.18. To uplift the ICRC profile in the FRCSA.

40.19. To remain in contact with the ICRC regarding future African regional ICRC conferences.

40.20. To co-ordinate the delegation of the FRCSA to the next Africa regional conference.

4.1 ICRC Conference 2021 in Namibia

Since the previous FRCSA synod, no ICRC Conferences were held. However, some of our ministers participated actively in meetings of ICRC Working Groups. Concise information about the ICRC is published on the website icrconline.com. At the previous ICRC Conference in Canada in 2017, it was decided to have the next Conference in 2021 in India, or alternatively in Australia. However, it has now been decided that the next international conference will be, the Lord willing, convened from **13 to 19 October 2021 in Windhoek, Namibia**. The conference will focus on "Training the church for ministry". It is expected that Reformed and Presbyterian churches from Africa will be well-represented at this Conference.

It would appear that the ICRC activities offer an increasing broader platform to make and maintain contact with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Africa and around the world. This is beneficial for our ecumenical activities, while the number of our sister churches is limited. The ICRC has a strong focus on mission work and the FRCSA should be able to learn from the relevant expertise and experience of ICRC member churches. The ICRC quarterly journal "Lux Mundi" contains many relevant and stimulating articles and should receive wider publicity. Feed-back to the local churches should be encouraged.

4.2 Recommendations

Synod decides:

- 1) To put in more effort to uplift the ICRC profile in the FRCSA by providing feed-back to the churches.
- 2) To send two delegates to the next ICRC Conference in Windhoek, Namibia.

- 3) To expand the DRCA by another specific ICRC deputy, preferably one of our missionaries, to stimulate our involvement in ICRC activities.

Grounds:

- 1) The ICRC is an organisation which adheres to its Reformed basis.
- 2) The ICRC provides a platform to maintain contacts with Reformed churches all over the world and to stimulate reformed theological thinking and practice.
- 3) The FRCSA and its members have a responsibility to promote the proclamation of the Gospel wherever reasonably possible. The ICRC provides us with opportunities to advance our mission activities, by participating in Working Groups and Conferences.
- 4) Attending ICRC conferences is usually a rather costly exercise and can only be justified if the FRCSA utilise the opportunities provided by the ICRC contacts. A Conference in nearby Windhoek offers an opportunity for a stronger FRCSA delegation.

4.3 Regional ICRC Conferences in Africa

A Regional Conference of ICRC churches in Africa was scheduled for August 2020, to take place in Nairobi, Kenya. Subjects to be discussed were theological training, mission and diaconate in Africa. Rev Dr P Boon was one of the speakers on the diaconate, while he is also a member of the ICRC Working Group on this subject. The conference was being organized by the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Kenya. As funding by the host church was limited, a request was made by the organizing committee to the ICRC Africa member churches to make a “generous financial contribution”. The DRCA was convinced that this conference would be a good means of improving contact between Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Africa and enhancing local mission efforts and that this regional conference would, therefore, justify our active support. Subsequently, letters were sent to some FRC congregations to solicit financial support through a collection. Positive feed-back was received.

The DRCA had planned to send one of their members to attend the Africa Regional Conference (for which the DRCA budget made provision) and to pass the conference information on to the missionaries, so that they might also send one or more delegates. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the conference had to be postponed to a later date. The congregational funding action would then be resumed.

4.4 Recommendations

Synod decides:

- 1) To authorise DRCA to maintain contacts with African ICRC member churches and to find ways to support the proclamation of the Word of God and leadership training by those churches in their home countries, in co-operation with other ICRC member churches.
- 2) To support efforts to organise a Regional Africa Conference of ICRC member churches, if requested by the organizing committee.
- 3) The relevant deputies from the FRCSA and the RCSA should co-ordinate their efforts concerning regional ICRC activities.
- 4) To send one delegate to the next ICRC Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, and to solicit further delegation from FRCSA missionaries.

Grounds:

- 1) Contacts with churches in Africa should mainly be made through the ICRC or sister churches. Especially the RCNL has several sister churches in Africa.
- 2) The ICRC offers opportunities to promote the proclamation of the gospel in our African continent.
- 3) The African member churches expressed their need for help to remain Reformed and to proclaim the Gospel in their home countries, as well as a need for leadership training in newly formed congregations.
- 4) The FRCSA should support regional ICRC conferences as a mean of mutual encouragement and strengthening of ICRC member churches.
- 5) The FRCSA and the RCSA, as African church federations, are in a better position to provide certain forms of support to those churches, than churches from other continents.
- 6) Missionaries can profit significantly from attending the ICRC regional missions conferences.

5 FRCSA Information Booklet

Mandate (Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017, art. 40.21)

40.21. To keep the booklet “Introducing the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa” up to date, to adjust it when specific needs arise, and to publish it electronically through the FRCSA website, in co-operation with the webmaster.

5.1 Activities

The reason for this task is to provide information to readers pertaining the FRCSA. These readers might be browsing the internet searching for a church to join. The information provided on this website ranges from the history of how the church was formed to recent sermons. This way the readers will know more about the church and what we teach. It will also serve the purpose of making good material available for anyone seeking it.

The task of the deputies was to update the booklet and place it in English and Afrikaans on the website. This was done by investigating the current state of the website. The website has an Afrikaans and a similar English section. Some of the links reviewed were the following:

- History
- Foundation
- Churches (all the independent churches as well as a link for the mission churches)
- Sermons (with an extended search function)
- Church Structure

The Committee updated all information pertaining to the different churches. Some of the information found under the separate churches are the minister’s contact details, the time of services, the church address (including a Google Maps link) and additional contact persons. All this information was updated to the latest available information (November 2020).

Sermons were added to the website, while Pretoria and Johannesburg upload their own sermons on the website regularly. This is usually done by the pastors themselves as they also have editing rights to the website and upload sermons. Sr Renette Ros from Pretoria provided the DRCA with editing rights to the website, as well as useful advice. The website was updated with the necessary information. Two sermon series from Rev. Johan Brintjes (Galatians and Daniel - in English) have been uploaded as well as one sermon from Rev. Phineas Kgatle in Sotho.

5.2 Maintenance of the website in the future

It will be good to maintain the website and keep it updated regularly. Sermons are preached every week. Each congregation was asked by the Webmaster to appoint a member from their congregation to keep the website updated with regards to local

church details, the upload of sermons, worship times and any other relevant information. As this duty falls outside of the deputies' mandate, a letter was sent to the consistory of Cape Town to appoint someone to this end. The consistory appointed one of their members for this task.

5.3 Conclusion

- 1) Deputies did execute their instruction of Synod Soshanguve North 2017 related to information to be placed on the FRCSA website.
- 2) Relevant information on the FRCSA on the new website should be kept updated, including Acts of Synods. This is the responsibility of the FRC congregations and the Web-master.

5.4 Recommendation

Synod decides to absolve the DRCA from further responsibilities concerning the FRCSA website.

Grounds:

- 1) Since the booklet contains details on local churches as well as on the FRCSA church federation, it should be kept up-to-date for easy and reliable information to interested people by persons at the local congregations and the Webmaster.
- 2) Ministers are responsible for putting own sermons on the website.

6 Liaison for the Churches

Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.10)

- 1) To provide the FRCSA church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
- 2) To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad.

6.1 Activities

An article about Synod Edmonton 2019 of the CanRC was published in *Kompas* in July 2019. Three articles on developments in the RCNL as discussed at Synod Goes 2020, were published in *Kompas* in 2020. Unfortunately, articles in *Kompas* in Afrikaans do not reach our Sotho-speaking churches. A solution for this apparent problem may be investigated.

Interim feed-back on the activities of the DRCA was provided to the representatives of the churches at the Indaba in Johannesburg in March 2019. The interim report submitted at the Indaba is attached as Appendix D.

At the request of our Mission Deputies, Br Moes obtained some information, while attending Synod Edmonton 2019 of the CanRC, on Canadian regulations concerning financial support from Canadian organisations to foreign organisations, including mission work of churches. No requests were received from the churches concerning our sister churches or from our ministers for an attestation for preaching overseas.

6.2 Conclusion

DRCA did fulfil its specific mandated concerning the churches in our federation.

6.3 Recommendation

Synod decides to instruct the DRCA:

- 1) To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
- 2) To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad.

Grounds:

There is an on-going need for the liaison and information function of the DRCA since they continuously gather information regarding churches abroad.

7 Budget

	Item	ZAR
1	One delegate to attend the FRCA Synod in Albany, WA, during 2021	20 000
2	One delegate to attend the CanRC Synod in Guelph-Emmanuel during May 2022	20 000
3	Two delegates to attend the ICRC Congress 2021 in Windhoek, Namibia, @ R5 000 p.p., and one delegate to attend the next ICRC Regional Africa conference @ R10 000	20 000
4	One deputy to attend Indaba 2022 and the FRCSA synod 2024	5 000
5	ICRC membership fee 2021-2023	2 000
	Total 2021-2024	67 000

Signed:

Rev. J Bruintjes:

Rev. P Kgatle:

Br JF Raimond:

Sr G van den Berg:



Br J Moes:

Br H Luijk:

Appendix A.1

ADDRESS OF REV P KGATLE TO FRCA SYNOD BUNBURY 2018

Dear Chairman and all the Delegates of the Synod, Brothers and Sisters,

I greet you all in Name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Synod as a delegate from Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. It is a great honour for me to be present at your Synod and to convey warm greetings from your sister-churches, the F.R.C.S.A.

The F.R.C.S.A. share many of the issues that you are discussing in this Synod. For example the training of theological students to enter into ministry. The F.R.C.S.A has started a pilot project with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), to further train our theological students to be equipped as to their standard. The pilot project is to use video recordings of classes at CRTS, under guidance by an experienced ministers. Since early 2018, the CRTS has established a work committee to investigate the possibility of distance education. Both the FRCA and FRCSA are can look to this opportunity that can help our own federations with their own theological training.

From the planning process for the new training model with the CRTS resources being considered for distance education it has become clear that we need a leading theologian with experience in training, to become an anchor theologian for the F.R.C.S.A. His tasks will consist of managing the training process, curriculum development, contextualisation and adaption of CRTS material. The FRCSA theological training may become a blended model in the near future, by combining CRTS material ant its contextualisation to the South African situation.

The F.R.C.S.A convened their 39th Synod in August 2017 that lasted for a week. We had the presence of the delegates from our sister churches of Canadian Reformed churches, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) and Free Reformed churches of Australia. As sister churches we need each other for support and mutual encouragements.

This synod of Soshanguve decision of our sister churches (RCN) lead to long deliberations on how to proceed with the relationship in future. At the one hand there is gratitude that these churches want to remain Reformed, support us as FRCSA in prayers, access to Reformed literature and the huge support in mission and other projects. On the other hand there is concern and sadness about the direction these churches took with the allowance of women in office. It is evident that previous calls not to follow the new hermeneutic approach (a new way of using Scripture which undermines the infallibility and clarity of Scripture), were not listened to. Also the Scriptural arguments against opening the offices were not taken seriously. To a question whether we as FRCSA could have done more to warn the RCN and call against opening the offices, the Dutch deputies BBK who attended our synod answered that we had done everything possible. A decision was taken that our synod will write a letter to the next RCN synod in 2020, enquiring what synod (and deputies BBK) had done with our arguments.

Synod 2017 of the FRCSA mandated Curators of the theological training to work towards the calling of an Anchor theologian to facilitate the distance education with CRTS.

The synods meetings are good platform for our sister relations. They can help us to share our own experiences to find practical ways to discuss important issues. May the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and guide us in this right direction for our sister churches relations.

The F.R.C.S.A is thankful for the support we receive from our sister churches. We are a small federation with two classis, namely classis North and classis South. We have a total of 7 churches, 4 in the Classis north and 3 in the classis south. We have a total 7 mission's congregations, 5 in the classis north and 2 in the classis south.

We currently have 3 vacant churches in our federations. Our vacants church are due to retired ministers and ministers called to serve in other countries. One of these vacant churches, namely the FRC Pretoria, has called a minister from Ukraine, Rev. Erich Van Alten to be their minister. We thank God that he has accepted the call and will be coming back to South Africa in 2019. The F.R.C.S.A experiences challenges to call ministers from abroad to serve in South Africa, because of our government laws.

We currently have 2 students, who have completed their theological training and are being prepared to enter into ministry.

We ask for your prayers with the 2 vacant churches, FRC Soshanguve north and FRC Johannesburg.

As the F.R.C.S.A we continue to spread the gospel according to our Lord's command found in Matthew 28:19-20: [19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,](#) [20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.](#) We continue to stimulate the reformed thinking and actions in our churches.

We have a number of social activities initiated by our own church members in South Africa among our communities. South Africa faces a lot of social challenges, such as the AIDS epidemic and drugs abuses. We have an organization from our churches called the (Khothatsong) which means a place of comfort, which helps with AIDS orphans & helps also drugs addicts teens in our communities.

We also have a Reformed Study Centre, which is led by one of our minister. The Reformed Study Centre distributes Reform literature in Africa electronically. They also started a French distribution with the support some Canadian Reformed churches.

We are very thankful in particular to the F.R.C.A. in providing financial support to the needy churches in our federation and support towards our theological training.

In Conclusion, I would like to close with the words of Paul in Ephesians 3:14-20:

[14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,](#) [15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,](#) [16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,](#) [17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,](#) [18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,](#) [19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.](#)

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

May the Lord grant us the wisdom through this gatherings, may he bless us with his grace and peace through Jesus Christ,

Amen.

Appendix A.2

PRESS RELEASE OF FRCA SYNOD BUNBURY 2018

Opening of Synod

Although the Free Reformed Church of Bunbury was appointed by Synod Baldivis 2015 as the convening church for the next synod, brothers and sisters of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia assembled in Southern River on the evening of June 18th, 2018. In view of the space limitations of the church in Bunbury, the Free Reformed Church of Southern River had graciously offered the use of their facilities in a rather unique arrangement of cooperation between the two churches.

The chairman of the Bunbury consistory, Br. K. Visser, invited all those gathered to sing praises to the Lord and led in opening prayer. In this prayer of intercession, Br. Visser expressed thanks to the Lord for His care and protection over the churches in the inter-synodical period, as well as a desire for God's blessing over the work of synod in the coming days. He then read from Proverbs 3:1-18, and focused on verses 5-6 in his subsequent meditation: Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. In his address, Br. Visser emphasised to the delegates in particular the great need for spiritual wisdom focused on heeding the instruction and clear teaching of Scripture. He declared Synod Bunbury 2018 officially opened and welcomed all delegates to take their place at the synod table.

Delegates and Officers

Br. K. Visser confirmed that the church at Bunbury had examined the previously submitted credentials and found them to be in good order. All primary delegates from the three classes were present:

Classis North: Rev. R. Bredenhof, Rev. W. Bredenhof, Rev. A. Souman, Elder H. Hamelink, Elder T. Reitsema, Elder W. Spyker;

Classis Central: Rev. R.D. Anderson, Rev. A. Hagg, Rev. C. Vermeulen, Elder E. Heerema, Elder H. Terpstra, Elder J. Torenvliet;

Classis South West: Rev. H. Alkema, Rev. R. Pot, Rev. S. 't Hart, Elder S. Bolhuis, Elder H. Olde, Elder W. Vanderven.

The election of officers to serve synod took place in a series of votes, yielding the following results:

Rev. A. Souman elected as chairman,
Rev. H. Alkema as vice-chairman,
Elder W. Spyker as first clerk, and
Rev. R. Pot as second clerk.

Sr. K. VanDuyn was appointed as an administrative assistant, and thankfulness was expressed for her willingness to serve once again at synod in this capacity.

The chairman declared synod to be duly constituted, after which the delegates rose to express their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. Rev. Souman then closed the evening in prayer and adjourned synod for the evening, giving an opportunity for all those present to enjoy a time of fellowship.

Foreign delegates

Synod was privileged to welcome foreign delegates representing a number of church federations in various levels of relationship with the FRCA. For the first time, a delegate from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand could be welcomed as a representative of a sister church (Rev. Dr. P. Archbald). Delegates from other sister churches were also welcomed, including representatives from the Canadian Reformed Churches (Rev. A. Witten, Br. H. Schouten), the Reformed Churches of Indonesia [GGRI] (Rev. A. Palandima, Br. Ev. A. Bantan), the Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (Prof. S. Lee) as well as the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (Rev. P. Kgatle).

Delegates from the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Rev. J. Plug, Rev. Dr. M.H. Oosterhuis) were received by synod in the category of temporary ecclesiastical contact, the result of the decision of Synod Baldivis 2015 to suspend the relationship of the FRCA with the RCN. Representatives from the churches of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [DGK] (Rev. C. Koster, Rev. M. Sneep) were also welcomed to synod in this category. Synod received delegates from churches with whom we have official contact, including representatives from the Calvinist Reformed Churches of Indonesia [GGRC] (Rev. Y.M. Bunda, Br. S. Dethan as well as (for the first time) the United Reformed Churches in North America [URCNA] (Br. G. Swets).

Also attending synod were representatives from the Reformed Churches of Indonesia [GGRI Timor]. (Br. Cl. Ngura, Br. F.S. Missa), A few days after the opening of synod, Rev. J. Sawyer of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was welcomed, and given the opportunity to address Synod Bunbury. In the second week of synod, delegates from our sister church of the First Evangelical Church of Singapore [FERC] (Rev. Chong Nam Tuck, Br. Johnson See Choon Hock) were also heartily welcomed.

Synod Bunbury 2018 made the following decisions in connection with various church federations:

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) and Southern Presbyterian Church (SPC)

Contact between the Free Reformed Churches in Tasmania and both the Evangelical Presbyterian Church as well as the Southern Presbyterian Church led to a proposal from Classis North to investigate the potential of this contact in a more formal way. Synod decided to create a deputyship to investigate the EPC and the SPC and report back to the next synod concerning the feasibility of further ecumenical contact. In the case of the EPC, this would not be a case of initiating contact for the first time on an official basis, but re-establishing the contact that was broken off at the synodical level in 1992 stemming from the lack of interest from the EPC at that time. Twenty-six years later it remains to be seen whether a relationship between our churches and these small federations will be possible.

Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

The relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches is one that members of our churches have cherished dearly for many years. It is our closest relationship, and now also our oldest. In his address to synod, Rev. A. Witten affirmed the close bond that is felt and experienced by members of our respective federations in an array of different ways. Cooperation between our federations continues on a variety of levels and strengthens our relationship. It was with thankfulness that synod could decide to continue our relationship with this sister church. In their report to Synod Bunbury, the deputies identified one area of concern to be a number of the decisions taken by the Blessings Christian Church, noting irregularities with respect to the practice of Reformed church polity: “Deputies question how such developments function within the CanRC and whether they are consistent with the plain reading of the agreed Church Order.” With this in mind, synod mandated the deputies very specifically to investigate these concerns. Ongoing attention was also given to the continued discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA with respect to a potential merger. Although the last URCNA synod fixed a waiting period of six years for federative unity with the CanRC, it was still felt beneficial for our churches to remain informed on this issue.

United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

In late 2014 contact with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia was initiated by the United Reformed Churches of North America. These churches are not unknown to us; their sister church relationship with the CanRC and efforts at working towards federative unity with them have made the URCNA a federation that has been on our ecclesiastical radar for some time now. Nevertheless, their efforts at establishing separate contact with our churches led Synod Baldivis 2015 to mandate deputies to explore the possibilities and advise the next synod on how to proceed with the initial contact.

In the inter-synodical period since 2015 minimal progress was made, and as a result Synod Bunbury essentially re-mandated the deputyship. The deputies were given the task to continue to liaise with the URCNA, attend their synod in Wellandport, Ontario in 2020, and recommend to Synod 2021 whether to proceed in a sister church relationship. It was good to have the presence of Br. G. Swets of the URCNA at our synod, which was a reflection of both the intent and the seriousness of this federation when it comes to a possible relationship with us.

Kosin Presbyterian Churches in Korea (KPCK)

While our sister church relationship with the Kosin Presbyterian Churches in Korea is one that we are thankful for, cultural and linguistic differences have historically made close interaction and cooperation with each other very difficult. Throughout the years the FRCA have taken different approaches to fostering increased familiarisation with the KPCK. At Synod Baldivis 2015 the deputies were tasked with the mandate to investigate the model and mode of missionary work being done by the KPCK in order to assist the local churches of the FRCA to determine whether and how they might cooperate together in their missionary calling.

Although work was done by the deputies to learn more about the activities of the KPCK in the Asian region, their conclusion was that limited possibilities exist, and at Synod Bunbury this mandate was discontinued. One complication in the relationship involves the presence of Koreans in the Perth area and the establishment of churches in this area by the KPCK without any significant communication with the FRCA. For

this reason, our deputies were mandated to further investigate the members of our sister churches living in the Perth metro area, with a view to improving contact and cooperation with them.

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN)

The potential termination of the relationship between the FRCA and the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands was a matter weighing heavily on the hearts of many members of our churches heading into Synod Bunbury 2018. Serious, detailed and prolonged calls for repentance in recent years have fallen on deaf ears. At Synod Armadale 2012 a significant effort was made to formulate a clear and exhaustive outline of the concerns held by the FRCA. Concerns about the RCN resulted in Synod Armadale classifying the relationship as being “under strain.” Sadly, the Dutch Synod of Ede 2014 rejected the admonitions sent by the FRCA, which led the deputies to present Synod Baldivis with the option of either terminating or suspending the relationship.

Synod Baldivis chose the latter option, and emphasized the seriousness of the FRCA’s concerns with the decision to send to the consistories of the RCN a copy of the letter sent to Synod 2017 of the RCN. This letter included the assertion that “*the FRCA’s sister relationship with the RCN will become untenable if the next Synod of the RCN in 2017 does not express and demonstrate evidence of repentance from the deviations mentioned in the letter of the Synod of Armadale 2012 to the Synod of Ede 2014.*” Synod Baldivis also encouraged the FRCA congregations to “pray that the Lord would grant the RCN to uprightly hold and defend the Scriptural truth as maintained in the Three Forms of Unity.”

A significant number of churches submitted letters to Synod Baldivis 2015 in connection with the relationship with our sister church, yet very few churches did so in preparation for this Synod. Decisions taken by the RCN in the inter-synodical period, and in particular the decision of Synod Meppel 2017, simply confirmed that the repentance prayed for and so desired by both our churches and our sister churches had not materialised.

The need for the termination of our relationship with the RCN appeared to be clearly understood by the churches, and this need was underlined by the content of the address at synod of Rev. Dr. M.H. Oosterhuis. As a result, a decision was taken, with great sadness, to terminate the sister relationship with the RCN. The following grounds were given to support this decision:

1. The relationship with the RCN has become untenable due to their use of the “New Hermeneutic’ – principles allowing the current cultural context to play a determining role in explaining scripture. This has allowed the RCN to turn away from the clear instruction of God’s Word and has shown unfaithfulness by lack of submission to that Word.
2. The evidence of ground 1 above is given particular expression in the recent decision of the RCN (Synod Meppel 2017) to allow women to the offices of deacon, elder, and minister.
3. There has been no adequate response, let alone repentance, to earlier admonitions:
 - I. Letter of admonition from Synod Armadale 2012 to RCN Synod Ede dated 22 April 2013 (Acts of Synod 2012, Appendix 5);

II. Letter from Synod Baldivis 2015 to RCN Synod Meppel 2017 (Acts of Synod 2015, Appendix 2).

The historic decision to terminate our relationship with Reformed Churches of the Netherlands was one taken with soberness and sadness. We hope and pray that the LORD would call this federation back to Himself. Synod Bunbury 2018 made the decision to convey this decision by sending two deputies to the next synod of the RCN.

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (DGK) & Reformed Churches Netherlands (GKN)

Synod Baldivis 2015 mandated deputies to continue to monitor developments in both the DGK and the GKN, and upon submitting their report, deputies considered their mandate to be completed. A number of letters from the churches urged Synod Bunbury to re-mandate the deputies in the interest of continuing contact with these church federations. Synod made the decision to mandate deputies to continue to monitor developments in both the DGK and the GKN, and encourage these two federations to work towards unity with one another.

An obstacle in the development of our relationship with the DGK has been their acknowledgement of the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA). Synod Armadale 2012 decided that “the [DGK’s] relationship with the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA) may be an impediment to a future sister church relationship with the [DGK].” Since Synod Baldivis 2015, some positive steps have been taken by the DGK towards the LRCA on the matter of their separation from the CanRC. Synod Bunbury mandated the deputies to keep informed on the nature of the developments between the DGK and the LRCA, and to communicate with their respective Canadian Reformed counterparts on this issue.

Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)

The history of our contact with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and our internal discussions concerning them goes back many years. Over time, progress was made to such an extent that in preparation for Synod Baldivis 2015 the deputies submitted the following recommendation: “to offer [a] sister church relationship to the RCNZ under the established rules, and to accept their offer of a sister church relationship.” Synod Baldivis accepted this recommendation, and the historic decision was made to enter into a sister church relationship with the RCNZ. Since that time, various efforts have been made to increase the communication between our respective federations, and a natural process of increased interaction has begun to take place, which has been a wonderful blessing to both federations.

Concerns with respect to the potential impact on the RCNZ with their relationship of ecumenical fellowship with the CRCA as well as the theological training at the Reformed Theological College (RTC) in Melbourne were identified as matters that deserve specific attention by deputies. Deputies will monitor these issues. A positive testimony of our sister church is captured in the first ground of the decision of Synod Bunbury in connection with the RCNZ: “from the decisions of its most recent synod, and the ongoing contacts observed and reported by deputies, the RCNZ gives evidence of a love for the gospel, ongoing faithfulness to God’s Word, and a

commitment to the Reformed faith, and no evidence has been presented of any deviation or unfaithfulness in this respect.”

In many ways, our relationship with the RCNZ is growing and maturing in a natural way. There is one point, however, that deputies identified as requiring further thought and consideration, which is the matter of coordinating financial arrangements for retiring ministers. Deputies have been mandated to help overcome this obstacle, so also in this respect the bond with the RCNZ may be strengthened to the benefit of our churches.

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

It was with great thankfulness to the Lord for the relationship that we enjoy with the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa that Synod Bunbury welcomed Rev. P. Kgatle to give his address. In it he outlined both the blessings as well as the challenges faced by the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa and treated all those gathered to an interesting and informative slide show which highlighted the various congregations in the FRCSA. Some of the most pressing issues faced by the FRCSA remain the number of vacancies in the federation and the challenges of calling ministers from abroad to serve in their churches.

There are also ongoing deficiencies in theological education, but a recent arrangement with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary has been put in place to allow a form of distance education which has already proven helpful. There also remains the need for financial support. The provision of financial support for the FRCSA was included in the mandate for the deputies at Synod Baldivis 2015, and at Synod Bunbury the deputies were once again mandated “to coordinate responses to any requests for support from Deputies within the FRCSA (including either Needy Churches or Theological Training) and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate.” It is our hope and prayer that the Lord would continue to support and uphold the churches of the FRCSA in their various challenges.

First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC)

While contact with the First Evangelical Church of Singapore has taken place on an informal basis for a number of years, it was at Synod Baldivis 2015 that the offer of a sister church relationship was formally extended to the FERC. This offer was accepted by the FERC shortly afterwards, and in the inter-synodical period the interaction between our two federations has increased. The Lord has blessed the FERC with the establishment of a sister church relationship with the Covenant Grace Church of Penang (Malaysia), a small instituted church which is the result of years of mission work by the FERC. At the same time, there are also challenges associated with being a single-church federation. For this reason, they have sought support from our federation in requesting ministers from our churches to teach and preach in their midst.

They also initiated contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches and submitted to Synod Dunnville 2016 a request for a sister church relationship, which was turned down by the Canadian Reformed Churches. Deputies were mandated to visit Singapore twice in the next three years, give timely reports concerning the FERC to the membership in the FRCA and to offer assistance to the FERC of Singapore where

requested and feasible. We pray that the Lord would continue to bless the relationship with our sister church in Singapore.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

Classis North submitted to Synod a proposal to investigate the possibility of entering into fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Synod Bunbury decided to accede to this proposal, and mandated Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad to establish contact with the OPC and report to the next synod with information about these churches. Deputies were also given the task to make a recommendation to the next synod concerning the feasibility of further ecclesiastical contact. It was also decided to send a delegate to the General Assembly of the OPC once in our inter-synodical period. A number of grounds were listed in support of these decisions: the history of this federation's strong stand for the inerrant truth of God's Word as well as its longstanding sister-church relationship with several of our sister churches, including the CanRC, the RCNZ and the KPCK. We will see whether it is the Lord's providential will that our church federations grow closer together now that this initial point of contact has been made.

Reformed Churches in Indonesia

The FRCA have for some time enjoyed a sister church relationship with Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRI). Synod Armadale 2012 noted that "this is now a larger federation as a result of the union in February 2012 of what were previously three federations, namely the federation of GGRI-NTT (our original sister church), the federation of churches in Papua, and the federation of churches in Kalimantan Barat" and mandated the deputies to report to the churches with more information concerning this larger federation with its three regional synods. At both Synod Baldvis 2015 as well as Synod Bunbury 2018 this mandate was again renewed, since it was decided that not enough has been reported about the Reformed character of these federations.

It was also made clear to the delegates of Synod that in the GGRI some troubling aspects in the area of church polity and liturgy have developed. These concerns were deemed sufficiently serious to require the addition of a new element to the mandate of the deputies: monitoring, evaluating and offering advice about these developments. Contact with the Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRC) was continued, while Synod also mandated deputies to establish official contact with a newly-formed federation in Indonesia, the GGRI Timor. This is a federation that came into existence in 2016 and was the result of mission work sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Church of Smithville, Ontario. The relationship between these three federations is one that is not always easy for the deputies to work with, yet they were also given the task to encourage the GGRI in their efforts to work towards federative unity with the GGRC and the GGRI-Timor.

One final element in connection with the GGRI discussed and debated by Synod Bunbury was the matter of theological training. A number of churches submitted letters to Synod recommending that deputies be tasked to find a local church to take over the support for the Theological College of the GGRI. Synod mandated deputies to continue to support theological training for the GGRI and make funds available for this cause, yet also gave the deputies the task of finding a local church to assume responsibility for the financial support of theological training for the GGRI following Synod 2021.

Synod Bunbury 2018 made the following decisions in connection with the workings of our own federation:

Australian Version of the Canadian Book of Praise

The topic of a potential Australian Book of Praise (or an Australian Version of the Canadian *Book of Praise*) is one that has surfaced at a number of synods preceding Synod Bunbury. The Australian churches have consistently expressed their thankfulness for the Canadian *Book of Praise* and have gratefully acknowledged a debt of gratitude to our sister church in this respect, but at the same time there has been an ongoing and increasing desire in the Free Reformed Churches in recent years for some form of our *Book of Praise*. Synod Baldivis gave the deputies a very challenging mandate to prepare a number of different versions of the *Book of Praise* for possible adoption. These included the use of either the NKJV or the ESV, none of the 19 additional hymns, all of the 19 additional hymns, or some number of them. It was clear from the variety of submissions to Synod Bunbury that this topic is one that very much holds the interest and attention of the churches. It was also clear to the delegates at Synod that coming to a common consensus on this issue would be challenging.

Synod decided to adopt and produce an Australian version of the Canadian *Book of Praise* that includes the psalms and hymns of the 2014 Canadian *Book of Praise*, including the 19 additional hymns, makes use of the ESV translation of the Bible and does not capitalize the personal pronouns for God. This song book will be called the “Australian *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter*”, and will include the creeds, confessions and liturgy forms as found in the 2014 Canadian *Book of Praise*, with adopted changes made by the FRCA, as well as the Australian Church Order. Synod Bunbury also created an Australian Standing Committee for the Book of Praise and gave the committee the task of making the practical arrangements necessary for the printing and distribution of this Book of Praise.

Of particular note is the second ground listed under this decision: “there is merit in keeping the Australian version of the Book of Praise as similar as possible to the Canadian *Book of Praise* so that they can be used interchangeably by the members, and so that our book closely resembles that used by our Canadian sister churches. This is also in the interests of promoting the good stewardship of our financial and other resources.” This emphasises the fact that the current 2014 Canadian *Book of Praise* can be used up until and beyond the time when the Australian version of the Book of Praise is ready for distribution.

Training for the Ministry – Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Synod Bunbury approached the subject of training for the ministry as a topic separate from that mentioned below: an investigation in the possibility of establishing an Australian Theological Seminary. In connection with the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Synod made a number of decisions. These included accepting the invitation from the CRTS to participate in the work of the ad hoc committee that is investigating the possibility of pursuing distance education with the CRTS and requesting the churches to match the contributions of our Canadian brothers and sisters (\$90 /c.m.) in support of the CRTS.

Synod also mandated the deputies to review the current system of funding for students with respect to its effectiveness in supporting and encouraging students as well as considering and implementing new ways to promote the study for the ministry among young men. In light of the current and anticipated vacancies in the FRCA and the CanRC, this is a crucial step. Further decisions were taken to investigate and report on the applicability of a ministry internship model and monitoring the effectiveness of the Pastoral Training Program (PTP) of the CRTS within the Australian churches by seeking feedback from the ministers and students participating in this program.

Regardless of what future decisions may be taken by the FRCA in connection with the establishment of a federate or regional seminary, strong support for and appreciation of the CRTS remains a prominent feature in the relationship between the FRCA our sister churches in Canada. We praise God for the faithful, quality instruction given at the CRTS and pray that the Lord would continue to bless this institution.

Australian Theological Seminary

Two members of the Deputies for Theological Training presented Synod Bunbury with a proposal in connection with the feasibility of an Australian Theological Seminary. One proposal recommended the establishment of an Australian Theological seminary in the short term, while the other recommended that Synod decide “that it is not feasible to establish a Free Reformed Theological Seminary at this time.” These proposals were the end product of the mandate these deputies received at Synod Baldivis 2015: “to investigate the feasibility of establishing an FRCA Theological Seminary, and report back to the next synod”.

Much work was done by the deputies in fulfilling their mandate. A survey was presented to the churches with the results compiled and included in their report, while input from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary was solicited and formed part of the analysis. A number of submissions from the churches presented various arguments on both sides of the issue, while a letter from Classis Central recommended that Synod mandate deputies to develop a seminary in Perth, locate premises, seek two professors, start an accreditation process, and pursue other preparations for the immediate establishment of an Australian Theological College.

After much deliberation, Synod decided not to pursue establishing an Australian Theological seminary at this time. A number of reasons were given for this decision, including the lack of broad support among the churches for this initiative, the understanding that Article 17 of the Church Order does not by definition require the establishment of a federate seminary, and acknowledgement that concerns expressed by the CRTS Board of Governors were significant.

At the same time, Synod recognised that among the churches of our federation there exists some support for the idea of establishing an Australian theological seminary in the medium to long term. This recognition is in line with some of the submissions from the churches in which the potential for an Australian Theological seminary was considered within the context of the broader Asian-Pacific community, including our sister churches in the region. For now, the FRCA will with thankfulness continue to send students to the CRTS in Hamilton.

Miscellaneous Decisions

Throughout the course of synod, a number of other decisions were taken:

a) A decision was made to amend the Rules of Synod to allow for changes in the way the Acts of Synod are compiled. The decision seeks to improve the readability and transparency of the Acts of Synod for consistories and general readership in our churches and overseas. Early reaction to the Acts of Synod posted online has been very positive.

b) Deputies were mandated to collate the decisions of Synod Bunbury 2018 as they relate to articles of the Church order, and to publish these decisions on the official web page of the FRCA. It was also decided to mandate the deputies to make all the published Acts of the Synods since the start of the FRCA available on the FRCA website, without password protection, in searchable pdf format.

c) Classis Central submitted a proposal to synod recommending that Article 36 of the Church Order be changed to make an allowance for an office bearer other than the minister to chair consistory meetings. Synod saw the wisdom in this proposal and adopted it, meaning that the second sentence of Article 36 now reads: *“In all churches there shall be a consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders. It shall meet regularly and as a rule be chaired by the minister.”*

d) As the result of the adoption of the proposal from the church at Launceston, the decision was made to create a new deputyship of four members to update the look and functionality of the FRCA website, and to make it mobile friendly.

Closing of Synod

Delegates at Synod Bunbury 2018 laboured over the course of six memorable days with the expressed desire of honouring the LORD and serving Him and His churches with decisions that were in accordance with His Word. Despite a variety of opinions and viewpoints, the delegates were able to work in a productive and harmonious manner. All would confirm that they served in weakness, but that by the grace of God issues could be addressed, discussed and decided upon.

These decisions were made with a continual desire to be truly reformed, time and again judging by the standard of God’s Word and the principles found therein. May the King of the church bless these decisions, to His glory and to our benefit. We praise Him for lighting the path forward for us through these past days: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path* (Psalm 119:105).

For Synod Bunbury 2018,
H. Alkema (vice-chairman)

Appendix B.1

ADDRESS OF J MOES TO CanRC SYNOD EDMONTON 2019

Mr. Chairman, dear brothers delegates and guests

I should like to start with a quote from the letter of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians, chapter 4: 1 – 6...

This is why we are here. Firstly, you as representatives of the CanRC. But also those from sister-churches. We, the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA), wish to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit with you through the bond of peace and we are very grateful that you have given us the opportunity to do so. In terms of physical space, we are on the other side of the world, but in terms of faith we are one family, sharing one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father.

The FRCSA are a very small church federation of almost 2 000 members. During the 1950's and 1960's members of the Reformed Churches (vrijgemaakt) in the Netherlands immigrated to South Africa. Four congregations were established, two in Pretoria, one in Johannesburg and one in Cape Town. During the 1960's mission work was started in townships around Pretoria and later also in townships around Cape Town. In his young days, your Prof. Arjan de Visser of Hamilton was one of the missionaries in Pretoria.

The mission work was blessed and has led to the establishment of three independent mission churches in our federation. In addition, we have at present eight mission preaching locations, with seven missionaries. We trust that after a number of years the original immigration congregations will be a *minority* in our church federation. However, financially the mission churches are very poor and they remain dependent on funding from the "immigrant churches". We hope that in time that will also change.

On behalf of the FRCSA, I bring heartfelt greetings to you, as our family in our Lord Jesus Christ. From the beginning of our church federations, in the 1950's, there has been a blessed familial unity between our churches and this unity has grown deeper over the last number of years. The more we learn about each other, the more we have come to appreciate the spiritual bond of faith which we share.

Thank you very much for the delegation that you sent to our Synod Soshanguve North 2017, to demonstrate the value of your relationship with us. In **our** visit here we wish to strengthen and deepen that relationship and find ways where we can support each other in service to the kingdom. We look forward to again welcome your delegates at our next **synod in Belhar**, a suburb of Cape Town, the Lord willing in October 2020. May also through this work His kingdom come.

I should like to give you a brief overview of a few aspects of our church life which may be of interest to you.

Theological Education

A matter close to our hearts, that we have been thinking and praying about much in the last few years, is theological education. The harvest is ready, but the workers are few! As a small federation we have always struggled with finding out what the best way is to equip our students for the ministry. Over the last few years we have worked more and more closely with the CRTS in Hamilton. We would like to express our appreciation for

your cooperation in this. The yearly visits that the professors have made have had a lasting impact on some of **our** students and have caused our churches to grow much more familiar with the work done at the CRTS. It has also motivated more young men (7) in our country to consider the ministry. Our own minister in Cape Town, Rev. Johan Bruintjes, who is a graduate of your seminary, is clear proof of the good reformed level of education provided there.

In 2017, the FRCSA have started a pilot project with the CRTS to train our theological students, to be equipped for the reformed ministry. The pilot project is to use video recordings of classes at CRTS and to use these in South Africa under study guidance of one of our local experienced ministers. Already in 2018 the CRTS has established a work committee to investigate the possibility of distance education. We look forward to seeing the results of that study.

The Lord willing, over the next number of years you will see several of our students bundled up against the cold Canadian winters to complete the four-year Master of Divinity Course. Our hope and prayer is that throughout the course of study in the practical training programme and after they graduate, they return to their own context and serve in South Africa, either in congregational ministry or in the mission field.

Mission Work

The work of training up ministers is vital, because the African continent, including South Africa, is ripe for and in need of the Gospel. Just in the past year we have seen another mission congregation planted (Fisantekraal) and we are presently in the process of instituting a fourth mission congregation as an independent church (Wesbank). We recently experienced a dire shortage in ministers, but at present six of the seven churches have their own minister, while we have seven missionaries, which is quite a blessing. In addition, there is the Reformed Study Centre, which supplies sermons and reformed study material internationally through the internet (Rev. Ryan Kampen – Clarion).

One of the challenges that we are currently experiencing is that, while the mission work continues to expand, the *funding is decreasing*. Our Dutch sister-churches, who have up to this point supported about 90% of the mission work of our churches, have decided to reduce their funding gradually and significantly over the next couple of years. Without additional financial support, the four immigrant churches will not be able to continue the mission work at the present level, while the indigenous churches are unfortunately not yet able to contribute substantially. If there are possibilities for *support* within the **Canadian Reformed Churches**, we should very much like to hear about this.

However, through these developments, our present mission constraints have also come as a blessing, as the churches in South Africa now are taking greater financial responsibility for the mission work and we have had to deepen our reliance on our Heavenly Father, trusting that he will provide.

Relations with Churches Abroad

As a founding member, the FRCSA is still actively involved in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Attending ICRC meetings provides us with an opportunity to meet with delegates of those churches with whom we have a sister-church relationship. Because of the size of our federation and the limited man-power available,

we have decided to focus most of our efforts to strengthen the bonds which we already have, particularly with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. But through the ICRC, we stay also in contact with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the world and in Africa in particular. Furthermore, we have opportunities to participate with others in ICRC working groups, to share knowledge and experience and learn from and cooperate with others.

We share a very close relationship with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. Because of the political and social unrest and limited work opportunities in our country (our official general unemployment rate is 28% and the youth unemployment is 55%) many of our members have moved to West-Australia and found a home among the brothers and sisters there. We value this relationship deeply.

Our relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands has been under strain over the last decade, as they have continued to not heed the warnings of our church and other sister-churches like yourselves. The core of the problem, *as we see it*, is that they appear to have opened up the Word of God to subjective interpretation. This is a matter of deep concern for the FRCSA because for so many years we called ministers trained at the Theological University at Kampen and so many of our members have family relations in the Netherlands. And unlike our brothers and sisters in Australia and North America, we share a rather similar language and heritage with the Dutch.

On the other hand, we continue to be deeply grateful for their mission support and they have expressed that our theological differences will not *directly* affect this support. But when it comes to the truth of God's word, we will not let financial support influence any decision on our sister-church relationship. We pray that God grant also this Synod much wisdom as you deliberate how to go forward.

The above developments have forced us to look more to our other sister churches for encouragement and support. This has been a time where we have grown closer to you, even calling one of your own from the CRTS. So, although you may not share a time zone with us like the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, or a hemisphere and ocean as the Australian churches, we do share a minister, who assists actively in deepening our relationship and love for one another.

Relations with Churches in Africa

We are very excited to be part of ICRC Africa, where we wish to work more with churches and federations that are closer to home. The African churches have much to contribute to the community of faith globally, and by the grace of God, Africa is a continent where Christianity is growing. We believe that the Christian faith is a critical basis for lifting the African people out of poverty and exploitation.

Locally there has also been an effort to work more closely with the Reformed Churches of South Africa, who are also members of the ICRC. We are thankful that on a local basis there have been "preaching exchanges", although nationally not much has taken place, e.g. due to their position on women deacons. We look forward to continuing our discussions with them both locally and nationally.

Closing

In closing, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to be here with you in Edmonton and for the privilege you have afforded me to address you on behalf of the FRCSA and to convey our warm greetings to you. May the blessed Lord Jesus, our King and Saviour, continue to bind us together in truth, as we sojourn toward a *better* country. May He richly bless all your deliberations, and may his Spirit of wisdom fill each one of you, so that the decisions made here may be for the edification and encouragement of the Church of Jesus Christ, here and globally. To him be the glory forever, in this age and the age to come.

Hans Moes, Convener: Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad of the FRCSA

Appendix B.2

REPORT OF J MOES ON THE CanRC SYNOD EDMONTON 2019

Introduction

A General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) was held at Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, from Tuesday 14 May to Thursday 23 May 2019. Br J Moes, convener of the Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA), was appointed by the DRCA as the official delegate to this synod, to represent the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. Br Moes attended this synod for its full (two weeks – eight working days) duration. More detailed information than contained in this report can be found in the Provisional Acts at the CanRC website, under news: <https://canrc.org/assemblies/general-synod/2019> .

Accommodation was kindly provided by local host families and meals were served during synod days in the foyer of the Edmonton – Immanuel Church building, the church organizing the synod. As Br Moes had arrived already in Edmonton on Friday 10 May, he attended worship services of the CanRC in Edmonton – Immanuel on Sunday 12 May, with the local minister Rev. Julius VanSpronsen officiating. On Sunday 19 May, he attended the morning service in St Albert, with the recently called Rev. Ken Wieske leading, and in the afternoon the service at Edmonton – Immanuel again, with Rev. Peter Holtvluwer officiating.

Opening

On the evening of 13 May 2019 the congregation of the Edmonton – Immanuel Church and local sister-churches (Providence and St. Albert) convened for a prayer service for Synod. Rev Richard Aasman, as chairman of the previous synod and emeritus minister of Edmonton - Providence, led the prayer service. The beautiful and practical church building was well-filled, which is a good indication of the interest of members of the local CanRC members in synod matters. A number of CanRCs had a congregational meeting on items of interest on the synod's agenda prior to synod and quite a few had submitted appeals, proposals or specific concerns.

Constitution of Synod

Synod Edmonton – Immanuel 2019 was officially opened on Tuesday morning 14 May. The consistory of Edmonton – Immanuel had received the credentials of delegates from the two Regional Synods: East and West. The following 12 ministers and 12 elders (6 of each Regional Synod) were welcomed as delegates:

Delegated by Regional Synod West:

Ministers: Dr. Karlo Janssen, Dr. Andrew Pol, Joe Poppe, James Slaa, Julius VanSpronsen, Bill Wielenga.

Elders: John DeHaas, Ken Huttema, Casey Leyenhorst, Harry Moes, Henry Schouten, Bert Vane.

Delegated by Regional Synod East:

Ministers: Douwe Agema, Clarence Bouwman, Peter Feenstra, Peter Holtvlüwer, John Louwerse, Clarence VanderVelde.

Elders: Ron Bremer (alt.) John Jager, Jeff Jans (alt.), Bernie Kottelenberg, Fred Stoffels, Dr. Art Witten.

The *Moderamen* elected consisted of Rev. Douwe Agema, chairman, Rev. John Louwerse, vice-chairman, Rev. Karlo Janssen, first clerk and Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, second clerk.

With all the delegates and officers in place, the chairman declared Synod constituted. The opening session of Synod was closed in a Christian manner and adjourned by the chairman, after which there was time for fellowship in the church hall with all delegates and visitors.

Foreign Delegates

Over the course of the synod, the following foreign delegates, mainly from sister-churches were welcomed:

Free Reformed Churches of Australia:	Rev. Hendrik Alkema Rev. Richard Pot
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands:	Rev. Dr Melle Oosterhuis Rev. Rinze IJbema
Reformed Churches of New Zealand:	Rev. Leo DeVos
Free Reformed Churches of South Africa:	Br. Hans Moes
Reformed Church of Brazil (IRB) Iraldo	Rev. Adriano Gama, Rev. Luna and elder Ademir Souza
Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ)	Rev. Ben Westerveld
Reformed Church of the United States	Rev. Travis Grassmid
United Reformed Churches in North America	Rev. Bill Pols
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church	Rev. Bill Barron
Free Churches of Scotland (continuing)	Dr James Wanliss
Reformed Churches of Korea:	CRTS student Sung-Min Hong
Gereja Gereja Reformasi Calvinis (Indonesia):	Rev. Yonson Dethan

A letter with greetings was received from a sister church, the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI), while other churches brought greetings through their delegates, during presentations in the evening. The delegate from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), Dr Jack Sawyer, was not able to attend, but his address was read at synod.

Foreign Churches

Concerning the **Free Church of Scotland (FCS)**, Synod evaluated the report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) and considered that they are positive about the faithfulness of the FCS. Synod decided to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF = sister-church relationship) with the FCS under the adopted rules. A similar decision was taken concerning the **Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC)**, where Synod evaluated the report of the CRCA and considered that they are also positive about the faithfulness of the FCC. Synod decided to continue the relationship of EF with the FCC under the adopted rules.

On the evening of the second day of Synod, 15 May 2019, the Rev. Poppe introduced Br. Hans Moes, credentialed delegate of the **Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA)**. Br. Moes addressed Synod describing the FRCSA, its history and its ministries. He expressed gratitude for unity in the faith, evident in the assistance the FRCSA receives from CRTS in training theological students. He outlined the need for financial support in South Africa for mission projects and described the inter-church relations of the FRCSA. The full text of his address will be included as an Appendix of the Synod's Acts. The proceedings of this evening were screened on U-tube.

A representative of the **Reformed Churches in Brazil (IRB)**, Rev. Adriano Gama, introduced his church federation, with translation provided by the CanRC missionary in Brazil, Rev. Jim Witteveen. Also, Rev. Yonson Dethan from the **Calvinist Reformed Churches (GGRC)** on Sumba and Timor in Indonesia spoke words of greetings and even sang an Indonesian psalm. The GGRC had already for some years requested to become a sister church of the CanRC, while recognizing that the CanRC already has a sister-church relationship with the GGRI. Synod would take a decision on this matter later.

In the evening of the third day (16 May), fraternal delegates of the **Free Reformed Churches of Australia** (Rev. Richard Pot), the **Reformed Churches of New Zealand** (Rev. Leo DeVos), the **United Reformed Church in North America** (Rev. Bill Pols) and the **Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church** (Rev. Bill Barron as fraternal observer) were introduced and given the floor to make a presentation on their churches.

Churches in North America

Concerning the **Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ)**, Synod decided to mandate the **Committee for Contact with Churches in North America (CCCNA)** to continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the ERQ under the adopted rules and to encourage the CanRC churches to support the ERQ prayerfully and financially in their missionary endeavours and special projects.

Synod decided to continue contacts with the **Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)** of the United States. Furthermore, Synod decided to continue EF with the

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) under the adopted rules. Synod also decided that the CCCNA should engage in continued dialogue and contact with the **Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA)**, as these were recognized as true reformed churches.

There has been an increase in contacts of the CCCNA that merits investigating the possibility of closer contact between the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (**ARPC**) and the CanRC. Synod mandated the CCCNA to engage in continued dialogue and contact with the ARPC. Synod considered that the Reformed Church of the United States (**RCUS**) is very appreciative of the relationship that they have with the CanRC and that the CCCNA observes faithfulness within the RCUS and the fruitfulness of their contact. Synod decided that it would be beneficial for the RCUS and the CanRC to continue to interact with each other on foreign mission projects. Synod decided to continue EF with the RCUS.

Synod concluded that the CCCNA has carried out its mandate diligently, especially considering that four additional churches, that is, the ARPC, the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC) and the Korean Presbyterian Church in America – Kosin (KPCA-K), have requested to interact with the CanRC via the committee. Much of this interaction will take place through the annual meetings of **NAPARC** (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches), of which also the CanRC is a member.

Synod also decided to continue EF with the **Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)** under the adopted rules. Concerning the **Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)**, Synod decided to accept the invitation of the HRC to enter into their “Level One correspondence” and commission the CRCA to investigate whether full EF (“Level Two”) can be established. Exactly the same decision was made concerning the **Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)**. Synod also decided to mandate the CCCNA to continue to represent the CanRC at NAPARC and to continue its active involvement in it.

The unification process between the CanRC and the **United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)**, which has been ongoing for the last decade, has been stalled due to various decisions of the last two synods of the URCNA. These relate to differences on a common Church Order, theological training and psalms and hymns. Synod Edmonton decided not to re-appoint a Committee on Church Unity with the URCNA but to continue EF with the URCNA through the CCCNA and to encourage local CanRCs to foster close relationships with local URCNA congregations. These activities could include, but are not limited to, pulpit exchanges, joint community and mission projects, and study opportunities.

Reformed Church of Brazil (IRB)

The IRB is a young federation and is excited about the Reformed faith. They place very high value on the confessions and live by it as churches. They consider themselves very young and look to the CanRC as a much older and wiser federation which has been blessed with the confessions that came out of the Reformation. They look to the CanRC for guidance (as for example in the approach to take with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands - RCN). The CanRC can look to the IRB to be reminded of their rich heritage, to value it, and to hold on to it so that the CanRC remain a faithful federation. The IRB has EF with only two federations: the CanRC and the RCN.

The IRB have three specific areas of concern in which the CanRC provides assistance:

1. The training of men for the ministry of the Word and for the office of elder and deacon are mostly beyond the ability of the IRB at this time. They are too small for the manpower and resources to do this. They are assisted in this work by the sending churches of Aldergrove and Hamilton, largely through their work at the IRB seminary, the John Calvin Institute.
2. Financially, the IRB is a very poor federation. They desire assistance in supporting ministers of the Word, in paying for worship buildings, in looking after the seminary, in providing ministers with funds to buy books and in their outreach efforts.
3. Because the IRB is a young federation with many new believers, there continues to be a lot for these believers to learn. This is being worked on by the CanRC sending churches and the mission workers by way of regular teaching in various forms.

Synod considered that in view of the needs in the IRB it is important to make every effort to maintain direct contact with them and to encourage the churches and their leaders. Synod decided to express gratitude for the continued desire of the IRB to grow in knowledge and faithfulness and to continue EF with the IRB under the adopted rules.

Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (RCN / GKv)

Rev. Rinze Ijbema addressed synod with greetings from the RCN. Immediately thereafter, Rev. Dr. Melle Oosterhuis, as delegate and chairman of the RCN Synod Meppel 2017, also addressed synod. He explained the decisions of GS-RCN 2017 (Synod Meppel), especially regarding **hermeneutics** as the background to RCN decisions that concern the CanRC. The full text of these addresses will be included as Appendices of the Acts of Synod. The next morning, one of the committees prepared a report to Synod on the RCN. Because of its importance for the FRCSA, the full text of **Synod's considerations and decision** on the sister-church relationship with the RCN / GKv is reproduced below from the Provisional Acts.

1. Material

- 1.1 Report of the CRCA–SRN on the GKv.

1.2 Letters from: Guelph-Emmanuel, Flamborough-Redemption, Fergus-North, Hamilton-Cornerstone, Houston, Carman-West, Burlington-Ebenezer, Barrhead, Winnipeg-Grace, Orangeville and Attercliffe.

2. Observations

2.1 GS 2016 decided:

[4.2] To express thankfulness and joy to the Lord for much faithfulness in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv) as well as grief and disquiet over tolerance of deviations from Scriptures and confession;

[4.3] To continue EF with the GKv, with the temporary suspension of the operation of EF rules 4 and 5;

[4.4] To mandate the CRCA-SRN:

[4.4.1] To maintain contact with the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (BBK) of the GKv and represent the CanRC at the next GKv Synod;

[4.4.2] To inform the next synod of the GKv in writing of GS 2016's decision;

[4.4.3] To send a copy of this act of GS 2016 to each of the GKv churches, accompanied by a cover letter;

[4.4.4] To monitor the work of the committee "Males / Females and Office", as well as the decisions of the next GKv Synod regarding this matter;

[4.4.5] To monitor the ongoing discussions between the GKv and the Netherlands Reformed Churches;

[4.4.6] To continue to observe developments at the Theological University of the GKv in Kampen (TUK), which includes paying attention to the article by Dr. Burger;

[4.4.7] To monitor the results of the GKv's involvement with the National Synod;

[4.4.8] To work in consultation with the deputies of our other sister-churches;

[4.4.9] To report to the churches six months prior to GS 2019 giving special attention to the question whether or not to continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship.

2.2 The subcommittee responsible for contact with the GKv provides an extensive report of their work since GS 2016. Of particular interest are the following points:

2.2.1 The subcommittee sent a copy of the decision of GS 2016 to each of the GKv churches. They also informed GS-GKv 2017 (Synod Meppel) in writing of the decisions of GS 2016.

2.2.2 Almost all of the sister churches represented at Synod Meppel (including our own) voiced "serious concerns" to this Synod about the proposal to open the offices of the church to women. Nevertheless, Synod Meppel decided that there were Scriptural grounds to call women to serve in the offices of deacon, elder and minister. This decision has subsequently been implemented within the churches.

2.2.3 Synod Meppel expressed the longing to become a single federation with the NGK as soon as possible, "on the basis of the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions and organized according to the principles of the Reformed order." Our subcommittee

expresses reservation about this proposed union because the commitment to listen to what the Lord says in his Word sounds hollow in light of the fact that both the GKv and the NGK have admitted women to office in spite of Scripture's clear directives to the contrary. Further, there has historically been no clear and common understanding of what subscription to the Reformed Confessions and adherence to the Church Order means as it was one of the central reasons for the split between the two churches in the first place. On this topic our subcommittee concludes that "these two churches are continuing to turn away from the clear directives of God's Word and the Reformed Confessions."

2.2.4 One of the professors at the Theological University in Kampen (TUK), Dr. A de Bruijne, has written material that opens the door to ethical judgments that could contradict the directives of Scripture. For example, though Scripture condemns homosexuality, Dr. de Bruijne's reasoning would provide opening to the legitimization of this behaviour. In this context it is striking to note that Synod Meppel appointed deputies to study whether there is reason to modify the way the churches have traditionally dealt with homosexuality.

Dr. Burger has clarified but not backed away from what he had earlier written. Though he was encouraged to, he has not published anything that would remove the confusion he generated by his earlier writings.

Synod Meppel also decided to work positively to the establishment of a Reformed Theological University would include the TUK and the Theological University in Apeldoorn (TUA) of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGKN). The Synod of the CGKN decided, however, that the TUA would not be part of this venture on grounds of distrust about the theological direction they see in Kampen.

2.2.5 Synod Meppel decided to instruct deputies to "participate" in the proposed "National Synod" and "if possible to even join the proposed covenant of Protestant churches in the Netherlands, taking into consideration obedience to God's Word and the value of the Reformed confessions." Given that this proposed body is "composed of representatives of very different churches including the Remonstrant Brotherhood", the sort of unity being pursued by this body cannot be based on Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. It is understood that the unity proposed by this "National Synod" is not necessarily meant to be ecclesiastical in nature.

2.2.6 The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) suspended the GKv from its membership in its meeting in July 2017.

2.2.7 Our subcommittee reports with sadness that "the GKv as federation has continued to move away from a submission to the authoritative, sufficient and clear Word of God and has more and more accommodated itself to 21st century western culture." Though the movement has been happening for some time, "it has come to a real watershed with the decision of Synod Meppel to permit the ordination of females to office."

2.2.8 The subcommittee recommends that Synod Edmonton decide “to discontinue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the GKv,” and provide the following grounds:

[a.] The decision by Synod Meppel 2017 to admit females to ecclesiastical office is contrary to Scripture as shown in Appendix H of our report.

[b.] It is highly unlikely that this decision will be reversed on appeal to the next general synod since Synod Meppel decided that the churches could ordain female office bearers immediately and since the NGK with whom the GKv are in the process of uniting have been allowing female ordination for some time already.

[c.] By the decision to permit female ordination, the GKv has ignored the numerous warnings about unbiblical hermeneutics directed to their synods by the CRCA-SRN, as well as delegates of other sister churches since Synod Zwolle 2008. The GKv has also brushed aside the serious admonitions directed to Synod Ede by Synod Carman 2013 concerning the place of those unbiblical hermeneutics at the TUK as well as in the report Deputies M/F.

[d.] The decision of Synod Meppel to work towards full unity with the NGK shows that the GKv have moved in the direction of those churches which have also opened the offices to females and which allow same-sex couples to remain members in good standing.

[e.] The decision of Synod Meppel 2017 to continue to take part in the wide ecumenical forum of Dutch Protestant churches at the National Synod in the Netherlands is concerning. This forum has moved to discussing some type of eventual union of all participating churches, so GKv involvement displays a weakening of commitment to true Reformed ecumenicity based on Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity.

[f.] A decision to discontinue the relationship with the GKv is consistent with maintaining relations with churches with which we presently have Ecclesiastical Fellowship as well as membership in the ICRC and NAPARC. The GKv membership in the ICRC has been suspended because of the decision to allow females to be ordained to office. Some of our sister churches have also terminated their relationship with the GKv and within NAPARC the OPC and the URCNA have ceased contact with the GKv due to female ordination.

[g.] A decision to discontinue the relationship with the GKv would be an encouragement to faithful members within the GKv to take action, and it would be a final call to the GKv as a whole to take stock of the direction of those churches which once stood with us on the same basis of Scripture and Reformed Confessions.

[h.] Severing ties with the GKv is the only responsible course of action in view of the spiritual wellbeing of the CanRC, which would otherwise be vulnerable to the unbiblical thinking which is becoming more and more evident in the GKv.

2.2.9 The subcommittee recommends that in the event Synod decides to go along with the recommendation, Synod also “appoint a CRCA delegation to attend the next Synod of the GKv to communicate its decision with appropriate words of sadness concerning this breaking with the churches with which we share such deep roots.

2.3 Several churches have responded to the Report about the GKv. They all express agreement with the recommendation of the subcommittee to discontinue the historic relationship with the GKv. Some specifics should be noted:

2.3.1 The Guelph-Emmanuel CanRC requests Synod to provide public instruction to our churches to be on guard lest we follow the GKv in their slide.

2.3.2 The Hamilton-Cornerstone CanRC requests Synod to discontinue EF with the GKv but at the same time to instruct the CRCA to continue to monitor the developments in the GKv and maintain some (undefined) contact with these churches so as to be able to assist those within the GKv who remain concerned. The Winnipeg-Grace CanRC makes a similar request.

2.3.3 The Flamborough-Redemption CanRC requests that, as GS 2016 mandated deputies to communicate its decision to each of the GKv churches in writing, GS 2019 ought to communicate the present decision (to discontinue sister relations) in writing to each GKv church as a means of encouraging the faithful to take appropriate action.

2.4 The delegation from the GKv addressed synod:

2.4.1 Rev Rinze IJbema passed on greetings from the GKv. As he has served in both federations, he was able to articulate that the “gap” between the two churches was painful for both parties. For the text of his address see *Appendix #*.

2.4.2 Rev Dr Melle Oosterhuis had served as chairman of the Synod of Meppel. He offered a presentation to defend the thought that the new hermeneutic adopted by the GKv was in fact not new at all but was the hermeneutic of K. Schilder and B. Holwerda, and in line with that of the apostle Paul, and indeed of Jesus Christ himself. He stressed that the report of our subcommittee did not provide sufficient grounds relating to the topic of new hermeneutics to discontinue EF with the GKv and urged Synod to postpone a decision till at least next Synod. For the text of his address see *Appendix #*.

3. Considerations

3.1 The report of the subcommittee is clear in its presentation of developments in the GKv as outlined above and convincing in its assessment of what these developments signal. Nothing in Rev Oosterhuis’ presentation shows that the subcommittee’s outline of developments is inaccurate or that its assessment of these developments and their implications is in error.

3.2 Sister churches from around the world have encouraged the GKv to rethink the course upon which they have gone, including admonitions from the CanRC. At Synod

Meppel in 2017, the GKv was not convinced by the admonitions of their sister churches. This gives no confidence for us to expect change in the GKv in the immediate future.

3.3 Ecclesiastical Fellowship is extended to churches where we find the marks of the true church (Article 29, Belgic Confession). The presence of the marks of the church are premised on a given church accepting the authority of the Word of God. Now that the GKv approve of developments contrary to the Lord's instruction in his Word, the marks of the true church cannot with confidence be said to be consistently present in these churches.

3.4 Continuing a relation with the GKv could communicate that we are not sorely grieved by their recent decisions and are not in earnest about our past letters and words of admonition. Conversely, severing the relation would communicate to our own members the need to be watchful that we in the CanRC do not follow a similar path. At the same time, severing the relation would give encouragement to the faithful members in the GKv to take similar action.

3.5 Discontinuing the relationship at this time does not have to be irreversible. Should a future synod of the GKv give evidence that the churches have reversed their direction, the CanRCs can re-establish.

4. Recommendations

That Synod decide:

4.1 To thank the subcommittee mandated by GS 2016 for the diligent work they have done.

4.2 With sadness to discontinue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv) and to implore the CanRCs to continue in prayer for the GKv.

4.3 To convey this decision, together with a letter of explanation and encouragement, to each of the GKv congregations.

4.4 To mandate the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA):

4.4.1 To deliver this decision and letter (see 4.3) in person to the next Synod of the GKv;

4.4.2 To submit its report to the churches six months prior to the convening of the next general synod.

ADOPTED unanimously.

The Rev. Bouwman read Psalm 25:1-10 and led in prayer.

Synod also decided to send a letter (in Dutch) to *all* individual GKv congregations explaining the decision to terminate the sister-church relationship with the GKv. This included a call to them to appeal at the next synod of the GKv (2020) to the decisions taken on women in office at their Synod Meppel 2017, but, if this was unsuccessful, to separate from the GKv, in line with Art. 28 BC.

DGK and GKN in the Netherlands

Concerning *De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)* and the *Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)*, Synod decided to maintain contact with the DGK and mandate the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) to continue to monitor developments within this federation, paying special attention to the relationship between the DGK and the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford (**LRCA**). Synod also decided to maintain contact and be available for dialogue with the GKN and to monitor developments in these churches.

Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

For sufficient detail and completeness, the full considerations and decision of Synod on the FRCSA are reproduced here.

1. Material

1.1 Report of the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA) regarding the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) (8.2.2.1).

2. Observations

2.1 GS 2016 (Art. 81) decided:

[4.1] To continue Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA);

[4.2] To mandate the CRCA to send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCSA;

[4.3] To encourage the CRTS to support the FRCSA in the training of their theological students, because of the unique circumstances of the FRCSA theological training program.

2.2 In August 2018, br. O. Bouwman, member of the CRCA, along with Dr. A.J. deVisser attended the FRCSA synod Soshanguve North (near Pretoria) as fraternal delegates. A report of that visit was shared in *Clarion*, and correspondence was received from the FRCSA mission deputies asking us to consider funding some of their mission work in light of their anticipated budget shortfalls.

2.3 The CanRC has had EF with the FRCSA since 1954, with numerous close ties – ecclesiastical, operational, and personal – between the FRCSA and CanRC.

2.4 Over the past three years the CRTS has been supporting the FRCSA in the training of their theological students through videos of class instruction. A recent CRTS graduate, Rev. J. Bruintjes, accepted a call from the church in Cape Town and began his ministry there in 2017. The South African delegate to synod advised us that a number of students from the FRCSA are preparing for studies for the ministry at CRTS.

2.5 The CanRC have financially supported the burgeoning Reformational Study Centre near Pretoria, and in connection with this, the Rev. R.J. Kampen is fulfilling a “special ministerial task” under the oversight of the church in Dunnville for this project.

2.6 Although FRCSA did not require financial assistance at GS 2016, the topic of financial need has come up again. The financial needs of the FRCSA are and can be expected to continue to be substantial and merit attention.

3. Considerations

3.1 The committee has completed its mandate with respect to the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA).

3.2 With thankfulness to the Lord, the FRCSA shows in confession and practice to be a church federation seeking to serve the Lord according to His Word.

3.3 There is good reason to continue EF with the FRCSA.

3.4 Given the brotherhood of the communion of saints around the globe, the current circumstances of the FRCSA make it desirable for the CanRC to be willing to assist to the degree we can. Churches possessing the means and desire to assist the FRCSA need to know that there are Canada Revenue Agency regulations regarding the need for charitable organizations which send money overseas to retain “direction and control” over how these funds are disbursed.

4. Recommendations

That Synod decide:

4.1 To continue the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) under the adopted rules;

4.2 To mandate the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA):

4.2.1 To send a delegation to the next synod of the FRCSA;

4.2.2 To recommend the FRCSA to the churches as worthy of continued and increased prayerful and financial assistance, to help them with their extensive mission work as well as the compassionate pursuits among the disadvantaged;

4.2.3 To submit its report to the churches six months prior to the convening of the next general synod.

ADOPTED unanimously.

Churches in the Far East

Concerning the **Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)** Synod decided:

1. To continue the relationship of EF with the FRCA under the adopted rules;

2. To express thankfulness and appreciation for the FRCA’s ongoing support for and interest in the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS), including their financial support;

3. To encourage the Board of Governors and Senate of the CRTS to continue contact with the deputyship for theological education in the FRCA in matters pertaining to their desire to have the first year CRTS program available as distance education in the short term and their desire to establish a seminary in Australia in the medium to long term.

After committee meetings and some sensitive discussions, Synod decided to enter into EF with the **Reformed Calvinist Churches (GGRC)** in Indonesia (mainly on Sumba and Timor) and to work together with the FRCA and the sending church of Smithville, Ontario, to stimulate closer co-operation between the various reformed churches on Sumba and Timor. Synod also decided to extend EF to the **Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI)** as a whole, being the national federation of the churches in Kalimantan Barat (GGRI-KalBar), the churches in Nusa Tenggara Timur (GGRI-NTT), and the churches in Papua (GGRI-Papua). Synod also decided to instruct their CRCA to provide assistance to the **Reformed Churches of Indonesia on Timor (GGRI-T)** in their effort to join the GGRI and, in conjunction with the CanRC Smithville, to offer any other assistance within the normal ambit of CRCA work that the GGRI-T would need.

Synod also decided to continue EF with the **Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)**. Several churches in Korea have contacts with the CanRC. Synod decided to maintain contacts with the **Reformed Churches in Korea (RCK)**, the **Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK)** and to continue EF with the **Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCK)**.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

Synod decided to approve the retirement of **Dr. Gerhard Visscher** as professor of New Testament of the CRTS in 2020. Synod expressed deep gratitude for his many years of faithful and diligent service to the Seminary and the Churches as professor of New Testament and for his nine years as principal of the Seminary. Synod directed the Board of Governors of the CRTS to appoint **Dr. William den Hollander** of Langley, BC, as **new professor of New Testament**, starting his work at the CRTS in September 2020, upon retirement of Dr Visscher.

Dr den Hollander visited synod on Monday 20 May and spoke words of appreciation for the trust put in him. He looked forward to his new work at CRTS, but expressed dependence on the Lord for wisdom and strength to fulfil these new responsibilities. Synod thanked him for accepting the appointment and also thanked again Dr Visscher in his absence for his many years of serving the CanRC as professor at the CRTS. Synod also made a number of appointments on the Board of Governors of the CRTS. Furthermore, they instructed the Committee for Pastoral Training Program Funding to continue with its present mandate by funding one full-summer internship for each M.Div. student of CRTS who aspires to the ministry in the CanRCs. The internship could occur after the second or third year of a student's studies at CRTS.

Bible Translations

The church at Neerlandia-North requested that stronger reasons be formulated for rejecting the **NIV 2014 Bible translation** for use in the CanRC worship services. Synod

denied this appeal and stated that the motivations and decisions of earlier synods on Bible translations were adequate. Also, a **Christian Standard Bible (CSB)** has been published, but synod did not take a decision on studying this translation.

Synod decided to mandate the **Committee for Bible Translation:**

1. To solicit, receive and evaluate comments from the churches on the English Standard Version (ESV);
2. To submit worthy translation suggestions to the ESV editorial committee, including recommending changing the wording of Genesis 3:16 back to the ESV2011 version;
3. To serve the churches as a resource for Bible translation matters brought to the attention of the Committee by a church.

Appeals and Proposals

The church at Chilliwack appealed to a decision of Synod 2016 to allow **women to vote** for new office bearers. This appeal was denied and synod confirmed that voting does not mean “exercising authority”, since it is finally the church council who appoints new office bearers. Therefore, all confessing members *could* be allowed to vote, as regulated by local voting directions. The **Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford (LRCA)** submitted an appeal. But since the church is not in the CanRC anymore and neither a sister-church, the appeal was considered inadmissible.

The CanRC Hamilton - Blessings requested a revision of the **liturgical forms** to improve its clarity. Synod decided to not accede to this request but to point it to consider the appropriate ecclesiastical process through the minor assemblies. Synod had received further requests from several churches to modernize the language of the liturgical forms. Synod accepted that the forms, and specifically the form for the Lord’s Supper, should indeed be modernized to a formulation that could be understood by all church attendants. They instructed their Standing Committee for the Book of Praise (SCBP) to undertake this task and take the present and possible future proposals from the churches into consideration (see also below).

Additional psalms and hymns

The URCNA and the OPC have together decided to use the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (TPH). A significant number of CanRCs have made various proposals to Synod concerning acceptance of the TPH in some form, to be used (e.g. partially) in CanRC worship services. Synod formulated the following mandate for the Standing Commission of the *Book of Praise* (SCBP):

1. Concerning the Psalms

- 1.1 to seek input from the churches as to which non-Genevan renditions of the Psalms could be added to enhance the Psalm section of the *Book of Praise*.

1.2 to compile a list of suitable additional Psalm renditions for possible inclusion in the *Book of Praise*, using the TPH as a primary resource.

2. Concerning the Hymns:

2.1 to seek input from the churches concerning replaceable and additional hymns for the 2014 *Book of Praise*, using the TPH as a primary resource;

2.2 to compile a list of such hymns, keeping in mind that at this time the final number of hymns in the *Book of Praise* should not exceed 100 (as per GS 2004), and being flexible with the structural template (Apostle's Creed) of the hymn-section of the 2014 *Book of Praise*.

3. To send an explanatory report to the churches, together with a provisional list of songs for immediate testing, in the worship services if so desired, at least 18 months before the next general synod so there can be well-considered feedback to the next general synod.

4. To receive feedback from the churches on the Committee's interim report and include its evaluation of that feedback along with actionable recommendations in its report six months before the next general synod.

Conclusion

It took Synod eight days to work through their extensive agenda. In the above overview only the most relevant of the many decisions have been summarised. They should be sufficient, however, to show convincingly how busy our Lord Jesus Christ is with His churches in Canada and also world-wide. During this Synod Edmonton 2019 the delegates regularly turned to the Head of the church in prayer to give thanks and to ask for His blessing and guidance. Synod did this in the awareness and acknowledgement that "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain." (Ps. 127:1). The chairman led the daily devotions from Ps. 119.

The CanRC deals with controversial matters or matters that require intensive discussion first in committee and then table a (first) committee report to the plenary session. This is then discussed and sometimes referred back to the committee for revision, since the plenary meetings feels (somewhat) differently. This cycle may happen up to three times. The FRCA, on the other hand, always have their discussion first in a plenary session. Only if no immediate advice can be formulated, the matter is referred to a committee for further investigation and debate. When it then comes back on the table of a plenary session, there is already agreement on the broad lines and the matter can then often been finalised in the plenary session after one draft. The FRCA approach, therefore, seems to be more efficient than the CanRC approach.

The decision taken by Synod Edmonton 2019 on terminating the sister-church relationship with the RCN has an impact on our own sister-church relationship with the RCN. We can learn from the work that the CanRC has undertaken in this regard. This will assist the FRCSA in their decision to be taken at Synod Belhar 2020.

Attending Synod Edmonton has been an interesting and enriching experience. The personal contacts were brotherly and supportive. This will be instrumental in improved future contacts between the (deputies of the) FRCSA and the CanRC. Personal contacts with sister churches will support understanding each other as Reformed churches and clarify directly any misunderstandings that may arise. Several delegates of the CanRC expressed their appreciation to the Australian and South African delegates who stayed for the full duration of the synod. The next synod will be convened, the Lord willing, in May 2022 by the CanRC Guelph - Immanuel, Ontario.

J Moes

27 May 2019

Appendix B.3

LETTER OF CanRC SYNOD EDMONTON TO ALL RCNL CONGREGATIONS

General Synod Edmonton 2019 of the Canadian Reformed Churches
Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer Second Clerk of Synod (e.t.)

To all the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (GKv)

Re: Decision on Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Sister-Church Relationship)

May 21, AD 2019

Dear Brothers and Sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ,

It is with profound sadness and heavy hearts that as Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held in Edmonton 2019 we write directly to you—each congregation in the federation of Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated). We are taking this unusual step because of the distressing situation that has developed within your churches over the last years leading to the most recent decision of your General Synod Meppel 2017 to allow women to serve in any of the special offices. Not only has this development brought about a disruption of our long-standing and deeply cherished sister-church relationship, but, most importantly, it is offensive and disobedient to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The purpose of our letter is to explain our decision as Synod regarding your federation of churches, to offer a final word of exhortation, and to encourage the faithful among you to take necessary action.

As you may be aware, for more than twelve years we as churches have expressed growing disquiet with decisions made by your synods which have increasingly put our relationship as sister-churches under strain. Our General Synods 2007 and 2010, through an appointed committee, communicated to your synods of that time period serious concerns about the faithfulness of your federation to the Word of God in particular matters. To our dismay, those concerns were not alleviated but instead grew worse. Our General Synod 2013 took matters a step further by writing a letter of admonition directly to your General Synod 2014, clearly warning against the underlying faulty method of interpreting Scripture (i.e. hermeneutics) which was evident among you. Our Synod pointed out how those hermeneutics resulted in your Synod failing to maintain faithfulness to the Word of God in several matters.

Once again, there was no change in the direction of your churches. Our General Synod 2016 then decided to suspend certain formal rules of fellowship with your federation in the hope that this more drastic measure would arouse your next synod to reverse course. Our Synod 2016 also appointed a committee to send a letter directly to each congregation in your federation to, as much as possible, make all consistories aware of the great seriousness of the issues and to warn against the very real threat that our ecclesiastical

fellowship would be severed if there was no genuine repentance evidenced in the decisions of your next synod. With great sorrow, our General Synod 2019 received a thorough report from the appointed committee showing that not only was the warning of Synod 2016 not heeded, but Synod Meppel 2017 carried forward the hermeneutical trajectory of your previous synods and decided that the Bible permits women to serve in the offices of deacon, elder, and minister. In the address by the fraternal delegates sent to our Synod 2019 by Synod Meppel 2017, nothing was said that contradicted the findings of this report. For reasons outlined in the report and presented in our Synod Edmonton 2019 decision (see attached), this action is a clear violation of the Word of God and has forced us to terminate our ecclesiastical fellowship with you, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated).

Brothers and sisters, we do not write any of the above with a sense of superiority or self-righteousness but rather in humility and awareness of our own sins and shortcomings. We too are susceptible to error and we pray that the Lord will open our eyes should we become delinquent in doctrine or in conduct. Daily we also need to repent as the Holy Spirit pricks our conscience. Our fervent desire is that by means of this letter, by means of the many admonitions expressed to you by us and many of your sister churches, that you as a federation of churches will also be pricked in your conscience and return to a faithful walk with the Lord in obedience to the plain teaching of His word. Please know that as General Synod Edmonton we have prayed for this very thing and rest assured that this will be the ongoing prayer of our churches for you as well. May this Word of God stimulate us all in these matters: “Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way” (Ps. 25:8–9).

We also are aware that many individuals and more than a few consistories have all along shared our concerns and have been praying and working for a return to faithfulness to God’s Word at the synod level. We want to encourage all such individuals, consistories, and congregations that you do not stand alone and that we wish to support you as best we can in this troublesome time. By means of this letter we would like to urge all members and consistories to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) by calling your next synod to repent and return to the Scriptures, to the Reformed confession we have historically shared together. If in time that process does not produce the desired result, we would then urge you to consider your place in the federation.

As we confess in the Belgic Confession, when a church federation no longer consistently maintains the marks of the true church, it is time to come out of it and seek membership in a true church: “. . . it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it” (BC Art. 28). We recognize that this process will not be easy and undoubtedly will be filled with many challenges but we believe it is necessary for the

glory of the Lord, the preservation of his church, and the salvation of many souls. As a church federation we will support all such efforts with prayer, encouragement, and whatever other assistance we may be able to render. We encourage you to take up contact with our Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad in order to seek whatever help you may need (crca@canrc.org). Dear brothers and sisters, please receive our letter in the spirit in which it was written, the spirit of brotherly love and concern. May the Lord give you grace, wisdom, and strength as you reflect on these things and find your way forward.

Yours in Christ Jesus our Lord,

On behalf of General Synod Edmonton 2019,

Rev. Douwe Agema (Chairman)

Rev. Peter H. Holtvlüwer (Second Clerk)

Appendix C.1

LETTER ON AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON HERMENEUTICS

Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad
c/o Mr J. Moes
Kuilsriver
South Africa

13 June 2018

Deputaten Betrekkingen Buitelandse Kerken
van de Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

RE : Request for cooperation in organising an International Conference on Hermeneutics

Thank you for your letter dated 2 May 2018 wherein you propose an international conference on hermeneutics. This was discussed at our meeting on 12 June 2018.

We are very supportive of this initiative and refer you to our letter of 10 August 2015 wherein this topic was mooted. It is now almost three years later and much has happened in your federation of churches. We remain committed to this discussion but are of the opinion that this should take place in the Netherlands itself. It is a 'hot issue' in your country and it would be of benefit to the lay church member if it was seen that the leadership of the church was open to influences from sister, and other, international churches. We note that the conference on hermeneutics held at the Theological Seminary of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Hamilton, in January 2014, was of a more academic nature. However, given the importance of this topic we feel it would be beneficial to all Dutch brothers and sisters to have the opportunity to participate in such a conference.

Another consideration for our suggestion that the conference be hosted in the Netherlands was the fact that the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa have not wavered from the line which the Church has always followed regarding Bible exposition and exegesis. This has been a uniquely Dutch development. It was in the context of our sister church relationship that we suggested the conference in 2015, and our concern remains the same today. We are willing to send a representative from our churches in order to contribute to the discussion, and thank you once again for this opportunity.

Additionally you have the resources both in terms of manpower and finance to host such a conference.

Be assured of our abiding interest and love for you which is underpinned by our prayers. May this response be of service to you.

Yours in Christ

J Moes

Appendix C.2

GREETINGS MESSAGE OF JF RAIMOND TO RCNL SYNOD GOES 2020

Esteemed delegates to Synod Goes 2020, both from local churches and from all over the world.

Greetings

It is a great privilege for us to be here and have the opportunity to convey the greetings of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, located at the southern tip of Africa. These greetings come to you from brothers and sisters on a continent where it is full summer now, and where brothers and sisters from a wide variety of cultures are gathered in one bond of churches. But in spite of the geographical distance and differences in language, culture and climate, we are united through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mission Work

Besides our greetings, we also wish to thank the Reformed Churches (liberated) in the Netherlands for their extensive support of the mission work of our churches. The diversity of languages and cultures in our bond of churches is a direct result of that mission work. We know from personal experience how invaluable your support has been over the years, not only financially but also through your prayers to the King of the Church.

There is a lot more to be done still, and the Lord has given us many opportunities in our country to proclaim the gospel. For example, in the past year we have seen another mission congregation planted (Fisantekraal) and one mission church (Wesbank) instituted as an independent church. We currently have eight instituted churches in our federation and seven mission congregations.

But the Holy Spirit is busy teaching us to also use different methods of doing mission work, besides church planting. One of these new methods is the work of the Reformational Study Centre (RSC). This is a gospel support project with a library, with the aim to provide Scripturally sound material to those who want to study and preach the Word of God. Reformed literature and preaching outlines are electronically distributed in Africa and Asia (in English and French).

This mission work is in response to the part in the great commission in Matthew 28 where Jesus says “... *teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*”

Purpose of Church Relations

The most important reason for having relations as sister churches is that we have a responsibility to encourage and admonish each other to stay faithful to the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Sadness

In this regard we are sad and deeply grieved in our relationship with the RCN. The reason for this is that it appears that many in your churches have started reading the Bible in a

way that is impairing the authority of the Word of God. You have either ignored, or started reasoning about certain parts of Scripture which do not agree with the culture of your present society any more.

Our churches have often expressed concern and have admonished you about this. We are sad because it seems that you have not been listening to us, nor to other sister churches.

Advice

Delegates from abroad have been invited to your synod in an advisory capacity. We wish to take this opportunity to advise you to prayerfully consider the meaning of the Word of God in 2 Peter 1 : 20-21 (NIV) :

"Above all, you must understand that no prophesy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own understanding of things. (Uw eigen vertaling zegt het eigenlijk mooier : "een eigenmachtige uitleg toelaat"). For prophesy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

Prayer

It is our prayer that the Tri-une God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit will guide you throughout this synod so that your work may be a blessing to all in the bond of churches, as well as provide reasons for joy and thankfulness to your concerned sister churches. May we be standing together in this lost and broken world, spreading the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, united in Him.

Appendix C.3

ADDRESS OF JF RAIMOND TO RCNL SYNOD GOES 2020

Esteemed delegates of Synod Goes 2020.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you in person.

Those of you who have read the greeting message of our churches may have noticed two things :

- In the first place that we used the words **“deeply grieved”** in our relationship with your churches. Why would we use such strong words ?

Is this because we are hurt in our personal feelings that you have not been listening to us ?

No, we are hurt because we believe that the authority of the Word of God is being impaired.

That is what makes us deeply grieved !

Because the Word of our Lord is dear to us. It is of life-saving importance to us !!

- And that brings us to the second thing that you may have noticed :

Foreign delegates are here in an advisory capacity. That is why we used the opportunity to give you the advice to prayerfully consider the meaning of the Word of God in 2 Peter 1 : 20-21 (NIV) :

“Above all, you must understand that no prophesy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own understanding of things. (Your own translation says it even better : “dat geen enkele profetie van de Schrift een eigenmachtige uitleg toelaat”). For prophesy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

I am not a minister, but a ordinary, faithful member of our churches.

In order to prepare for this synod I started reading about the question of women in office. I read the “grounds for the decisions of Synod Meppel”, de “Nota van de kerk van Amersfoort-de Horsten”, and I read about “Zwijgteksten, Scheppingsorde en Geesteswerk”, as well as various articles in “Nader Bekeken”. And I must say that at first I was rather confused.

And I can understand why many ordinary, faithful members of your churches are confused, and don’t know what to believe any more.

Because I read that :

- Synod Meppel simply ignored the so-called “Silence texts” because they say : “the exegesis of these texts is too greatly in dispute”.
- I read that we must not read what apostle Paul literally says in those texts, but what he actually meant to say.
- I read that the Holy Spirit has brought us further than in the time of Paul, and that the Spirit could teach us something now that is the opposite of what the Word of God used to tell us.
- I have also read that the Word of God can actually mean two different things at the same time. You can believe that the Word of God forbids women in office, and that it does not forbid it, and that you are right if you believe the one or the other.

- And last but not least, I have read that we must not pay too much attention to the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ appointed only male apostles, who were given the ministry of reconciliation according to 2 Corinthians 5: 18, the same as our Lord only appointed male priests in the OT who were given the same ministry.

Do you understand now why we used those strong words “deeply grieved”.

Because one could almost start to believe that the Word of God is only a matter of interpretation !

.....

I quoted you earlier from 2 Peter 1 vers 20 – 21, but now I wish to encourage all of you with the Word of God in the vers before that : *“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”*

May the light of that Word, that prophetic message, guide you throughout this Synod.

I thank you

Appendix C.4

REPORT ON ATTENDANCE OF RCNL SYNOD GOES 2020

1. General

The RCNL (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) or GKv (Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt) have 32 sister churches (as well as 22 contact churches). All these churches were invited to the “Buitenlandweek” (week of foreign delegates) of Synod Goes 2020. According to the invitation letter *“foreign delegates will have the opportunity to present their churches and have an advisory role in the General Synod, in the sessions of Thursday 9th till Saturday 11th January 2020.”*

Of these sister churches, 5 have terminated their relationship, 5 (including FRCSA) have suspended their relationship, and 1 has reduced their relationship to a lower level. Eight further churches have expressed their concerns regarding the developments in the RCN and the decisions of Synod Meppel.

Of the 22 “contact churches” one has decided to withdraw their request for sister church relationship, one has suspended and one has terminated their relationship. Of all these churches only 19 delegates of 12 churches, of which two had already terminated relations, attended the “Buitenlandweek”.

Letters of the concerned churches were all gathered by deputies BBK of the RCN, and sent (except, by omission, the letter from the ICRC) to the members of synod as well as to all foreign delegates attending Synod Goes 2020.

It is an eye-opener and at the same time a comforting experience to read those letters, because from them speaks the love and concern of churches from all over the world for the RCN, whom they often consider their mother churches. You can really see the sister church relationship at work.

Allow us to quote one example *“.. we write to you one more time to plead with you, who were fathers in the faith to us for so many years, to turn back from the course upon which you embarked in Synod Meppel 2017....”*

2. Program of Synod Goes and meetings attended

The undersigned, Rev FJ Bijzet and br JF Raimond, attended the following meetings and discussions :

- Wednesday January 8th 2020

Meeting in sections (ours was the “Africa section”), where every delegate could introduce himself and tell a bit about their churches with the focus on their mission work.

Here we learned about the DOCENDA program of the GKSA, where untrained or poorly trained church leaders can enroll via DOCENDA as students of the North West University. Successful students receive a worldwide recognised degree from the University at the end of their studies.

They can study by way of distance learning with lectures via the internet. For this purpose a number of church buildings of the GKSA are used as open learning centres, where the lectures are received by the students, and the local pastor acts as their facilitator.

Jean Pierre Kanyiki (Professor and minister) of the URCC told us of the difficult circumstances in the Congo, such as war, hunger, epidemics, and people moving from the country to the big cities in search for work.

In the corridors and during lunches many conversations and discussions were held with the Dutch deputies. The different way of reading the Bible soon became apparent. For instance, one of the deputies was of the opinion that the hermeneutics of prof J van Bruggen “are a bit too strict”.

It was also clear that the deputies never expected that the foreign churches would react like they did, and they are looking for ways to appease them rather than taking their arguments and concerns seriously.

The deputies BBK of the RCN expressed the opinion that the previous synod had made many mistakes that caused people to be concerned. This synod should correct these mistakes and give the proper Scriptural grounds for the decisions regarding women in office, which the last synod did not. Synod Goes must also handle the request for revisions in a correct way.

The Dutch deputies for Churches Abroad also noticed that a perception exists with foreign churches that the previous synod had not listened to them and done nothing with their arguments. They say that although nothing reflects in the grounds for the decisions, they did indeed listen to their sister churches and that on the contrary their concerns were taken seriously.

- Strategy meeting

At 14h00 there was an informal meeting to discuss a common strategy between :
CanRC, rev dr. Karlo Janssen and br Gerard Nordeman
FRCA, rev Dean Anderson and br Bert Veenendaal
FRCSA, rev FJ Bijzet en br Frits Raimond

There had already been a meeting between CanRC and FRCA with the GKN (Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland).

A meeting with the DGK was planned for Thursday evening which rev FJ Bijzet would attend.

Dr Karlo Janssen would keep minutes of both meetings and will send them to us as soon they had been approved by the GKN and DGK

Delegates of all three churches (CanRC, FRCA and FRCSA) decided to make use of the opportunity to address Synod Goes on Friday. This opportunity came about by a change in program which was announced on 2 January by the Dutch deputies in an email. Any delegate who wished to do so, could address the synod for a maximum of 10 minutes. This change was caused by the delegates from CanRC and FRCA who insisted on addressing Synod Goes. Their synods had sent them to explain the decision to terminate the sister church relationship with the RCN in person.

- Thursday January 9th 2020

Discussion of the joint report NGK/DKE (Deputaten Kerkelijke Eenheid = Deputies for Church Unity)

There were several critical questions from the Korean Churches :

- what happened in 1967 ? (when the NGK churches split up with the RCN). Is this not relevant any more now ?
- What about homosexuality which is allowed in the churches of the NGK as well as some of the RCN churches
- you are looking for contact with many churches, why particularly with those you mention in your report, and not for instance with the Roman Catholics ?
- The Brazilian delegate was shocked to read in the DKE report that the deputies "last but not least" had contact with the World Council of Churches. He drew the conclusion that the RCN did not mind losing half of their sister churches worldwide and were already looking for new (and quite different) relations.
- Another delegate asked a question about a remark in the DKE report, "*to continue as separate churches is harmful for our credibility*" - can you explain what you mean by that ?
- As FRCSA we asked the question : what are your criteria in your search for unity ? Surely this should be unity in truth according to the gospel of John.

New Church order

In the discussion of the new church order the following questions were asked :

- Why were the sister churches not consulted about the new church order (dr Breed of GKSA) ? because that is part of your obligation as sister churches ?
- GKSA : when you are looking for unity with other churches, where do you stop ? Because you could be leaving churches behind who love you !
- OPC asked a question regarding the form of ordination of ministers.

Women in office

- Korean Churches asked : how can you quote Rev 12 : 6 in the grounds for decisions of Synod Meppel, because it is clear from Scripture that this woman means the church !
- Rev FJ Bijzet : the grounds for the decision on women in office mention two lines in the Bible, but the one line (against) is a consistent line, but the other line is not. Time and again new exegesis are done of certain Bible texts in an effort to make them say something different than what we used to read in them.
- Br Raimond asked a question as reaction to what one of the delegates had said : The Lord is one, and therefore His Word is not divided. His question : I agree with that, but how can you then maintain that Gods Word is saying two different things at the

same time ? Is this not because you have started reading the Bible in a different way. And is this not the **core question** : how do we read the Bible ?

- One of the delegates from Sri Lanka came to br Raimond later to thank him for the question because he agreed with it wholeheartedly !

- Afternoon of January 9th

Official opening of Synod Goes by chairman rev. M Oosterhuis, and discussion of the report of BBK.

Ceremony of offering Sister Relationship to GKT (Gereja Kristus Tuhan). This was a very moving ceremony, with many hymns sung in Indonesian.

Both delegates of the GKT addressed synod and gave extensive information regarding their church history, as well as their outreach to many ethnic and other religious groups in Indonesia, especially Chinese and Muslim.

It was remarkable that both delegates spoke without notes in English that was quite understandable (as opposed to delegates from other foreign churches).

Church Service in the Petra Kerk in Harderwijk

Br Raimond attended this church service while rev. Bijzet attended a meeting with the DGK.

Here the Lords Supper was celebrated after a sermon by Rev. R Mayer of the ERKWB (Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche W.B). This sermon was a beautiful, penetrating proclamation of the Word of God about confession of sin before the Lord who says “Be holy because I am Holy”. In his sermon, Rev. Mayer gave a short summary and practical application of the ten commandments.

Friday January 10th 2020

- Addresses by delegates of CanRC, FRCA, Korean churches, FRCSA, GKSA, OPC and GKT, published on the website of “Een in Waarheid”.
- The delegate of GKSA : why did you not consult us, we have studied this matter since 1988. We could have helped you. Why confront us with decisions ? Our advice : put everything on hold and talk to us. *“If your hermeneutics are wrong, everything goes wrong.”*

In the reactions of members of synod it was noticed that there was not a single person who reacted on the content of the concerns of the foreign churches, but they only picked on certain words and statements their delegates had used, such as “strong words” “own interpretation” and “you have changed”. They called it “Harsh words that hurt”.

The worst reaction was : “you are saying ‘we love you’ but where does that love show ?”

Generally they were surprised that these churches all feel so strongly about the issue.

3. Impressions of discussions and addresses

Here are a few impressions that your delegates gained during the “Buitenlandweek” of Synod Goes 2020.

- There was almost no recognition of the concerns of foreign churches.
- Although the delegates of foreign churches were given many opportunities to voice their concerns, we had the impression that most of the Dutch delegates were long past the stage of considering other views. One of the synod delegates said in a discussion : *“we have discussed these arguments for 20 years now, let’s not go there again.”*
- There are many of those who are against women in office (such as a former delegate to Synod Meppel, who voted against Women in Office), but who still see room for a different interpretation of the Bible, and as a result do cooperate with (or at least tolerate) the developments in the RCN.
- The RCN are moving forward to unity with the NGK, which is very important to them. (The NGK has had women in office for years, allows homosexual couples at the Lord’s Supper, as well as homosexual office bearers, as well as children at the Lord’s Supper).
One can notice this move to unity in the tasks proposed for the new deputies BBK (point 12.4. in their report) : *” to work together with the CCS (“Comitee voor Contact en Samensprekingen”) of the GKN, and coordinate the development of functioning as one committee in future when, as expected, the two federations become one.”*
One can see it in the fact that GKN representatives were present at various discussions of the “Buitenlandweek”. One can also see it in the fact that the two churches are working together in a joint committee for a new church order.
- We have the strong feeling that this synod is only going to do what is called in naval terms “damage control” : trying to prevent more foreign churches to terminate their relationship, and trying to prevent people and churches to leave the church federation.
- From private conversations with some ordinary, faithful members of the RCN, br. Raimond gets the feeling that they are hoping for a kind of “Modality Church” where each can find what he prefers, such as a “traditional church” without female elders or ministers and a traditional liturgy with an organ and not a band.
- We should not forget that there are many local churches of the RCN that have been working together with the local NGK churches as well as the CGK (Christian Reformed Churches) for many years. The result of this is that for many members of the RCN, unity with the NGK is only to be expected. The fact that the RCN did not allow “Women in Office” has always been a stumbling block to unity in the past.

In spite of the disappointments experienced at the “Buitenlandweek” of Synod Goes 2020, there is the overwhelming joy and encouragement of the love and faithfulness of the delegates of the foreign churches. Time and again they came to us with encouragement and brotherly love. It is with them that we felt the Unity in Christ. See for example an excerpt from an email of a delegate of the Christian Reformed Church of Sri Lanka :

*It was so good to interact with you over the last few days!
Will remember to pray for your unique position as a
consequence of the unrelenting attitude of the RCN!*

*May the presence of the Lord be your blessing as you travel
back home!*

Your brother in Christ,

It was also very good to sit next to the delegate from the GKSA and to experience the shared love and faithfulness for the Word of God with him.

Rev FJ Bijzet

br JF Raimond

Appendix C.5

RESPONSE LETTER TO PROPOSED NEW RCNL CHURCH ORDER

Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad
c/o. Mrs. G.W.C. van den Berg-Kroeze
Bloukeurstraat 17
Blommendal
BELLVILLE 7530 South Africa

To Deputies RCA of the Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt
c/o Mrs. A. Mijnheer
P.O Box 499
8000 AL ZWOLLE
The Netherlands

21 October 2020

Esteemed Sisters / Brothers

PROPOSED NEW CHURCH ORDER

Your letter of 23 September 2020, concerning the proposed new Church Order of the in future united Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (GKv) and Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK), refers.

We regret not to be in a position to respond to your request to comment on the proposed new Church Order, due to the following considerations.

1. We have serious concerns with the unification of the GKv and the NGK. The NGK separated from the GKv in the period 1967-1969 partly because of a dispute about binding the churches to the Confessions, with the NGK having a more liberal view. The Church Order of Dordt was also replaced by a less restrictive church accord. After 1969, our churches have maintained a sister church relationship with the GKv and rejected the opinions of the NGK. It seems clear to us now that views of the GKv are aligning more with the thinking and theology of the NGK. The NGK have already accepted women in office, on which subject we have raised serious concerns with the GKv over the past several years. In addition, the NGK accept practicing homosexual couples as full church members without exercising church discipline, while this is contrary to the Lord's proclaimed will.

2. Our churches appreciate the Church Order of Dordt as a sound reformed basis for church polity. To replace this by a more liberal and less binding accord of church relationship will, in our view, be a weakening of the bond between churches within a federation and in keeping each other on the reformed path.

3. From submissions in 2014 until the letter of 27 August 2019 of our latest Synod Soshanguve North, we have not received any substantial comments on our concerns related to the developments in the GKv. It is difficult not to conclude that our concerns are not being taken seriously. Therefore, it seems that there will be no use in submitting further concerns.

It is our opinion that the GKv, in its aim of uniting with the NGK, are not conducive to furthering discussions with concerned sister churches. We cannot support your efforts in watering down your present Church Order, by reducing the oversight responsibilities that the churches should have toward each other.

We trust you will understand our position. We will submit this opinion of our deputyship to our next Synod Belhar 2021. But we are convinced that our synod will share our views.

With brotherly greetings

J Moes, convener DRCA

Appendix C.6

MINUTES OF DISCUSSIONS WITH THE DGK ON 9 JANUARY 2020

Meeting FRCA-CanRC-VGKSA-DGK

January 9, 2020

Present:

CanRC: Rev. Karlo Janssen, br. Gerry Nordeman

DGK: Rev. Michiel Sneepe (BBK), br. Dirk-Jan Bolt (BBK), br. Piet Dijkstra (BBK), Rev. Hilbert Gunnink¹ (BBK), Rev. Piet van Gorp (BBK adviseur), Rev. Corneel Koster (BBK), zr. Riet Sollie (translator).

FRCA: Rev. Dean Anderson, br. Bert Veenendaal

FRCSA: Rev. Ferdinand Bijzet

Opening by MS with the reading of 1Thesalonians 5:1-11 and prayer. He spoke some words of welcome. We decided to use Dutch as the main language.

Then followed a round where each member of the meeting introduced themselves.

MS request that each of the churches give a general impression of their churches and describe points of relevance to our connections.

DGK: (CK) We are coming closer to the GKN. In 2019 DGK held an extraordinary synod which decided that the GKN should be recognized as churches of Jesus Christ. We are now in discussions, both nationally and, where relevant, locally. We need each other. There are various points that will require discussion, but none are considered church-dividing. There is contact with ministers within the GKv, usually informal and direct between persons. Among the names mentioned were: Rev. Wiersma, Rev. Storm. There is also contact with other office bearers and churches (e.g. Ten Boer). The periodical *Bazuin* has become a private magazine. DGK does at times organize meetings for the concerned within the GKv, but it has not proven to be very effective. As far as churches abroad is concerned: there is contact with CanRC, FRCA, and FRCSA. The sister church relationship with the LRCA has been continued, but questions are being asked about their view of the catholicity of the church. We have begun discussions on paper, how they view the Westminster Standards, and how they separated from the CanRC. Our provisional conclusions (as deputies) have been shared with them. DJB indicated that doesn't mean that there are no concerns on our side with respect to the CanRC (e.g. issues surrounding Blessings). GN explained that there has never been a division within the CanRC since institution in the 1950s and thus there is a lot of variety within the CanRC.

FRCA: (DA) Our committees have been merged into a single large committee. (MS) We had a very positive experience in Australia at the synod. How did decisions fall within the churches? (DA) There is concern, especially regarding the way decisions were taken, e.g. the matter of admissibility (can individual members address a broader assembly on a synod decision or not). The last sister church relationship entered into is the First Evangelical

¹ Rev. Gunnink has been a missionary in Kalimantan Barat (Indonesia). In his retirement he plans to teach (as private individual) in the GGRI-KB. He indicated that Rev. Waang is very clued in to what is going on in the GKv, others less so.

Reformed Church in Singapore. (HG) How are the relationships regarding Indonesia and taking over from the GKv? (DA) LitIndo is being taken over by the Mundijong church. As to support for the mission churches, this is not completely clear but support is moving from The Netherlands to Australia (Rockingham). (HG) Does Australia understand that the merging of the three federations in Indonesia is something that won't work well for at least the next 100 years? (DA) Our Rev. VanDelden is focused on that work. (HG) VanDelden has been in touch with me. (MS) We have no decisions yet on Indonesia. Should we not work more formally together? (GN) Smithville CanRC has a missionary in Timor, Indonesia.

CanRC (KJ²): Explained relationships with GGRI, GGRC, GKv. Discussion about the Indonesian situation followed. Explanation of church plant situations in CanRC (e.g. Chinese Reformed Church) and external relations the CanRC have.

FRCSA (FB): 10 congregations, of which 4 are white and 6 are coloured. The challenge for South Africa is that it cannot call ministers who do not have a South African passport. Description of the work of Jopie Vanderlinde. Eric van Alten has come to Pretoria. Theological education is now being done through Hamilton, which has also been supported financially by Australia. There are governors in South Africa. Mission is all internal in South Africa. There is a closer connection with the Doppe churches (which began with Pretoria, but also in Capetown – there is pulpit exchange between VGKSA and GKSA). The relationship with the GKv has been suspended and there is a synod in 2020 that will decide how to proceed. In the past FRCSA has intensive contact with 3 churches (Canada, Australia, The Netherlands), for the rest it is contact as manpower is limited.

MS: Opportunity for half an hour of general discussion.

DJD: we seek contact with a small federation of churches west of the Carpathian mountains in the Ukraine. They have a sister church relationship with the RPCCEE. Our concern is that the RPCCEE is centrally run. How do you judge the third-party relationships a possible sister church relationship you might have an issue with? (KJ): If the relationship concerns us, we may continue contact but we do not enter into a relationship – as in the case of DGK because of the DGK-LRCA relationship.

GN: How is the relationship with GKN? We were pleased to hear that you had convened an extraordinary synod. What if DGK and GKN don't merge soon, should we consider sister church relationships with just one or with both rather than wait until they are united? We recognize that it might take some time for the union to happen. (MS): Myself and CK are both in the deputies for this unity. We are enthusiastic about union. We hope to sit together at the end of January where we need to determine what we need to discuss. We're not clear yet on how things should be done (especially when it comes to schisms and suspensions). (CK) We need each other, we can't stay separate. (RS): I belong to Zwolle where there has been a breach; things need to be talked through, especially for the youth. (MS) This requires time to be dealt with locally. (RS): We also need to explain the change with respect to the LRCA. (MS): we may also ask the congregations what they feel needs to be dealt with. (GN): would there be anything that could cause permanent division (e.g. women voting, which some GKN have). (MS): There are important differences but none are not considered church divisive. (CK): There is a complexity, we have seen people go from DGK to GKN and from GKN to DGK. There are also caricatures. (HG): Would the CanRC & FRCA be willing to help us in these things if things do break down? (Consensus): that would be within the mandates given, and is certainly a responsibility.

KJ: How should the CanRC interact with the request of DGK Mariënberg? (DJB): I was on the appeals committee. We have tried to do everything we could to help things come right, but

² It is very difficult for me to be both taking notes and talking.

the attitude is not good, they tell pure lies. There is a perception of a measure of radicalism within the DGK, I've certainly seen it when it comes to DGK Marienberg. (HG): One thing I have appreciated about the DGK is how they discussed this in a peaceful way at their synod.

DJB: It would not help if you were to enter into a sister church relationship with one of us (GKN or DGK) without doing it with the other, for it might slow down the process of becoming one.

CK: We were glad with the decision of Australia to consider working with us with pressing towards union as a condition.

PvG: Do note that there have been decisions by both synods to seek unity, and that should be sufficient. (KJ): What you are saying, then is, at any point it should be either both or neither, never one while not the other.

A misunderstanding regarding the CRCA-SRN report was cleared.

PvG: Could we have some sort of press release for the church members? They need to know that there is movement in things. (Consensus): Once we have minutes, a press release can be put together.

Discussion about what can be shared of the DGK-LRCA discussion. One point is that the LRCA has not responded officially yet. Once that reaction is there, this can be shared with the FRCA, FRCSA, and CanRC, but, even then, only for confidential use.

(HG): Is it true that KJ will lead a worship in the GKN this Sunday? (KJ): Yes. (Discussion ensues, some eyebrows raised at whether this is right, at the end HG admitted he too preaches in Indonesia).

(GN): This a good meeting, I feel relieved (“opgelucht”) how this meeting has gone.

Some closing words were spoken of gratitude and the foreigners were encouraged for the task before them yet with respect to the GKv synod. KJ led in closing prayer.

Appendix C.7

MINUTES OF DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GKN ON 7 JANUARY 2020

Meeting GKN, CanRC, FRCA

Tuesday January 7, 2020 – Elspeet, The Netherlands

Present:

GKN: Rev. Lourens Heres, Rev. Aalzen de Jager, Rev. Rob Visser

CanRC: Rev. Karlo Janssen, Br. Gerry Nordeman,

FRCA: Rev. Dean Anderson, Br. Bert Veenendaal

LH opened with the reading of 1Thessalonians 1 and spoke some words on this, and then led in prayer.

The meeting took place in (mostly) Dutch. KJ took minutes in English. The purpose of the meeting was to become acquainted with each other in a more personal way and to update one another.

DA explained that FRCA deputies had a mandate to be in contact with the GKN and DGK. The FRCA are looking for unity among the churches in The Netherlands. For there to be a relationship with the GKN, a local FRCA needs to present the matter to a classis for presentation to synod; Mundijong is looking to do this. For the FRCA, the relationship DGK-LRCA³ is an issue.

KJ explained the CanRC mandate, which is also about being in contact with the GKN and DGK. The CanRC figure the situation is still 'young' with much changing, and thus have not yet responded to the GKN request for Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF). As the LRCA is in Canada and has declared the CanRC a false church, the relationship DGK-LRCA is an issue.

Both FRCA and CanRC wonder where things are at, in GKN-DGK discussions, especially on the issue of the catholicity of the church.

Recently both GKN and DGK have decided in synod that there is nothing between them that should keep them separate. On January 29 GKN deputies and DGK deputies will have their first formal discussion. At this meeting they plan to figure out what exactly needs to be sorted out between them. One of these matters would be the relationship between DGK and the LRCA and more broadly the catholicity of the church. The discussion that will take place will be between committees consisting in fact of all active ministers in both federations.

DA asked if the relationship with the LRCA is indeed not something that would keep them separate. RV explained that they had not really looked at this in this way. AdJ explained that within DGK Rev. P. Van Gulp has recently admitted DGK may have acted too hastily.

KJ explained the origins of the LRCA: namely that it was a group of people who had withdrawn from various CanRCs and then formed a church. The LRCA should not be seen as a CanRC that had withdrawn from the federation. GN explained that the members of

³ Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford.

the LRCA had various reasons for doing what they did. A main issue was relationships with churches that did not fence the Lord's Supper as the CanRC does. Other reasons includes things like celebrating the Lord's Supper with small cups, using fruit juice instead of wine.

The issue of the catholicity of the church is a difficult point, GKN and DGK recognize there are various views that are all within the bounds of Scripture and confession.

DGK is eager to press on to unifying, GKN wants to be very careful in proceeding so that it is done consciously and without causing unnecessary strife. Grass roots unity is important too: thus DGK Rev. Van Egmond has recently spoken at a GKN on 'Being Reformed'. Church Order is an issue at times too, because within the DGK there have been those who push very strict views. The DGK itself is experiencing issues within its circles with a radically strict thinking (AdJ called it "Shield and Sword", "Reformanda" type thinking). It's why, for example, DGK has classes and a synod once every 3 years (GKN at this time only has one broader assembly twice a year.) The issues DGK is experiencing relate especially to DGK Mariënberg (with a ward in Hasselt).

GKN has variations within it: two congregations have (with approval of the GKN classis) more hymns, some GKN have women voting. It depends on the origins of the congregation as to how it functions. Thus GKN Zwolle, where a large portion have been DGK in the past, has just the 41 hymns in the pre-1996 *Gereformeerd Kerkboek* and only recently decided to allow the singing of Hymns 3 & 4 for the creed.

DA asked what motivated the request for a sister church relationship with FRCA and CanRC. LH explained, we have historical ties, to formalize pulpit exchange (though GKN has approved ministers from CanRC, FRCA, and FRCSA to lead worship services⁴), we have theological agreement, we may need each other with a view to training for the ministry. AdJ explained how much we need each other. He is very thankful for the pulpit supply.

AdJ indicated the GKN is disappointed that at this point in time the CanRC reacted with a "wait and see" attitude. DA asked, would it be wise of FRCA or CanRC to enter into EF with the GKN without doing so with the DGK, would this not cause issues in The Netherlands. The issue for both FRCA and CanRC with DGK is the DGK-LRCA relationship. RV & AdJ indicated they realize that the matter of the LRCA will have to be raised January 29.

LH wondered how many appeals would be submitted to the next DGK synod regarding internal issues (e.g. Mariënberg); this could serve to be a litmus test.

The GKN brothers asked how important a tie with The Netherlands would be in Canada and Australia.

DA explained there is not really much of a tie between FRCA and The Netherlands. It's a "far from their bed" show.

GN explained that in Canada few people know what is happening in The Netherlands.

⁴ FRCA: Rev. Veldman had led worship services. CanRC: Rev. Janssen is to lead a worship service on January 12.

One factor to keep in mind is regionalization in interchurch relations: Australia concentrates on Asia, Canada on the Americas. Australia has a policy of there having to be very good reasons for a sister church relationship (e.g. there's no relationship with Brazil - IRB). A relationship CanRC-GKN would be experienced similar to a relationship CanRC-FCS.

Discussion led to GKN focusing on Europe. GKN has EF with the SERK in Germany. The GKN has looked within EuCRC circle. KJ pointed to churches such as the EPCEW, EPCI, FCS, RPCCEE.

KJ asked what the GKN expected to happen within the GKv after GS 2020. The GKN brothers indicated there are contacts within GKv but there is no idea about what may happen. It does seem that there will be large groups pulling out of the GKv (Spakenburg, Capelle a/d IJssel, Urk, Rijnsburg).

DA asked whether there are concerns within GKN. AdJ indicated that sometimes there is the issue that with smaller numbers, opinions and persons carry more weight, there is macho behaviour (“haantjesgedrag”).

Appreciation was expressed by all for how the meeting had gone. DA closed in the meeting in prayer.

Appendix D

DRCA REPORT TO THE FRCSA INDABA OF 1 and 2 MARCH 2019

1. Instructions

The general instructions from Synod Soshanguve North 2017 to the DRCA are :

- to maintain contact with our three sister churches (the FRCA in Australia, the CanRC in Canada and the USA and the RCNL in the Netherlands) and attend their synods to convey our greetings and provide an overview of recent developments in our churches,
- to monitor the developments in the DGK and the GKN who separated from the RCNL,
- to remain an active member of the ICRC and
- to report back to the FRCSA churches on relevant developments.

2. Membership and Meetings

The members of the DRCA are: Rev Johan Bruintjes, sr Gwen van den Berg, brs Frits Raimond and Hans Moes (convener). Rev Phineas Kgatle is the ICRC contact person, who attends the DRCA meetings through Skype. Br Henri Luijk has been co-opted as a young member. So far, five quarterly meetings have been held since March 2018.

3. Activities

The DRCA have sent the Acts of Synod Soshanguve North 2017 to our sister churches and have updated the Afrikaans and English version of the FRCSA information booklet. This has been placed on the FRCSA website. The DRCA follow the developments in our sister churches mostly through their synod reports and their publications (*Una Sancta* of the FRCA, *Clarion* and *Reformed Perspective* of the CanRC and *Nader Bekeken* of the RCNL).

Activities concerning the **FRCA** have been mainly attending their Synod Bunbury in 2018 (by Rev Kgatle). The FRCA have decided to terminate their sister church relationship with the RCNL. They focus with their mission work on South East Asia and rely on the CRTS of the CanRC in Hamilton for the training of their future ministers. Some feed-back on this has been provided in *Kompas* of June and August 2018.

The main contact with the **CanRC** has been the visit of Prof Arjan de Visser of the CRTS to South Africa in July 2018. Rev Bruintjes will attend Synod Edmonton in May 2019, the Lord willing.

Synod Meppel 2017 of the **RCNL** has decided to open all church offices to sisters. This has met with serious concerns from within this church federation, as well as from their sister churches such as the FRCSA. It becomes clear that this decision is based on “new hermeneutics” and acceptance of modern western lifestyles. Because of this, the RCNL’s membership of the ICRC has been suspended. Deputies RCA of the RCNL have proposed to hold a conference on reformed hermeneutics with their sister churches, but whether this finds enough support is not certain yet. Synod Soshanguve North 2017 decided to send a letter of concern to Synod Goes 2020 of the RCNL. Our *dilemma* is how to support

the concerned group of churches and members within the RCNL, while we are only supposed to have contact with the RCNL through their DRCA.

The next synod of the RCNL will be **Synod Goes 2020**. It is expected that a number of revision requests of “sisters in office” will be debated. We are instructed to send two delegates to this synod.

The RCNL mission organization *Verre Naasten* is planning to hold a conference in the Netherlands in May 2019 on “Resident aliens”, with four sub-themes. We have concerns about the value of attending, but it has been suggested that one of our missionaries may be in the Netherlands for a mission visit and that this person could possibly attend. This will then be arranged directly.

The **GKN and the DGK** in the Netherlands are in contact with each other, trying to iron out their differences. They advise us on these developments.

The Africa Region of the **ICRC** is planning to hold a regional meeting in Namibia. Rev Kgatle is following these developments so that the FRCSA can be represented. The next general ICRC meeting is scheduled to be held in India in 2021.

We have been approached by Rev Martinho of Tete Province, Mozambique to become affiliated with the FRCSA. However, it would appear that they only correspond in Portuguese, which makes contact very difficult. It is not clear what he/they require of us.

4. Outstanding tasks

Before our next Synod Belhar 2020 (21 to 25 September 2020), we hope to be able to report back on the decisions of Synod Edmonton 2019 of the CanRC and on the decisions of Synod Goes 2020 of the RCNL. These synods will take important decisions that will affect sister church relationships. We will provide feed-back to the churches when it becomes available, through *Kompas*.

5. Matters of general attention

Synod Belhar 2020 will most likely review our present sister church relationship with the RCNL. Our churches will have to judge the seriousness of the “new hermeneutics” that is spreading within the RCNL and determine whether this is reason for changing or even terminating our sister church relationship with them. But we should try to support those in the RCNL that are also concerned about these developments within their church federation. These are challenges not only for the DRCA and synod delegates, but should involve a wide section of our churches. It may also impact on our mission work.

Deputies for our mission work and for the support of needy churches are looking at the FRCA and the CanRC for financial support. Sometimes, a delegate to a synod of a sister church is asked to, in general, request such support. The FRCSA should construct efficient procedures to co-ordinate requests for financial support from our sister churches and this should not become part of the task of the DRCA.

One of the tasks of the DRCA is to issue attestations to ministers who will be preaching in one of our overseas sister churches. In practice, no minister requests such an attestation. It may therefore be time for the next synod to scrap this arrangement.

J Moes

2019-02-01