

Press Release CERCU/CCU November 2012

Once again the meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC), which was held on November 13-14, 2012, in Dyer, Indiana, provided the opportunity for a meeting of most of the members of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) of the URCNA and the Coordinators of the Committee for Church Unity (CCU) of the Can. Reformed Churches. Those present from the CanRC were Rev. William den Hollander and Rev. Clarence VanderVelde; from the URCNA Rev. Bill Boekestein, Rev. John Bouwers, Rev. Casey Freswick, Rev. Todd Joling, Rev. Adam Kaloostian, Rev. Bill Pols, Rev. Ralph Pontier, Rev. William Van Hal, Rev. Peter Vellenga, and Elder Al Vermeer were present.

The focus of the meetings that were held on Monday evening, November 12, and Wednesday afternoon, November 14, 2012, was Synod Nyack's decision (without dissent) regarding the Canadian Reformed Churches; particularly the recommendation that "each classis and consistory continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting Canadian Reformed ministers to fill their pulpits, inviting Canadian Reformed representatives to our classis meetings, seeking open dialogue with Canadian Reformed brothers regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with Canadian Reformed congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection."

Regarding invitations to meetings of classes, Rev. den Hollander could report with thankfulness on his invitation to Classis Pacific SW US, September 18, 2012, and his related engagements with groups of ministers in Ontario CA and San Diego CA, as well as the opportunities to preach in the URC of Chino and Ontario CA, respectively, on Sunday, September 16th. Similar invitations are being prepared and organized to Classis Eastern US, Classis Central US, Classis Pacific NW US, and Classis Michigan, as well as to churches in Iowa, the Lord willing in April and May of 2013. The experiences and discussions that were had in Classis Southwest gave much helpful and fruitful insights and feedback with a view to some outstanding areas of concern.

We also spoke about the possibilities for United Reformed Churches to engage their local church and classis in discussions about the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) and the matter of Theological Education in a united federation of CanRC and URCNA. The members of the CERCU could report that there are churches that are seeking ways to engage the US churches with the PJCO and its benefits for the URCNA compared to its present Church Order. Also the discussion regarding Theological Education and the support for at least one seminary is ongoing, while following Synod Nyack the matter of federational standards for theological education and the approval of other seminaries with a mechanism for oversight and review are being discussed among United Reformed Churches as well. The brothers of the CanRC, while still convinced of the federational seminary model themselves, would like to see a URC classis wrestle with and propose a way forward.

In the context of a discussion about concerns among some URCNA men with regard to the position of the CanRC on Federal Vision, the Coordinators of the CCU drew the attention to their report to Synod Carman 2013, which can be found at www.canrc.org. Of particular interest is their evaluation of URC statements against Federal Vision, especially concerning two points that aroused the most interest among CanRC people. The Coordinators report to Synod Carman 2013:

These [15] points were adopted by Synod London 2010 with respect to the Federal Vision, a movement with particular views on covenant and baptism. Point 12 is of most interest to us. Contrary to the Federal Vision movement, we too believe that baptism does not bring about the believer's union with Christ or justification. One is united to Christ through faith, and one is justified through faith. It is good that we state this explicitly, since we are sometimes seen by some as being part of the Federal Vision movement.

Neither should we feel threatened by Point 6 of the Nine Points adopted by Synod Schererville 2007, which received much attention among us. In Point 6, Synod Schererville 2007 rejected the error of those "...who teach that all baptized persons are in the covenant of grace in precisely the same way such that there is no distinction between those who have only an outward relation to the covenant of grace by baptism and those who are united to Christ by grace alone through faith alone (HC Q&A 21, 60; BC 29)" (Acts Synod Schererville 2007, Art. 72). As Canadian Reformed Churches, we too believe that while all covenant children receive the promise of salvation, not all will receive the promised salvation. This is what Point 6 of Synod Schererville is trying to get across.

In conclusion, the recommendation was made to seek inclusion of this Press Release of our meetings in local church bulletins and/or congregational newsletters, to ensure it be read as widely as possible. All representatives expressed their joy and thankfulness for the frank and fruitful discussions, which will be very helpful for their further efforts in order that progress toward union may be maintained and enhanced. The United Reformed brothers are giving serious consideration to working toward a recommendation to URC Synod 2016 (the synod after the next) to enter into a Phase 3A relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. This would entail a commitment to making preparation for eventual, integrated federative church unity. Although much work yet needs to be done, all were motivated to move forward prayerfully with patience, perseverance, and faith, as together we make every effort to obey the ecumenical imperative of Scripture.