

May 1996 Letter to the Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches

FELLOWSHIP OF UNITING REFORMED CHURCHES

May 3, 1996

Esteemed Brethren:

We are pleased to be able to report that the work of the provisional federation is progressing. The Church Order Committee met on April 12 and 13. Among other things, they gave consideration to nine pieces of correspondence received from the churches. The committee reports that they are making good progress. They will be meeting again later this month and hope to be able to present a church order to the churches for consideration sometime this summer.

The attorney who is assisting us in the matter of incorporation is making progress and plans to have something ready to present to our committee in a couple weeks.

We hope by early summer to be able to announce a date for the fall meeting of the Federation.

Several churches have informed us that they are in the process of joining the Federation.

The Independent Reformed Church of Winnipeg has changed its name to Providence Reformed Church. On April 21 the Bethel Independent Church of Jenison, Michigan had a special service of dedication for the building which they had purchased recently. Seminarian Phil Vos has accepted the call to the Free Christian Reformed Church of Kalamazoo. Shortly after his acceptance, Mr. Vos was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. The prayers of the churches are solicited on behalf of Mr. Vos and his family as well as the Free Church.

A letter of congratulations has been sent on behalf of the Federation to the Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States which will be celebrating its two hundred fiftieth anniversary on May 20 while meeting at the Eureka Reformed Church, Eureka, South Dakota.

Enclosed is a series of statements tracing the history and giving the rationale for the founding of the federation. It was thought that this material might be helpful in the ongoing discussion concerning the need for a federation.

We encourage each of you in your continuing witness to the Reformed Faith in your particular area.

Sincerely,

/s/ Arthur Besteman, Acting Clerk

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FEDERATIVE PROCESS

1. At the conclusion of the 1994 Alliance meeting, Mr. Peter Moen, a delegate to the meeting from the Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church, invited delegates present at the meeting who were interested in the possibility of federating to meet after the formal Alliance meeting was adjourned. Under the press of time, it was agreed informally by those present at that meeting to ask the Lynwood (Christian Reformed Church Independent) consistory to call a meeting in the spring of 1995 to discuss the possibility, or proceed to the federation of the churches represented.
2. The Lynwood consistory announced such a meeting for the last part of April, 1995. However, for various reasons, the consistory cancelled the meeting before it was held.
3. Subsequent to that cancellation, the council of the Beverly Christian Reformed Church Independent contacted the councils of the Trinity Reformed Church (Lethbridge, Alberta) and the Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church (Wellandport, Ontario) inquiring whether there was interest in considering the matter of federation. These councils indicated their wholehearted support, and invitations and proposals were sent out to all the independent congregations. A meeting to discuss federation was scheduled in connection with the Alliance meeting in November, 1995.
4. At this meeting, held after the formal meeting of the Alliance had adjourned, various proposals were presented by the three consistories that had arranged the meeting. The [first of these proposals](#) was "That the undersigned, or otherwise designated congregations determine, on the basis of a majority vote of each consistory/council to form a provisional federation of churches." This proposal was adopted unanimously.
5. To federate was done voluntarily by the churches involved . . . there was no pressure, no coercion. At the meeting of the Alliance, preceding this meeting of the independent congregations there was a certain impatience displayed with respect to the work of the Alliance because of the interest in the meeting to follow.
6. Preparation for federating the independent congregations has had the attention of the Alliance for a number of years. In the appointment of a committee to draw up a church order, the Alliance was certainly anticipating the formation of a new federation of churches. That church order was adopted at the last meeting of the Alliance. See: Article 33, Minutes of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, held at Lynwood Christian Reformed Church Independent, November 14,15, 1995.
7. The last official act of the Alliance meeting (November 14-15, 1995), was the adoption of a motion giving its blessing to churches that were moving toward federation: "Motion is

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made and supported that the Alliance, having recognized the need of the independent churches to federate, and having assisted with the formulation of a Church Order (provisional) now encourages them to take action upon that with the blessing of the Alliance." This motion was adopted, although two protests were received to the action. The collective wisdom of the Alliance was that the federation of the independent congregations was a good thing and timely.

8. Subsequent to the decision to federate, several representatives of ecclesiastical bodies present at meetings of the Alliance over the years, have indicated their pleasure and approval in the decision of the independent churches to federate. These endorsements appeared in Christian Renewal: See Christian Renewal, 1/29/96 Vol. 14, #9.

9. At the meeting at which federation was determined, it was also decided "That this federation be based on God's Holy Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Church order of 1934, with the understanding that work will continue on a church order for the federation." A further "Motion is made and adopted to request the committee appointed by the Alliance to draw up a church order to continue to function on our behalf in the preparation of a church order." It was understood that the Church Order of 1934 was adopted simply to give some structure to the organization until a new church order was ready for final adoption.

10. By motion the three organizing consistories were authorized to function on behalf of the federation until final organization is effected.

*11. No congregation is under obligation to join the federative process. However, Reformed Thinking has always recognized the desirability of congregations with a common history and common commitments to join together in federation or denomination in order to give a united witness, and to work together in the furtherance of the work of the kingdom. Independentism may be possible for a time, but joining together promotes the work of the church of Jesus Christ. To ignore the history made in previous ecclesiastical situations similar to the present means that we will have to repeat it to our own detriment and to the shame of the Church of Jesus Christ.

12. It would appear that federation is a natural outcome of the process inherent in the evolving nature of the Alliance itself.

* The thesis set forth in this statement is developed in an interesting way in the book Bound, Yet Free edited by Jack DeJong, Premier Publishing, Winnipeg, 1995.