

FRCA speech to FRCSA Synod commencing 7 August 2017

Brother Chairman, delegates, brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ:

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, it is our privilege to offer you heartfelt greetings. We thank you for your kind invitation to attend your Synod Soshanguve North.

Joy

Your invitation mentioned that Synod will convene at the “Pure Joy Lodge and Conference Centre.” It is our hope and prayer that our interaction and fellowship at this Synod may reflect this name, that it may result in an experience of “pure joy” as we seek to assist and encourage one another.

The Scriptures speak often of Joy. Many of the Psalms refer to how we as God’s people may “shout for joy and be glad” as we reflect on His goodness and grace toward us. Indeed, what greater happiness can we have than to dwell in God’s presence. Joy is a fruit of the Spirit that we may experience in our lives at all times, even in times of trouble. For we may even count it joy when we fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of our faith produces endurance. Indeed, we may rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory as we believe in our risen Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We thank God for the close contact that we may continue to enjoy as sister-churches. We have a common heritage that goes back many years, not only to the post-war migration from the Netherlands and the establishment of our respective churches in the 1950’s, but in this year 2017 we may also reflect on the 500 years since God in His grace brought His people and church back to His Word, Sola Scriptura. May we as fellow churches stand side by side as we support each other in remaining faithful as churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May we, in the unity of true faith, use our ongoing relationship to our mutual benefit, that we may assist and encourage one another to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3)

Thank you for sending br Hans Moes as your delegate to our most recent Synod Baldivis. It was good to welcome this brother, to receive his input into our discussions, and to become better acquainted with your churches. Face-to-face interaction certainly helps to promote a deeper understanding of your church situation and also serves to strengthen the harmonious relationship that exists between us.

Over the years we have been able to reflect on the increasing contact between our two church federations. Largely this has been the result of migration from South Africa to Australia – your loss has been our gain. And indeed the connections continue to grow closer, as for the first time we may now send a delegate who is South African born.

FRCA developments

Over the past 3 years our federation has remained stable with 16 congregations and a steady growth in total membership to around 4,750. There has continued to be movement in the ministerial ranks, with the retirement of Revs vanderJagt and VanDelden. Indeed, our federation is now blessed with a number of emeritus ministers, who continue to be actively involved in many ways in church life. Among their number we may now also count your own retired Rev Kleijn.

Many of our incoming ministers continue to be sourced from our sister-churches in Canada. Over the past 3 years we have received 5 in total, with Rev W Bredenhof in Launceston, Rev D Winkel in Bunbury, Rev R Bredenhof in Mt Nasura, Rev A Souman in Kelmscott and just recently Rev R Eikelboom in Byford. In addition we have also received Rev R deJonge as missionary in Papua New Guinea, at around the same time as Rev I Wildeboer left the field after many years of faithful service. Sadly, we also had the painful experience of one minister being deposed from office. In total, our federation now experiences three vacancies, as well as a vacancy for a missionary.

All in all, we are greatly blessed by the provision of ministers from our Canadian sister-churches. We also continue to make use of their federational seminary, the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. In this regard, however, our last Synod Baldivis did appoint deputies to investigate the feasibility of establishing our own Australian Theological Seminary. The grounds for this study are that it may become practically necessary for us to engage in our own theological training should the use of the CRTS become unavailable to us, and further that the Church Order provides that the churches shall, if possible, maintain an institution for the training of the ministry. We note that this item also features prominently on your Synod agenda, and hope that we may benefit from your discussions in this regard.

Our Synod Baldivis 2015 also made a number of significant decisions with respect to inter-church relations. With great thankfulness to the Lord, we were able to extend an offer of sister-church relations to the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and also the First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Synod also mandated our deputies to provide the URCNA with information about our churches, to take up contact with the URCNA and to provide our next Synod with a recommendation on how to proceed. With sadness, however, our Synod Baldivis decided to suspend our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN). This decision was made with deep sorrow, and was based upon the ongoing toleration of Scriptural and Confessional deviation evident within this federation. Unfortunately, the recent decisions of Synod Ede and Meppel have not alleviated any of our concerns and give further evidence of this deviation. We regularly pray that God may in His grace awaken a new faithfulness within our Dutch sister-churches and cause them to repent and return to Him.

This time of sadness can also provide cause for serious reflection for our own churches and church federations. Are we being influenced by the trends and philosophy of the world around us? Are we compromising the gospel message to remove the rock of offense? Are we pushing the envelope of our confessions to be seen as more relevant to our culture and palatable to our members? Our prayer for greater faithfulness in the RCN requires that we too, are ever watchful for the attacks of the evil one in the life and doctrine of our church members.

Needy Churches

We have over the past 3 years continued to enjoy regular contact with your deputies for needy churches. Our most recent Synod again mandated our deputies to coordinate responses to any requests for support received from your deputies for needy churches. Our churches have happily responded to such requests and we have willingly assisted you, recognising the Lord's abundant blessings to us.

We wish to point out, however, that our support is only to be used towards needy churches. In this regard, we have indicated on a number of occasions that our support is not to be seen as for an individual project or minister, but rather as a general contribution towards the fund of your Deputies for

Needy Churches (Art 11). In the event that your Needy Churches Fund does not require further funding, then our support will cease.

Conclusion

Brothers, it is good to be here to share warm greetings from your sister across the ocean. May we say again that we are very thankful for your invitation to attend at this Synod and for this opportunity to address you. May God bless your deliberations and decisions, to the praise of His glory and for the benefit of His church.

In conclusion we may jointly encourage each other with the words of Hebrews 12:1,2: *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

With Christian greetings,

Revs A Hagg and S ‘tHart
Deputies for Sister-Church Relations
Free Reformed Churches of Australia