

MINUTES
of the Second Synod of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES in NORTH
AMERICA
held Tuesday, October 21 through Thursday,
October 23, 1997
at
Trinity Orthodox
Reformed Church, St. Catharines, Ontario

Contents

Minutes page 1

Classical Map page 38

Reports

Stated Clerk (preliminary) page

39

Stated Clerk page 40

Inter-Church Relations page 42

Church Order page 46

Federative Structure page 56

Delegate to ICRC page 66

Office of Deacon in the

Churches page 68

Communications page 80

Overtures (corrected) page 88

Ecumenical

Observers presentations page 122

MINUTES OF THE SECOND SYNOD
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UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES in NORTH AMERICA
October 21-23, 1997
held at Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church
St. Catharines, Ontario

ARTICLE I

The Chairman of the Council of the calling church, Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church of St. Catharines, Mr. Chuck Dykstra, calls for the singing of Psalter Hymnal Numbers 114, 298, and 287:1-3. The Rev. Calvin Tuininga reads from Ephesians 1 and leads in opening prayer.

ARTICLE II

Roll call reveals the following delegates:

Agassiz, BC-Evergreen Covenant Reformed	Rev. Mark Zylstra	◆
Allendale, MI-United Reformed	Rev. Clarence Werkema	◆
Alto, MI-Grace United Reformed	Rev. Peter Adams	Bruce Brink
Aylmer, ON-Bethel United Reformed	Rev. Jerry Van Dyk	Neil Van Gorp Al Bruining (Oct. 21) Roger Vanoostveen (Oct. 22-23)
Balmoral, ON-Covenant Reformed	Rev. Al Bezuyen	Bruce Cooper
Boise, ID-Cloverdale United Reformed	Rev. Ed Marcusse	Ralph Buter Jerry Van Rijn
Brockville, ON-Ebenezer ORC	◆	Ed Heerema
Byron Center, MI-Trinity United Reformed	Rev. Brian Vos	Arie Schalk
Calgary, AB-Bethel United Reformed	Rev. Dick Wynia	◆
Cape Coral, FL-Trinity Reformed	Rev. Allen Vander Pol Rev. Richard Stevens	◆
Coopersville, MI-Eastmanville URC	Rev. Stephen De Boer	Cliff Lieffers, Jr.
Clinton, ON-Grace Orthodox Reformed	Rev. P. J. Vellenga	Arie Peters
Delavan, WI-Orthodox Reformed	◆	Ben Hoekstra
DeMotte, IN-Immanuel Reformed	Rev. Thomas Wetselaar	Bill Vander Molen
Doon, IA-United Reformed	Rev. Tim Perkins	Ed Van Maanen Richard Schotsman (Oct. 21-22) Wilfred Westerveld (Oct. 23)
Dunnville, ON-Grace Reformed	Rev. Richard Stienstra	Norm Greidanus
Edmonton, AB-Orthodox Reformed	Rev. William Pols	Jerry Nop Jacob Gosliga
Ferrisburg, VT-URC of Champlain Valley	◆	Menno Klunder
Grande Prairie, AB-Covenant Reformed	Rev. William De Jong	Allen Veurink Willem Pols
Grand Rapids, MI-Christian Reformation	◆	John De Graaf
Grand Rapids, MI-Walker United Reformed	Rev. Joel Vander Kooi	◆
Grant Park, IL-Faith United Reformed	Rev. Rein Leestma	◆
Guthrie, ON-Grace Orthodox Reformed	Rev. Brian Schouwstra	Peter Geus Henry Schilthuis (Oct. 21-22) Ray Koetsier (Oct. 23)
Hamilton, ON-Rehoboth United Reformed	Rev. Raymond Sikkema	◆
Highland, IN-Community Ref. Bible	◆	Donald Terpstra Edward De Boer
Holland, MI-Faith United Reformed	◆	Ron Telman Harris Dyke
Hudsonville, MI-Cornerstone United Ref.	Rev. Stephen Arrick	John Sterk
Jenison, MI-Bethel United Reformed	Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen	Willis Van Dyke
Jordan, ON-Immanuel Orthodox Reformed	Rev. John Bouwers	John Veldhuizen
Kalamazoo, MI-Covenant United Reformed	Rev. Philip Vos	Kenneth J. Zigterman

Kansas City, MO-Covenant Reformed	Rev. Stuart Pastine	Wil Postma
Lansing, IL-Oak Glen United Reformed	Rev. Paul Ipema	John Witvoet
Leduc, AB-Grace Reformed	◆	Eelke Eilander
Lethbridge, AB-Trinity Reformed	Rev. Jelle Tuininga	Dick Vander Molen
London, ON-Cornerstone United Reformed	Rev. Dennis Royall	James Bakker
Longmont, CO-Pleasant Valley	Rev. Allen Elder	◆
Loveland, CO-Calvary United Reformed	Rev. Dale Piers	Gail Koops
Lynwood, IL-Lynwood United Reformed	Rev. Jerome Julien	Paul Dykstra
Neerlandia, AB-Emmanuel Reformed	Rev. Theo Hoekstra	Andy Viersen
Newton, NJ-Covenant Reformed	Rev. Casey Freswick	Raymond Vander Wey
Orange City, IA-Redeemer United Reformed	Rev. Ralph Pontier	Roger Heckathorn
Phoenix, AZ-United Reformed	Rev. Bradd Nymeyer	Joel Gross
Pompton Plains, NJ- Reformed Bible	Rev. Richard Kuiken Rev. James Graveling	◆
Ponoka, AB-Parkland Reformed	Rev. Henry Van Olst	Roelof Hoojkamp
Sanborn, IA-Cornerstone Orthodox Ref.	Rev. Harry Zekveld	Dick Hofman
Santa Ana, CA-Saigon Ref. Presbyterian	Rev. Bao Xuan Nguyen	◆
Sheffield, ON-Zion Reformed	Rev. Robert Heerema	Tony Brouwer
Smithers, BC-Bethel Reformed	Rev. Barry Beukema	John Bandstra
St. Catharines, ON-Trinity Orthodox Ref.	Rev. Calvin Tuininga	Chuck Dykstra
Telkwa, BC-Reformed Church	Rev. Jim Klazinga	Joe Boonstra
Toronto, ON-Covenant Reformed	Rev. Phil Grotenhuis	Art Miedema (Oct. 21-22) Robert Van Tol (Oct. 23)
Walnut Creek, CA-Trinity United Ref.	◆	Bill Godsey
Wellandport, ON-Orthodox Reformed	◆	Jake Veldman Dick Baarda
Winnipeg, MB-Providence Reformed	Rev. Fred Folkerts	Peter Verbeek
Woodstock, ON-Independent Reformed	Rev. William Van Hal	K. J. Werkema
Wyoming, MI-Beverly United Reformed	Rev. Arthur Besteman Rev. E. J. Knott	◆
Wyoming, ON-Covenant Christian	◆	William Weiland Arend Korvemaker

NOTE: The following churches, members of the federation, do not have delegates present: United Reformed Church, Lynden, WA; Christ Reformed Church, Placentia, CA; and Bethany Covenant Reformed Church, South Holland, IL.

The following Ecumenical Observers are present:

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church	Rev. Thomas E. Tyson and Rev. Stephen L. Phillips
Reformed Church in the United States	Rev. Maynard Koerner and Rev. Jim Sawtelle
Presbyterian Church in America	Rev. Donald McNair and Rev. Thomas Vanden Heuvel
Free Reformed Churches of North America	Rev. Carl Schouls
Canadian Reformed Churches	Rev. W. Den Hollander, Hank Vander Velde, and Dr. Jack DeJong
Protestant Reformed Churches in America	Rev. Robert Decker

Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar Rev. Chris Matu
Independent Presbyterian Church of Dr. J. P. Roberts
Mexico

The following churches have Official Observers present: Ancaster, ON,
Independent Christian Reformed Church; Chino, CA, First Christian Reformed
Church; Dutton, MI, Independent Reformed Church; West Sayville, NY, Christian
Reformed Church, Independent.

ARTICLE III

The Credentials Committee reports:

A. A motion is made to seat the Rev.

Edward Knott as a delegate from Wyoming, MI, Beverly United Reformed Church.
Adopted

B. A motion is made to seat the Rev. R. Leestma as a delegate from Grant
Park, IL, United Reformed Church.

Adopted

C. A motion is made to make an exception for Chino, CA, First CRC, which has
voted to become part of the URCNA, and receive them without sponsorship or
colloquium doctum. They will finalize their relationship with us early in
December of this year.

Adopted

D. A motion is made to make an exception for Escondido, CA, CRC, which has
voted to become part of the URCNA, and receive them without sponsorship or
colloquium doctum. They will finalize their relationship with us during November
of this year.

Adopted

ARTICLE IV

Synod is declared constituted after the delegates assent to the
[Form of
Subscription as printed.](#) [see page 39]

ARTICLE V

The acting chairman extends a welcome to the delegates, fraternal
delegates/observers, and the visitors.

ARTICLE VI

The following time schedule is adopted:

Tuesday, 1:30 - 5:30, Evening

Inspirational meeting, 7:30 P.M.

Wednesday, 8:30 - Noon, 1:30 - 5:00, 6:30 -
9:00;

Thursday, 8:30 - Noon, 1:30 - 5:30, 7:00 - 9:00.

Fifteen minute breaks at

10 A.M. and 3 P.M.

Sessions may be extended by vote, if necessary.

ARTICLE VII

Election of officers is held. The following are elected:

President: Elder

Chuck Dykstra

Vice-President: Rev. Ralph Pontier

ARTICLE VIII

A. Willem Pols requests permission to report on the last meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches. This will be done at the time the Fraternal Delegates speaks.

B. The Rev. Robert Heerema requests permission to be absent on Wednesday afternoon to conduct a funeral. The alternate delegate from Sheffield will not be able to attend in his place due to his involvement with the funeral. The chair so grants the request.

ARTICLE IX

Report of the Calling Church:

A. The Rev. Calvin Tuininga presents the report of the committee.

B. Recommendation: That committees of pre-advice as outlined in the report be appointed. This, in essence, is the answer to [Overture 30](#). [see page 96]

Tabled

until we can consider it at a more favorable time.

1. Motion is made to take up

[Overture 30](#).

Adopted

2. Motion is made to table [Overture 30](#) and authorize the chairman to appoint committees.

Adopted

3. Motion is made to proceed with the recommendation to appoint committees which comes from the Trinity consistory.

Adopted

C. Recommendation made to give the clerk an honorarium of \$1,000 U.S.

Adopted

D. Motion is made to declare overtures

[29-45](#) and [48-71](#) out of order because

they were not properly considered by Classis East..

Defeated

ARTICLE X

Stated Clerk's Report:

A. Motion is made that the officers assign the matters listed for consideration in this report to an appropriate committee.

Adopted

B. Motion is made to approve

[the work of the Stated Clerk](#).

Adopted

ARTICLE XI

Canadian Treasurer's Report:

A. The report indicates that the account balance as of October 6, 1997, is \$2,603.41 CN.
B. A motion is made to approve the work of the Canadian Treasurer.
Adopted
[See [Article XXV](#) for the U.S. Treasurer's report.]

[ARTICLE XII](#)

Committees of Pre-advice are appointed by the chairman.

[Committee 1](#) Church
Order Articles 1-7
Overtures [IV](#), [VI](#),

[XXXV](#), [XXVI](#),
[LV](#), [LVIII](#),
[LIX](#), [LX](#),
[LXXXVIII](#)

Rev.

Al Bezuyen, Elder Jake Veldman, Rev. Theo Hoekstra, Elder Peter Verbeek, Rev. Tom Wetselaar, Elder John Witvoet, Elder James Bakker, Rev. Casey Freswick, Elder Dick Vander Molen

[Committee 2](#) Church Order Articles 6-14

Overtures [V](#), [VII](#),
[XXXI](#), [XXXVII](#),
[XXXVIII](#), [XXXIX](#),
[XL](#), [XLI](#),

[XLVI](#), [LIV](#),
[LXII](#)

Rev. Jerry Van Dyk, Elder Roger

Vanoostveen, Elder Tony Brouwer, Rev. Ed Marcusse, Elder Andy Vierson, Rev. Fred Folkerts, Rev. Tim Perkins, Elder Gail Koops, Rev. Edward Knott.

[Committee 3](#) Church Order Articles 15-27

Overtures [VIII](#), [IX](#),

[X](#), [XI](#),
[XXXII](#),
[XLII](#), [LVI](#),
[LVII](#), [LXIII](#),
[LXIV](#), [LXVIII](#),

[LXIX](#)

Rev. Richard Stienstra, Elder Peter

Geus, Rev. Dennis Royall, Rev. William De Jong, Rev. Jelle Tuininga, Elder Norman Greidanus, Elder Jerry Nop, Rev. Joel Vander Kooi, Elder Paul Dykstra

[Committee 4](#) Church Order Articles 28-35

Overtures [XII](#), [XIII](#),
[XIV](#), [XV](#),

[XVI](#),
[XLIII](#), [XLIV](#),
[XLVIII](#), [LXV](#),
[LXXXV](#), [LXXXIX](#)

Rev. William Van Hal, Elder Art Miedema,
Elder William Wieland, Elder Roelof Hoojkamp, Rev. William Pols, Elder Menno
Klunder, Rev. Peter Adams, Rev. Stephen De Boer, Rev. Arthur Besteman

[Committee 5 Church Order Articles 36-48](#)

Overtures [XVII](#), [XVIII](#),

[XIX](#), [XX](#),

[XXI](#),

[XXVI](#), [XXVII](#),

[XXVIII](#), [LXVI](#),

[LXXXII](#)

Elder Neil Van Gulp, Rev. Brian Schouwstra,

Elder Ron Telman, Rev. Mark Zylstra, Elder Bruce Cooper, Elder Arie Schalk, Rev.

Rein Leestma, Rev. Harry Zekveld, Rev. Richard Kuiken

[Committee 6 Church Order Articles 49-64](#)

Overtures [XXII](#), [XLV](#),

[XLIX](#), [LXVI](#),

[LXX](#)

Elder Don Terpstra, Elder Dick Baarda, Elder Arie Peters, Rev. Henry Van Olst,

Rev. Barry Beukema, Elder Joe Boonstra, Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen, Elder Bill

Godsey, Elder Harris Dyke, Rev. Steven Arrick

[Committee 7 Church Order - General](#)

Overtures [II](#), [III](#),

[XXIII](#), [XXIX](#),

[XXXIII](#),

[XXXIV](#), [L](#),

[LI](#), [LII](#),

[LXI](#), [LXXXI](#)

[Church Order Committee Report](#),

[Communication from](#)

[Lansing, IL, Oak Glen](#)

Elder Will Postma, Rev. Phil Grotenhuis, Elder Ralph Buter,

Rev. Dick Wynia, Rev. Clarence Werkema, Rev. Brian Vos, Elder Cliff Liefers,

Jr., Elder Ken Zigterman, Rev. Jim Klazinga.

[Committee 8 Church Order - Ecumenical Matters](#)

Overtures [I](#), [LIII](#),

[LXXVII](#),

[Communications I-IV](#),

[Inter-Church Relations Committee Report](#),

[I.C.R.C. report](#)

Rev. Allen Elder, Elder Raymond Vander Wey, Rev. Paul Ipema, Rev. Dale Piers,

Elder Joel Gross, Elder Arend Korvemaker, Elder James Bakker, Elder Bruce Brink,

Rev. Bradd Nymeyer.

[Committee 9 General Matters](#)

Overtures [XXIV](#), [XXV](#),

[XLVII](#), [LXXI](#),

[LXXII](#), [LXXIII](#),

[LXXIV](#), [LXXVI](#),

[LXXX](#)

[Stated Clerk's Preliminary Report](#)

Rev. James Graveling, Elder

Dick Hofman, Elder William Pols, Rev. Allen Vander Pol, Rev. Stuart Pastine,

Elder K. J. Werkema, Elder Richard Schotsman, Rev. Richard Stevens, Elder John Sterk

ARTICLE XIII

The assembly recesses for supper. Devotions are led by Elder John Sterk. After the supper hour a public meeting of praise and thanksgiving is held. The Rev. John Bouwers addresses the evening assembly on the subject of "Remembering for Renewal."

Wednesday, October 22, 1997

ARTICLE XIV

The meeting is called to order by the chairman as he calls for the singing of Psalter Hymnal Number 1. The Rev. Harry Zekveld reads from Psalm 149 and leads in prayer.

ARTICLE XV

Elder Roger Vanoosteven replaces Elder Al Bruining as delegate from Balmoral, ON. He stands to assent to the [Form of Subscription](#).

ARTICLE XVI

Concept Minutes are read and approved.

ARTICLE XVII

The clerk reads a letter received from Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico. The letter extends greetings to our assembly and requests that Dr. J. P. Roberts speak on behalf of their churches. The chairman indicates that this request will be granted when Dr. Roberts arrives.

ARTICLE XVIII

Ecumenical Observers are welcomed by the chairman. The following bring greetings: The Rev. Thomas E. Tyson of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, The Rev. Maynard Koerner of the Reformed Church in the United States, the Rev. Thomas Vanden Heuvel of the Presbyterian Church in America, the Rev. Carl Schouls of the Free Reformed Churches of North America, the Rev. Robert Decker of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, the Rev. W. Den Hollander of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the Rev. Chris Matu of the Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar. The chairman responds to each of the brothers, thanking them for their greetings.

ARTICLE XIX

The assembly recesses in order that the Committees of Pre-Advice may meet.

ARTICLE XX

The body reconvenes for noon devotions led by Elder Jacob Gosliga, and then adjourns for lunch.

ARTICLE XXI

The afternoon meeting is called to order by the chairman as he calls for the singing of Psalter Hymnal Number 58. The Rev. William Pols reads from Psalm 115 and leads in prayer.

ARTICLE XXII

Concept minutes are read and approved.

ARTICLE XXIII

The following matter appears on the credentials of the Saigon Reformed Presbyterian Church, Santa Ana, CA:

Saigon Reformed Presbyterian Church requests assistance in purchasing a permanent worship facility as soon as possible.

Referred to the churches

It is further noted that as soon as they move to their permanent facility they will change their name to Saigon United Reformed Church.

Received for information

ARTICLE XXIV

Federative Structure Matters

A. The Federative Structure Committee Report is presented.

1. The committee requests privilege of the floor be given to Mr. Gerald Rozema and Mr. Herm Faber.

So Ruled

2. Following the reading of the report and recommendations the chair declares that the report of Advisory Committee 9 is before us.

B. The report of [Advisory Committee 9](#) is read.

C. The

[Federative Structure Committee Report](#) is declared on the floor. [See page 56]

1. Motion is made to adopt the report's resolutions.

Tabled to be taken

up at the next regular meeting of synod.

2. Motion is made to make this our answer to Overtures [25](#), [72](#), and

[80](#).

Adopted

[Advisory Committee 9 report continues in [Article LXIV](#)]

ARTICLE XXV

U.S. Treasurer's Report:

A. The report indicates that the account balance as of September 24, 1997, is \$3,681.06 US.

B. A motion is made to approve the work of the U.S. treasurer.

Adopted

[For

the Canadian Treasurer's Report, see [Article XI](#)]

ARTICLE XXVI

Advisory Committee 6

A. [Overture 22](#) - Church Order Article

[53](#), [54](#), and [57](#).

[See page 94]

Recommendation: That we not accede to Overture 22.

Ground: These articles do not infringe upon the local consistory's responsibility to exercise the key of discipline.

Adopted

B. [Overture 49](#) - Church Order

[Article 53](#). [See page 102]

Recommendation: That

we not accede to Overture 49.

Grounds:

1. The present article is consistent with classic Reformed polity.
2. The proposed changes would not safeguard the consistory in case of civil action anymore than the present article.

Adopted

C. [Overture 66](#) - Church

Order [Article](#)

[64](#). [See page 108]

Recommendation: That we not accede to Overture 66.

Ground: For the sake of unity in our federation, a 2/3 majority of consistories is preferable.

Adopted

D. [Overture 70](#) (a) - Church Order

[Article 25](#). [See page 110]

Recommendation:

That we accede to Overture 70 (a) (with ground) without the word "ordinarily."

Ruled not properly before us.

E. [Overture 70](#) (b) - Church Order

[Article 54](#). [See page 110]

I.

Recommendation: That we accede to Overture 70 (b) (with grounds), [Article](#)

[54](#): To

delete the phrase "with the advice of classis."

Grounds:

a. According to [Article](#)

[53](#) the consistory has already sought the advice of classis before proceeding to the second step of discipline. If the sinner remains unrepentant after obtaining the concurring advice of classis to proceed, there should be no need to seek the advice of classes a second time in order to proceed.

b. Such an emphasis on the need for classis' advice tends to undermine the authority of the consistory of the church, and puts too much weight on the classis.

c. Because our classes might meet once per year, such a double requirement could in fact render the discipline less effective.

Adopted

2. [Article 54](#) now reads:

If these steps of discipline, having been carried out in a loving manner, do not bring about repentance, but rather harden the sinner in his ways, the Consistory shall proceed to the extreme remedy, namely, excommunication, in agreement with the Word of God and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

[[Advisory Committee 6](#) report continues in [Article LII](#)]

ARTICLE XXVII

[Advisory Committee 8](#)

A. [Overture 1](#) - Ecumenical Relationships. [See page 88]

1. Recommendation: That we accede to Overture 1 with its grounds.

a. Motion to

amend by adding: “and that this be implemented through the [Interchurch Relations Committee](#).”

Adopted

b. The recommendation with amendment is before the body. That synod pursue the establishment of ecumenical relations with the following federations and that this be implemented through the Interchurch Relations Committee:

1. The

Canadian Reformed Churches

2. The Free Reformed Churches

3. The Orthodox

Christian Reformed Churches

4. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

5. The

Presbyterian Church in America

6. The Protestant Reformed Churches

7. The

Reformed Church in the United States

8. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That we add the following groups of churches to the list:

The Reformed Church of Quebec

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

The

Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar

The Independent Presbyterian Church of

Mexico

Adopted

B. [Overture 53](#) - Fraternal Delegates to the Alliance of Reformed Churches.

[See page 104]

Recommendation: That synod send two fraternal delegates representing our churches to the next meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches and accept the grounds listed.

Ruled out of order

C. Closer Ties with OPC

1. [Communication III](#) [See page 82]

Recommendation:

That synod accept the OPC's invitation to enter "corresponding relations" with them.

Grounds:

a. The Lord calls us to manifest visibly our spiritual unity with congregations sharing our common bond of faith. Furthermore, this unity should strive for the mutual edification of member congregations as well as the development of an effective witness to the world. (John 17:20-23; I Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:1-6; 4:11-16; Philippians 2:1-2).

b. Our Reformed confessions reflect the ancient ecumenical creeds concerning "one holy catholic and apostolic Church." (Belgic Confession, Articles 27, 28, and 29; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

c. By engaging in ecumenical relations, as defined in Articles 33, 34, and 35 of the Church Order, we intend to accomplish the following:

1) To advise one

another regarding questions and problems of import pertaining to the spiritual welfare and the Scriptural government of the churches;

2) To confer together, as

far as advisability or necessity may require, regarding missionary work of the churches at home and abroad;

3) To strive to attain a common course of action

with respect to common problems; likewise to issue joint resolutions regarding movements, practices or dangers, when joint statements are deemed necessary;

4)

To give united testimony to our common Reformed faith in the midst of a world living in error and groping in darkness, particularly to the many churches which have so lamentably departed from the truth of God's Holy Word, and which are in dire need of a return to the faith of the fathers;

5) To express our precious

unity in Christ and our oneness as Reformed churches, though scattered over the earth. (Cf. Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1963, p. 130.)

Adopted

2.

[Overture 77 \[See page 112\]](#)

a. Recommendation: That synod appoint a committee to study the Confessional Standards, Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory of Worship of the OPC with regard to the similarities and differences between them and the Confessional Standards and Church Order of the URCNA in order to work toward ecclesiastical unity with the OPC.

Grounds:

1. At its 1997 General Assembly the Orthodox Presbyterian Church expressed its close affinity with the United Reformed Churches in North America when it severed ties with the Christian Reformed Church in North America and voted to enter into "corresponding ecclesiastical relations" with the United Reformed Churches in North America.

2. We need to build upon a long history of seeking ecclesiastical unity with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church which began in the Christian Reformed Church and continued for many years until it was prematurely cut off in 1963 when the CRC Synod rejected the recommendations of the Committee on Closer Relationships with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (see following addendum taken from the Acts of Synod, 1963, pp. 274-282). Unity with the OPC was once again pursued when the Alliance of Reformed Churches studied the confessional similarities and differences and in 1994 and 1995 adopted the Westminster Standards as part of its Confessional basis.

Adopted

b. Recommendation: That the following be appointed to this study committee:
Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. Jerome Julien, Rev. J. S. Gangar, Rev. Paul Ipema,
Elder Robert Clausing, and Dr. Robert Godfrey (Advisor).

Adopted

c. Recommendation: That the materials presented in the addendum be referred
to this committee for use at its discretion.

Adopted

d. Recommendation: That synod direct the Stated Clerk to express our deep
gratitude to the OPC and Free Reformed Churches for recommending the URCNA to
the ICRC.

Adopted

[See [Article LVI](#) for change in personnel.]

D. [Communication II - Interclassical Conference of the CRC](#) [See page 81]

Recommendation: That synod receive this letter for information.

Received for
information

E. [Communication I - Concerns of Dutton Independent Reformed Church](#) [See page
80]

1. Recommendation: That synod consider its answer to Overture 81 as its
response to this letter.

2. Motion made to refer Communication I to
[Committee 7](#).

Adopted

(For action,
see [Article XLV](#), J and [Article L](#), A.)

F. [ICRC Report \(from Rev. J. Gangar\)](#) [See page 66]

Recommendation: That synod
allows this report to be distributed and read.

Adopted

G. [Interchurch Relations Committee Report](#) [see page 42]

1. Recommendation:

That synod change the name to “Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church
Unity.”

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That synod refer the request for refining the mandate of
the committee back to the committee instructing them to do this by contacting
other Reformed and Presbyterian federations which share like precious faith.
Also that it recommends the refined mandate to our next synod.

Adopted

3. Recommendation: That synod designate observers from other federations
“Ecumenical Observers.”

Adopted

4. Recommendation: That synod appoint the committee members to a three year
term at which time they become eligible to be reappointed by synod.

Adopted

The committee is to arrange for rotation so all the committee members will
not be replaced at the same time.

[[Advisory Committee 8](#) report continues in
[Article XXXIV](#)]

ARTICLE XXVIII

The chair notes that Rev. Philip Vos returned to Kalamazoo to conduct a
funeral.

ARTICLE XXIX

The assembly recesses for supper. Elder John Bandstra leads in devotions.

ARTICLE XXX

The evening session is called to order by the chairman, announcing Psalter Hymnal Number 299:1-4. Rev. Dale Piers reads from Romans 15:5-6 and leads in prayer.

ARTICLE XXXI

The concept minutes are read and approved.

ARTICLE XXXII

Credentials Committee Report

A. Motion is made to seat Elders Ralph Buter and Jerry Van Rijn of Ebenezer Orthodox Reformed Church of Brockville/Hulbert, ON.

Adopted

B. They rise to assent to the [Form of Subscription](#).

ARTICLE XXXIII

Ecumenical Observer Rev. Thomas Vanden Heuvel of the Presbyterian Church in America introduces Dr. Don McNair of the PCA.

ARTICLE XXXIV

[Advisory Committee 8](#), continued from [Article XXVII](#)

A. Recommendation: That synod receive the [report of the Interchurch Relations Committee](#) and thank them for their work.

Adopted

B. [Stated Clerk's Report](#). [See page 40]

1. Recommendation: That synod not respond to the request for advice from Classis East regarding ecumenical relations with the Independent CRC of Ancaster, ON, due to insufficient information. Motion to table this until the committee has had time to study the letter requesting this from Classis East.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That synod accede to the request of Classis West for advice to send regular observers to the meetings of the western classes of the OCRC. Motion to table this until matters regarding [Overture 16](#) be taken up.

Adopted

[See [Article XXXV](#), E, 3]

C. Recommendation: That the stated clerk of the federation be an ex-officio member of the Interchurch Relations Committee.

Adopted

D. Recommendation: That the following be appointed to the Interchurch Relations Committee: Rev. John Bouwers, Rev. Harry Zekveld, and Rev. J. S. Gangar.

Motion to amend this by deleting the name of Rev. J. S. Gangar.

Adopted

The recommendation as amended is

Adopted

[Advisory Committee 8, continued in [Article LVI](#)]

ARTICLE XXXV

Advisory Committee 4

A. Overtures [12](#) and [44](#) regarding Church Order

[Article 29](#). [See pages 91 and 101]

1. Recommendation: That we keep the wording of our present [Article 29](#).

Grounds:

- a. The present article already requires a reasonable and responsible mutual accountability.
- b. The proposed changes would seem to afford too much opportunity for external interference and for agitation within the congregation before leaving the federation.
- c. The present article has already served well in answering questions from prospective federation member churches concerning our method for withdrawal from the federation.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That this be our answer to Overtures [12](#) and [44](#).

Adopted

B. Overtures [13](#), [65](#), and [79](#). [See pages 91, 108, and 117]

1. Recommendation:

That we adopt Overture [13](#). In addition to its grounds, we add ground 2 from Overture [79](#), so that Overture [13](#) reads: "Classis West overtures synod to delete the last sentence of [Article 31](#) of the Church Order, and replace it with the following:

Any such church shall be provisionally accepted into membership in the federation by the classis, pending ratification by the following synod.

"Grounds:

- a. "According to [Article 8 of the Church Order](#), and [Appendix 4 \(Guidelines for a Colloquium Doctum\)](#), classis has the responsibility to examine such ministers and to declare them eligible for call. As it now stands, [Article 31](#) gives the responsibility of examination to the classis, but does not allow it to accept such church/minister into the federation. This appears to be somewhat ambiguous. To clear matters up and provide consistency in our rules, classis should be able to provisionally accept such congregations and/or ministers until ratified by the following synod.
- b. "According to the present reading of [Article 31](#), a minister and/or congregation desiring to join the federation could be required to wait for three years before being admitted, since synod will ordinarily meet every three years.

c. “Even if synod meets annually, a congregation wanting to unite with the federation may be under undue constraints to disunite with another denomination in a timely manner if it had to wait almost a year.”

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That this be our answer to Overture 79.

Ground: Synod ought to have a voice in the reception of churches into the federation .

Adopted

3. Recommendation: that we keep the wording of our present

[Article 31](#) regarding the reception of ministers with their congregations into federation.

This is our answer to Overture 65.

Adopted

4. [Article 31](#) now reads:

Any church may be admitted into the federation

provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with this Church Order, and its minister sustains an examination by the nearest classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation. Any such church shall be provisionally accepted into membership in the federation by the classis, pending ratification by the following synod.

C. [Overture 14](#) - Church Order

[Article 32](#). [See page 91]

Recommendation: That

we keep the wording of the present article.

Ground: The present article was written by an attorney.

Adopted

D. [Overtures 15 and 75](#) - Church Order

[Article 33](#). [See pages 91 and 111]

1.

Recommendation: That we adopt [Overture 75](#) with the following changes:

- replace

the words “official ecclesiastical” with the word “ecumenical.”

- include the

word “occasional” before “pulpit exchange.”

- delete the words “membership

transfer.”

Adopted

Editorial change to [Article 33](#) as it is before the body in [Overture 75](#): Use

“churches” in place of “congregations” as revised in [Overture 75](#). [Article 33](#) now reads:

Churches must seek and pursue official ecclesiastical relations with Reformed congregations outside the federation which manifest the marks of a true church and demonstrate faithful allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Each church is to give account of its ecumenical activities to classis. Fraternal activities between congregations which need not be reported to classis may include occasional pulpit exchanges, table fellowship, as well as other means of manifesting unity.

2. Recommendation: That this be our answer to [Overture 15](#).

Adopted

E. [Overture 16](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

[34](#). [See page 92]

1. Recommendation:

That we adopt [Overture 16](#). “Classis West overtures synod that the second sentence in [Article 34](#) be changed to read:

The classis shall keep synod informed of such ecumenical relations, thereby honoring our federative bond.

Grounds:

a. As it now stands, a classis might have to wait a total of three years before being able to initiate ecumenical relations which it deems necessary and beneficial.

b. The present wording of these articles tends in the direction of hierarchy-rule from the top down.

Adopted

2. [Article 34](#) now reads:

The churches of a classis may, as a group, enter into ecumenical relations with an individual church or group of churches such as a classis or presbytery. The classis shall keep synod informed of such ecumenical relations, thereby honoring our federative bond.

3. Motion that this be declared our answer to items 5 and 6 in the [Stated](#)

[Clerk's Report](#). [See Article [XXXIV](#), B, 1 and 2.]

F. [Overture 43](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

[28](#). [See page 100]

1. Recommendation:

That we adopt the proposed change for [Overture 43](#) as a replacement of the third sentence alone, with the omission of the words "or Church Order."

Ground: The formulation ". . . insofar as they agree with the Word of God . . ."

raises the potential of members and churches submitting with mental reservations, producing undesirable and unscriptural consequences, as in the history of the churches this has indeed happened in the Netherlands when in 1816 the Dutch Reformed Church adopted new Regulation (Algemeen Reglement), which allowed the churches to accept the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order "insofar as they agree with the Word of God." The resultant turbulence produced the secession of 1834.

a. Motion to amend by omitting the following words, "with the omission of the words 'or Church Order.'"

Adopted

b. Editorial change: Begin sentence 3 with "All" in place of "The."

c. The motion as amended is adopted.

d. [Article 28](#) now reads:

If any assembly complains of having been wronged by the decision of another assembly, it shall have the right to appeal to the broader assemblies. An individual's appeal must proceed first to the Consistory, and only then, if necessary, to a broader assembly. All decisions of a broader assembly are to be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. Consistories who are convinced that they cannot comply with a decision of a broader assembly because it does not agree with the Word of God cannot be compelled to do so, provided that they state to the classis the points at which the decision of the assembly disagrees with the Word of God. If a Consistory refuses to comply with the final decision of the synod and a subsequent synod rules by majority vote that submission in the matter is essential for the unity of the churches, the congregation is no longer eligible for membership in the federation.

2. Recommendation: That this be our answer to [Overture 43](#).

Adopted

[[Advisory](#)

[Committee 4](#) report continues in [Article XLI](#)]

ARTICLE XXXVI

Rev. Mark Zylstra leads in closing devotions, reading from Ephesians 3.

Thursday, October 23, 1997

ARTICLE XXXVII

Opening devotions are led by the Rev. Bradd Nymeyer. Psalter Hymnal Numbers 48 and 282 are sung. He reads from Psalm 65 and seeks God's blessing for the day through prayer.

ARTICLE XXXVIII

The following delegates are seated:

- A. Elder Bob Van Tol replaces Elder Art Miedema for Covenant, Toronto, ON
- B. Elder Ray Koetsier replaces Elder Henry Schilthuis for Rehoboth, Hamilton, ON.
- C. They stand to signify their agreement with the Form of Subscription.

ARTICLE XXXIX

The concept minutes are read and approved.

ARTICLE XL

The following speak to the assembly:

- A. Delegate Willem Pols brings greetings and a report from the recent meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches which met at Kalamazoo, MI.
- B. Dr. J. P. Roberts, Ecumenical Observer from the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico, brings greetings.

ARTICLE XLI

Advisory Committee 4, continued from Article XXXV.

Overture 48 - Church Order Article 28. [See page 102]

Recommendation: That we keep the wording of the present Article 28 regarding the percentage of vote required for such decisions of broader assemblies.

Grounds:

1. Requiring a two-thirds majority could give undue power to a minority of churches.
2. Our present method requiring a simple majority is effective for the working of broader assemblies in matters pertaining to this article.

Adopted

ARTICLE XLII

Advisory Committee 3

A. [Overture 8](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

18. [See page 90]

1. Recommendation: That Synod accede to Overture 8 and change Church Order

[Article 18](#) to use the words “Chairman” and “Vice-Chairman” instead of “President” and “Vice-President.” All references in the Church Order referring to President and Vice-President ought to be changed to “Chairman” and “Vice-Chairman.”

Adopted

2. [Article 18](#) now reads:

In every assembly there shall be a chairman, assisted by a vice-chairman. It is the chairman's duty to state and explain clearly the matters to be dealt with, and to ensure that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed and that every delegate observes due order and decorum in speaking. In all delegated assemblies the above named functions shall cease when the assembly adjourns.

B. [Overture 9](#) - Church Order [Article 20](#) and

22. [See page 90]

Recommendation:

That synod not accede to Overture 9 because it confuses the distinctive roles of Elder and Deacon.

Ground: Our present Church Order is clear and concise. It gives us clear definitions of both offices. (Consistory is defined as Ministers and Elders.) To suggest that deacons may be members of consistory is a confusion of terms. This is not to say that Elders and Deacons should not have a very close and cooperative relationship.

Adopted

C. [Overture 10](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

25. [See page 90]

1. Recommendation:

That synod accede to Overture 10 and replace the word “six” in the first sentence with the word “twelve.” In addition, the following should be placed after the first sentence: “If three consistories in the classis deem it necessary that a classis meet earlier than the regular time determined, the consistory charged with convening the meeting shall determine when and where the meeting is to occur.”

Adopted

2. [Article 25](#) now reads:

A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose Consistories delegate two of their members with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis meeting, within the next twelve months. If three consistories in the classis deem it necessary that a classis meet earlier than the regular time determined, the consistory charged with convening the meeting shall determine when and where the meeting is to occur. The churches shall take turns providing a chairman and acting as the convening church. Furthermore, the classis shall inquire of each Consistory whether Consistory and deacons' meetings are held, the Word of God is faithfully preached, the sacraments are faithfully administered, church discipline is exercised, the poor are cared for, and God-centered schooling is promoted; and whether the Consistory needs the advice and help of the classis for the proper government of the church. Each classis shall inform the other classes regarding matters of mutual concern by forwarding its minutes to them in a timely manner.

D. [Overture 11](#) - Church Order [Article 26](#). [See page 90]

1. Recommendation: That synod accede to Overture 11 so that [Article 26](#) reads “two experienced office-bearers appointed by classis . . .”

Ground: Classes should choose church visitors, not the church herself. This committee concurs with the grounds stated in the overture as well.

Adopted

2. [Article 26](#) now reads:

Each Consistory of the classis shall invite the two experienced office-bearers appointed by classis, either two ministers or a minister and an elder, to visit the council once every two years, who shall give account of their visit to the classis. These visitors shall inquire whether the office-bearers faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe in all things the adopted order, and properly promote as much as lies in them, by word and deed, the edification of the congregation, including the youth, to the end that these visitors may fraternally admonish those office-bearers who have in anything been negligent, and may by their advice and assistance help direct all things unto the peace, edification and greatest profit of the churches.

E. [Overture 32](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

24. [See page 97]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this overture, in keeping with the conclusion of the Church Order.

Ground: Church Order committee report which states: “The participation of classis is important in giving wisdom, refinement, and analysis. Moreover, because interpretation is needed regarding which matters ought to be discussed on the federative level, the proposed change seems unworkable.

Adopted

F. [Overture 42](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

20. [See page 100]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to Overture 42.

Ground: The focus of [Article 20](#) is not the relationship of the consistory to Jesus Christ, but rather the relationship of the consistory to the other assemblies of the church: classis and synod.

Adopted

G. [Overture 56](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

26. [See page 105]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to Overture 56 regarding [Article 26](#).

Ground: As the Church Order Committee report states: “The proposed alternative leaves the matter too voluntary. Moreover, the experience of ministers is a valuable asset for this practice of visiting. Finally, in classic Reformed polity both elders and deacons (the council) are visited.

Adopted

H. [Overture 57](#) - Church Order [Articles 24-27](#). [See page 105]

Recommendation:

That the synod not accede to Overture 57 regarding [Articles 24-27](#).

Ground: We affirm the principle that we have a common interest in maintaining the practice of regular, respectful, and brotherly church visitation. We believe the Church Order is fine in its present wording.

Adopted

I. [Overture 63](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

19. [See page 107]

1. Recommendation:

That synod not accede to the first request of Overture 63, regarding [Article 19](#).

Ground: We find that the request of this overture moves in a direction that is not in accord with historic Presbyterian Reformed polity and is inconsistent with the purpose of the Church Order which is to establish mutual accountability.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That synod not accede to request #2 because it will not serve the church well.

Grounds:

a. The committee of preadvise foresees an increasing amount of disarray and poor record keeping if we moved in the direction suggested by request # 2.

b. There is sufficient latitude allowed by Article 19 for each classis to decide how matters will be handled in their classes. The Church Order does not call for a stated clerk, but merely (only) for a clerk.

Adopted

3. Recommendation: That synod not accede to request #3 to add a new article.

Adopted

J. [Overture 64](#) - Church Order [Article](#)

[20](#). [See page 108]

Recommendation: That

synod accede to Overture 64 with the slight change of the words: "all the" to "each." With that change the Church Order [Article](#)

[20](#) will read:

In each

congregation there shall be a Consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The Consistory is the only assembly in the church(es) whose decisions possess direct authority within a congregation, since the Consistory receives its authority directly from Christ; and thereby directly accountable to Christ.

Adopted

K. [Overture 68](#) - Church Order Articles [24](#), [25](#) and [27](#). [See page 109]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to Overture 68.

Grounds: Although the sentiments in this overture are understandable; they should not be codified in the Church Order.

1. Classes and Synod are intended to be deliberative bodies.

2. What exactly is a 'weighty matter' is open to a difference of opinion. In Acts 15, had the minds of delegates been bound, the status of Gentile Christians would not have been recognized.

3. To accede to

overture 68 would be a compromise of fundamental Reformed polity and the leading of the Holy Spirit upon the Word of God in deliberative bodies. We draw your attention to page 26 in the back of Church Order under the heading: Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government, [No. 9](#) - "Member churches meet together in consultation to guard against human imperfections and to benefit from the wisdom of a multitude of counselors in the broader assemblies. The decisions of such assemblies derive their authority from their conformity to the Word of God."

Adopted

L. [Overture 69](#) - Church Order Articles [25](#) and [27](#). [See page 109]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to Overture 69.

Grounds:

1. This matter was dealt with at last year's synod and defeated, and therefore should have been declared out of order because it was dealt with under [Article 17, Paragraph b, of the Acts of Synod 1996 of the URC](#).
2. Sending three delegates from each church will result in a synodical assembly that is too large and involving more cost.
3. Delegating more elders does not guarantee their participation.
4. Attempting to outnumber the ministers of the Word fosters an atmosphere of distrust. The committee believes we should guard against an attitude of anti-clericalism.
5. The present wording of our church order allows for two elders to represent their church when this is the preference of the council.

Adopted

ARTICLE XLIII

The chairman recognizes that Elder Wilbur Westerveld replaces Elder Richard Schotsman as delegate from Dunnville, ON. He stands to signify his agreement with the Form of Subscription.

ARTICLE XLIV

The chairman recognizes Observer Jake Klaasen of West Sayville, NY. He briefly addresses synod.

ARTICLE XLV

Advisory Committee 7

A. [Overture 2](#) - Church Order: use "concurring" before "advice." [See page 88]

1. Recommendation: That, for the sake of consistency in the Church Order, we add the word "concurring" before "advice" in [Articles 9](#) and [21](#), but not in [Articles 4, 6, 34, and](#)

[59](#).

Grounds:

- a. The word "concurring" is already used in [Articles 4, 34, and 59](#).
- b. [Article 6](#) deals with advice from the congregation, and so it would not be appropriate to add the word "concurring" in this article.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: This be our answer to [Overture 2](#).

Adopted

3. [Articles 9](#) and [21](#) now read:

- a. [Article 9](#) - A minister of the Word is bound to the service of the churches for life and may change the nature of his labor only for weighty reasons, upon approval by his supervising council with the concurring advice of classis.

b. [Article 21](#) - When a congregation is organized within the federation, this shall take place under the supervision of a neighboring Consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

B. [Overture 3](#) - Church Order --Headings and Table of Contents. [See page 88]

Recommendation: That synod accede to this overture and hand this matter over to the Church Order Committee.

Adopted

C. [Overture 23 - Guidelines for Colloquium](#)

[Doctum](#). [See page 94]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this overture.

Grounds:

1. Publishing personal information in such a manner could be a problem.
2. The proposed change invites problems for ministers who leave a denomination for doctrinal reasons to enter a church in the URCNA.
3. The

letters from the examinee and the sponsoring Consistory required by provision 1 of the [Guidelines for Colloquium Doctum](#) should provide classis with sufficient information.

Adopted

D. [Overture 29](#) - Continue to Use the 1934 Church Order. [See page 96]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this overture.

Grounds:

1. The substance of this overture was dealt with and [defeated](#) last year.
2. The overture argues that we broke procedural rules, whereas our federation has not established any such rules.
3. Ground 2b from this overture is incorrect in that the motion referred to was defeated.

[[Minutes of Synod, 1996, Article 17](#), pp. 6f]

4. The decision to adopt the Church Order is settled and binding. [Church Order [Article 28](#)]

Adopted

E. [Overture 33](#) - Church

Order—[Introduction](#). [See page 97]

Recommendation:

That synod adopt Overture 33 with Ground 1 deleted.

Ground: The phrase “confessional nature of the Introduction” may be problematic.

Adopted

The fourth sentence of the [Introduction](#) now reads:

This headship is exercised in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the God-ordained offices, for the sake of the purity of doctrine and the holiness of life.

F. [Overture 34](#) - Church

Order--[Introduction](#). [See page 98]

Recommendation: We

recommend that synod adopt the overture, amended as proposed by the Church Order Committee in their report, thus using the following division headings: I.

Ecclesiastical Offices (Articles 1-14), II. Ecclesiastical Assemblies (Articles 15-35), III. Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks (Articles 36-48), IV.

Ecclesiastical Discipline (Articles 49- 64).

Ground: The word “ecclesiastical” provides a consistency which the word “church” does not. Confusion may result when the word “church” is used to refer both to the local congregation and the federation.

Adopted

G. [Overture 50 - Guidelines for a Candidacy](#)

[Examination](#). [See page 103]

Recommendations:

1. That synod not accede to this overture.

Adopted

2. That synod replace the requirement for “A medical certificate of good health” with a requirement for “A medical evaluation of health.”

Grounds:

a. Ill health should not necessarily be a deterrent to candidacy.

b. This would serve the interest of the church in making sure that they are made aware of the candidate’s health status.

Adopted

H. [Overtures 51 and 52](#) -

[Guidelines for a Candidacy Examination](#). [See page 103]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to either Overture 51 or 52.

Ground:

Entrance into the ministry of the Word in Reformed Churches today without a Reformed seminary education ought to be regarded as extremely exceptional. It would not be wise to write the exception into the Guidelines.

Adopted

I. [Overture 61](#) - Church Order - Add an Article on Congregational Meetings.

[See page 106]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this overture to add an article on the congregational meeting.

Grounds:

1. The congregational meeting is not an ecclesiastical assembly to which people are elected or delegated to make decisions on ecclesiastical matters.

2. This is a matter which should be left up to the local churches to codify in their own constitutions and by-laws.

Adopted

J. [Communication I](#) - Consideration of the Concerns of Dutton Independent Reformed Church about the Church Order. [See page 80]

Recommendation: That

[synod’s answer to Overtures 15 and 75](#) be our answer to Dutton’s first concern.

Adopted

[See [Article XXXV, D](#)]

[[Advisory Committee 7](#), continued in [Article L](#)]

[ARTICLE XLVI](#)

Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen conducts devotions. He reads from I Corinthians 15:51-58 and leads in prayer. The assembly recesses for lunch.

[ARTICLE XLVII](#)

The afternoon session is called to order with the singing of Psalter Hymnal Number 445. The Rev. Phil Grotenhuis leads in devotions.

[ARTICLE XLVIII](#)

The Concept Minutes are read and approved.

ARTICLE XLIX

The clerk requests to be freed from the Study Committee to study the similarities and differences between the OPC and URC due to other federation responsibilities. [See [Article XXVII](#), C, 2, b]

Chairman so rules

Recommitted to Advisory Committee 8 to recommend a new committee member.
[see [Article LVI](#)]

ARTICLE L

[Advisory Committee 7](#), continued from
[Article XLV](#)

A. [Communication I](#),
continued

1. Recommendation: That synod's answer to [Overture 21](#) be our answer to Dutton's second concern.

Adopted

[See [Article LXII](#), B]

2. Recommendation: That synod's answer to [Overture 20](#) and [27](#) be our answer to Dutton's third concern.

Adopted

[See [Articles LVII](#), F, G, and

[LXII](#), A]

3. Recommendation: That synod's answer to the first section of the [Church](#)

[Order Committee's report](#) be our answer to Dutton's fourth concern.

Adopted

[See

[Article L](#), B, 2]

4. Recommendation: That synod answer the fifth of Dutton's concerns by stating that the Church Order reflects common usage and there is no scriptural teaching requiring that we call the church "she" (for example, see Matthew 16:18).

Adopted

B. [Church Order Committee Report](#). [See page 46]

1. Recommendation: That synod accede to recommendation 1 of the [Church Order Study Committee Report](#) and grant the privilege of the floor to Church Order committee members during the discussion of this report.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That synod accede to recommendation 2 with the following amendment: revise the last sentence so that "If the released minister desires..." reads as follows: "If the minister released from his congregation desires..."

Adopted

The new article to be inserted after [Article 10](#) (requiring the renumbering of all subsequent articles) reads as follows:

If, for reasons

other than such as warrant ecclesiastical discipline, either a minister of the

Word or the congregation he is serving desires to dissolve their pastoral relationship, that dissolution shall occur only upon mutually satisfactory conditions and only with the concurring advice of the classis. If the released minister desires to receive a call to serve another congregation, the council from whose service he is being released shall announce his eligibility for call, which eligibility shall be valid for no more than two years, whereafter he shall be honorably released from office. If the minister released from his congregation desires to leave his office in order to seek non-ministerial labor, he must receive the approval of the classis before doing so.

3. Recommendation: That synod accede to recommendation 3 of the report and so adopt the edited forms as printed in the report.

Adopted

4. Recommendation: That synod accede to recommendation 4 of the report and so adopt the proposed editorial changes as listed in the report, with the provision that any other changes made to these articles by this synod take precedence.

Adopted

The following articles, appendices, and the Foundational Principles are corrected to read:

Article 8

A minister who has been ordained in a church outside the federation shall not be admitted to serve in a church within the federation without an examination conducted to the satisfaction of the classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation, whereupon he may be declared by classis eligible for call by his sponsoring Consistory. (See Appendix 4.)

Article 34

The churches of a classis may, as a group, enter into ecumenical relations with an individual church or group of churches such as a classis or presbytery. Before entering into such relations, a classis shall seek the concurring advice of a synod, thereby safeguarding the purity of the federation.

Article 48

The Consistory shall maintain accurate membership records which include names and dates of baptisms, professions of faith, marriages and deaths of members of the congregation.

Article 59

When a minister, elder or deacon has committed a public or gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions of the Consistory, he shall be suspended from his office only by his own Consistory and with the concurring advice of the Consistories of two neighboring churches. When he hardens himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot continue in office, he shall be deposed only by his Consistory and only with the concurring advice of classis.

Article 60

Included among the gross sins, but not to the exclusion of all others, which are worthy of suspension or deposition from office, are these: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre, in short, all sins and gross offenses which render the perpetrators infamous before the world and which in any other member of the church would occasion excommunication.

Article 62

Those who seek membership in another congregation shall request in writing that their current Consistory send to the receiving Consistory an official letter including pertinent membership information and testimony concerning their doctrine and life.

Article 64

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they ought to be observed diligently. If it be found that God may be more honored and the churches better served by changing any article, this shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall be ratified by two-thirds of the Consistories prior to the next synodical meeting, after which meeting they shall take effect.

APPENDIX 2

- omit the words “inquire concerning” (occurring six times)
- replacing “Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches” with “United Reformed Churches in North America” (throughout entire document)

3. CONTENT

b.

- (2) Bible knowledge: inquire concerning the prospective candidate’s doctrine of Scripture, canonicity, hermeneutics, etc., and familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible.
- (3) Biblical exegesis: an Old Testament and a New Testament passage should be assigned to the prospective candidate at least three weeks in advance (one of them in connection with one of his assigned sermons); the examiner should inquire concerning the meaning of the text and the prospective candidate’s ability to work with the original languages and with a suitable exegetical method.
- (4) Confessional knowledge: inquire concerning the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, the prospective candidate’s willingness to subscribe to them by signing the Form of Subscription.
- (7) Ethics: inquire concerning the meaning and function of the Decalogue, also in relation to Christian motivation and character, and to contemporary moral problems.

APPENDIX 3

3. CONTENT

- (1) Practica: inquire concerning the prospective candidate’s personal and spiritual life, his relationship with the Lord, his growth in faith, his background and preparation for ministry, his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking entrance thereto, liturgics, homiletics, pastoral care, and evangelism.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF REFORMED CHURCH GOVERNMENT

14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, the church, under the supervision of the elders, is called to worship Him according to the Scriptural principles governing worship.

Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1,2,6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; I Peter 2:9

C. Church Order Committee Membership

Motion that

[the present members of the](#)

[Church Order Committee](#) be requested to serve until the next meeting of synod.

Adopted

D. Communication from Oak Glen, Lansing, IL. [See page 85]

Oak Glen has

withdrawn this document.

ARTICLE LI

Advisory Committee 1

A. Overture 4 — Church Order

Article 2. [See page 89]

Recommendation: That synod adopt Overture 4 on the basis of the grounds given.

Defeated

B. [Overture 60](#) — Church Order

[Article 2](#). [See page 106]

Recommendation: That

synod not accede to this overture.

Grounds:

1. The language and the grammar of the overture make it difficult to interpret.
2. An overture of this nature should not be considered without due consideration being given to what manner of work beyond the parish ministry might be served by an ordained minister under the oversight of a local consistory: i.e. teacher of theology, seminary professor, parachurch organization, etc. And finally, we question whether this concern is best dealt with in connection with Article 2.

Adopted

C. [Overture 58](#) — Church Order

[Article 3](#). [See page 105]

Recommendation: That

synod not accede to this overture.

Ground: The substance of the proposed change is already included in the words, “must evidence genuine godliness.”

Adopted

D. [Overture 35](#) — Church Order

[Article 4](#). [See page 98]

Recommendation: That

synod not accede to this overture.

Grounds:

1. We do not believe that synodical deputies are truly able to represent the federation.
2. With the Church Order Study Committee advice we believe that the role of the synodical deputies has yet to be defined.

Adopted

E. [Overture 36](#) — Church Order

[Article 6](#). [See page 98]

Recommendation: That

synod not accede to this overture.

Grounds:

1. We do not believe that synodical deputies are truly able to represent the federation.
2. With the Church Order Study Committee advice we believe that the role of the synodical deputies has yet to be defined.

Adopted

F. [Overture 6](#) — Church Order

[Article 7](#). [See page 89]

1. Recommendation: That

synod adopt the following change to [Article 7](#): Replace the sentence “He shall consider a call only with consent of his current council,” with “Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current council regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent.”

Grounds: [Ground 3 is deleted.]

- a. The present reading of this article gives the impression that a minister may not even consider a call without the consent of his current consistory. This would be unjust both for the minister and for the church which is extending the call.

b. The present requirement is over restrictive and may prevent the legitimate needs of vacant congregations from being met.

Adopted

2. [Article 7](#) of the Church Order now reads:

Those who are already ordained ministers within the federation may be called to another congregation in a manner consistent with the above rules, without the examination or the laying on of hands. Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current council regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent. Upon receipt of proper credentials from the church he last served, he shall be installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form and shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

G. [Overture 55](#) — Add an article to section I of the Church Order. [See page 104]

Recommendation: That synod not add an article as follows: “Men who aspire to the office of elder or deacon must be appropriately trained to fulfil the demands of that office. The training for the specific office is to be conducted by, and is to be under the supervision of the consistory.

Ground: Though we endorse the sentiments of the overture we think it proper that the training of aspiring office-bearers be left to the discretion of the local church.

Adopted

H. [Overture 59](#) — Add an article to section I of the Church Order. [See page 105]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to Overture 59 which requests whether there is a need for an article in section I allowing for admission to the gospel ministry of men who possess “exceptional gifts. . .”

Ground: This matter has not been dealt with as far as possible in the narrower assembly.

Adopted

I. [Overture 78](#) — Grandfather Clause for Evangelists. [See page 117]

1.

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this overture.

Ground: It would be better to deal with such eventualities in each concrete situation by way of exception.

Defeated

2. Motion to adopt Overture 78:

That any church which is admitted into the United Reformed Churches which already has an ordained evangelist working under its supervision, be allowed to continue the evangelist in office according to its own rules even though the United Reformed Churches do not recognize the office of evangelist. This permission shall be limited as follows:

a. The office

of evangelist in that church shall be terminated when the position becomes vacant.

b. The evangelist's supervision shall be an entirely internal matter with his calling church.

c. The evangelist shall not exercise his office outside the field to which he has been called.

Grounds:

a. This permission will help minimize potential impediments to churches considering membership in the United Reformed Churches. At least one church considering membership in the United Reformed Churches has an ordained evangelist.

b. By requiring that the office be terminated when the position becomes vacant, this permission seeks to uphold the high standards embodied in the Church Order for those who would preach the Word of God, namely a seminary education including training in the original languages of Scripture, something not required for the office of evangelist where that office is recognized.

c.

This permission is preferable to having the church "upgrade" the evangelist's office to that of minister of the Word before entering the federation.

Adopted

ARTICLE LII

Advisory Committee 6, continued from

Article XXVI.

Overture 45 —

Church Order Article 59. [See page 101]

A. Recommendation: That we accede to

Overture 45 (with the grounds) except that we end the article after the phrase:

“. . . with the concurring advice of classis,” and delete the words: “And in case of a minister, also with the concurring advice of the deputies of synod.”

Ground: The overture assumes the functions of synodical deputies that do not exist in our federation.

Adopted

B. Article 59 of the Church Order now reads:

When a minister, elder, or

deacon has committed a public or gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions of the Consistory, he shall be suspended from his office by his own Consistory with the concurring advice of the Consistories of two neighboring churches.

Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot continue in office, he shall be deposed by his Consistory with the concurring advice of classis.

ARTICLE LIII

Advisory Committee 2

A. Overture 5 — Church Order

Article 6.

[See page 89]

1. Recommendation: That synod delete the provision for the approbation by members of the calling church, after the name of the minister has been announced for two successive Sundays and no lawful objection has arisen.

Ground: Article 6 seems to preserve a procedure found in Article 4 of both the Dort Church Order and the 1914 CRC Church Order. However, those church orders envision the possibility of a consistory extending a call without having a congregational vote. Therefore, in the procedure outlined in Article 6, the advice of the congregation in step three is redundant.

Adopted

2. Article 6 of the Church Order now reads:

The lawful calling to the office

of minister of those who have not previously been in that office consists of:

First, the election by the council of one who has been declared a candidate according to the regulations prescribed herein, after having prayed and received the advice of the congregation;

Second, the examination of both doctrine and

life, which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the delegates to the

classis of which the calling church is a participant, according to the regulations adopted by the federation (see Appendix 3);

Finally, the public

ordination before the congregation, which shall take place with appropriate instructions, admonitions, prayers and subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, followed with the laying on of hands by the ministers who are present and by the elders of the congregation, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

B. Overtures 7,

37-39 — Church Order [Article](#)

13. [See pages 89 and 99]

1.

Recommendation: That synod reword [Article 13](#) to read as follows:

The duties

belonging to the office of elder consist of continuing in prayer and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. They shall see to it that their fellow elders, the minister(s) and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, assist in catechizing the youth, promote God-centered schooling, visit the members of the congregation according to their needs, engage in family visiting, exercise discipline in the congregation, actively promote the work of evangelism and missions, and insure that everything is done decently and in good order.

2. Recommendation: That this change be synod's answer to Overtures

7, 37-39.

Adopted

C. [Overture 31](#) — Church Order

[Article 10](#). [See page 97]

Recommendation: That

synod not accede to Overture 31.

Grounds:

1. Grounds given in the overture do not support the desired changes.

2. [Article](#)

[10](#) adequately handles the situation of the status of retired ministers.

Adopted

D. [Overture 40](#) — Church Order

[Article 14](#). [See page 100]

Recommendation: That

synod not accede to Overture 40.

Ground: The work of "promoting with Word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit" in the congregation is implicit in [Article](#)

14.

Adopted

[[Advisory Committee 2](#) report continues in [Article LV](#)]

[ARTICLE LIV](#)

Word is received that the mother of the Rev. Stephen Phillips, Ecumenical Observer from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, went to be with the Lord. The chairman extends the sympathy of synod and Rev. Pontier leads in prayer.

[ARTICLE LV](#)

Advisory Committee 2, continued from
Article LIII.

A. Overture 41 — Church

Order Article 14. [See page 100]

1. Recommendation: That synod accept Overture

41. The first sentence of Article 14 would be changed to read thus: “The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of continuing in prayer and supervising the works of Christian mercy in the congregation.”

Adopted

2. Article 14 of the Church Order now reads:

The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of continuing in prayer and supervising the works of Christian mercy in the congregation; acquainting themselves with congregational needs; exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy; gathering and managing the offerings of God’s people in Christ’s name, and distributing these offerings according to need; and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ’s mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered as resources permit. The deacons shall ordinarily meet every month to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render an account of their work to the Consistory.

B. Overture 46 —

Report on “The Office of Deacon in Churches.” [See page 102]

1. Recommendation: That synod recommend to the churches for study the report on “The Office of Deacon in the Churches.”

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That this be synod’s answer to Overture 46.

Adopted

C. Overture 54 — Church Order

Article 12. [See page 104]

1. Recommendation:

That

Article 12 be re-worded: “Elders and deacons shall be elected to a term specified by the consistory, and upon . . .”

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That this be synod’s answer to Overture 54.

Adopted

3. Article 12 of the Church Order now reads:

Elders and deacons shall be elected to a term specified by the Consistory, and upon subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, shall be ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form before entering upon their work.

D. Overture 62 — Church Order Articles

3, 6, 9, and

11. [See page 106]

1.

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this overture.

Grounds:

a. Re: point #1 of the overture, the word “diaconate” is included in the word “council.”

b. Article 22 already covers the concerns expressed in the overture.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That regarding point 2 of the overture, it is not our place, nor do we have time to formulate an article for the Church Order.

Adopted

ARTICLE LVI

Advisory Committee 8, continued from
Article XXXIV.

Recommendation: That

Elder Dave Perron replace Rev. J. Julien on the OPC Study Committee. [See Article XXVII, C, 2, b and Article XLIX]

Adopted

ARTICLE LVII

Advisory Committee 5

A. Overture 17 — Church Order

Article 37. [See page 92]

1. Recommendation: That synod not accede to the proposed change in Article 37.

Grounds:

a. Preaching has already received primary position in this article.

b. Article

37 declares that the regulation of these elements of worship belong to the Consistory.

Defeated

2. Motion that synod change the second half to read: “Namely: that the preaching of the Word have the central place, that confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.”

Grounds:

a. In the context in which we live, there is a collapsing of worship and praise.

b. We wish to make clear that preaching and hearing the Word of God is to be central.

Adopted

3. Article 37 of the Church Order now reads:

The Consistory shall regulate

the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word: namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, that confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.

B. Overture 18 — Church Order

Article 41. [See page 92]

1. Recommendation:

That synod accede to this addition in Article 41; namely, “with the use of the appropriate liturgical forms.”

Grounds:

a. It ensures a greater consistency in usage in Articles

12, 40, 42,

44, etc.

b. This guards the proper practice of adult baptism.

Adopted

2. Article 41 of the Church Order now reads:

Adults who have not been

baptized shall receive holy baptism upon public profession of faith, with the use of the appropriate liturgical forms, and be thus accepted as members. They

shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

C. [Overture 19a](#) — Church Order

[Article 42](#). [See page 93]

Recommendation: That

synod not accede to the deletion in [Article 42](#).

Grounds:

1. The sentence is not redundant because it deals with a new context.
2. This scriptural requirement (Hebrews 10:25, I Corinthians 11:17a) needs to be spelled out since we receive people from different church communions who do not always understand this requirement.

Adopted

D. [Overture 19b](#) — Church Order

[Article 42](#). [See page 93]

1. Recommendation:

That synod accede to the addition to [Article 42](#), but with different wording: “interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life.”

Ground: The wording of the Church Order Committee is succinct.

Adopted

2. [Article 42](#) of the Church Order now reads:

Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life, and their public profession of faith shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcement to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby baptized members are accepted into full communion in the congregation and shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

E. [Overture 67](#) — Church Order

[Article 42](#). [See page 108]

1. Recommendation:

That synod accede to the following addition: Persons coming from other denominations shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. The consistory shall determine in each case whether public profession of faith shall be required. Their names shall be announced to the congregation for approval.

Ground: It is the task of elders to examine the life and conduct of those who seek membership from other denominations.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That this be included as a separate article immediately following [Article 42](#).

Ground: Adding it as an additional article makes [Article 42](#) less cumbersome.

a. Motion made to amend this article by deleting the last two words: “for approval.”

Adopted

b. Motion made to amend this article by adding: “two weeks prior to reception in order that the congregation may have opportunity, if necessary, to bring lawful objections to the attention of the Consistory.”

Adopted

c. The main motion, as amended, is

Adopted

3. A [new article](#) to appear in the Church Order following [Article 42](#), reads as follows:

Persons coming from other denominations shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the Consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. The Consistory shall determine in each case whether public profession of faith shall be required. Their names shall be announced to the congregation two weeks prior to reception in order that the congregation may have opportunity, if necessary, to bring lawful objections to the attention of the Consistory.

F. [Overture 20a](#) — Church Order [Article](#)

[44](#). [See page 93]

1. Recommendation:

That synod accede to the addition to [Article 44](#), namely, the addition of the word “ordinarily” in relation to the administration of the Lord’s Supper.

Ground: This underscores the consistorial freedom that is understood by the Church Order.

Adopted

2. For corrected reading of Church Order [Article](#)

[44](#), see

[Article LVII](#), G, 5.

G. [Overture 20b](#) — Church Order

[Article 44](#). [See page 93]

1. Recommendation:

That synod not accede to the deletion from [Article](#)

[44](#) of the words: “The

administration of the Lord’s Supper shall ordinarily be preceded by a preparatory sermon and followed by an applicatory sermon.”

Grounds:

a. It is a matter urged upon us by Scripture, I Corinthians 11:27-28.

b. It is a matter urged upon us by our Reformed liturgical tradition.

2. Motion made to amend by dropping Ground a.

Adopted

3. Motion to adopt the recommendation as amended is

Defeated

4. Motion to delete the words in question is

Adopted

5. [Article 44](#) of the Church Order now reads:

The Consistory shall ordinarily administer the Lord’s Supper at least every three months in a service of corporate worship, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. This administration shall conform to the teaching of God’s Word and the regulations of ecclesiastical order, in such a manner as is most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

[[Advisory Committee 5](#) report continues in [Article LXII](#)]

[ARTICLE LVIII](#)

Synod recesses for the supper hour. The Rev. Jelle Tuininga leads in devotions as he reads from I Chronicles 29 and prays.

[ARTICLE LIX](#)

The evening session of synod is called to order with the singing of Psalter Hymnal Number 186. The Rev. Ray Sikkema reads from I Corinthians 3 and leads in prayer.

ARTICLE LX

Delegate Ben Hoekstra is excused to return home.

ARTICLE LXI

The concept minutes are read and approved.

ARTICLE LXII

Advisory Committee 5, continued from Article LVII

A. Overture 27 — Church

Order Article 44. [See page 95]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this addition to Article 44, namely, the provision for serving Lord's Supper in institutions of mercy.

Ground: Article 44 prescribes what is done every three months in a service of corporate worship without denying the consistories opportunity to supervise the Lord's Supper in extraordinary circumstances.

Adopted

B. Overture 21 — Church Order

Article 45. [See page 93]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to this change in Article 45.

Grounds:

1. Article

45 adequately expresses our understanding that the church's mission task is to be identified with preaching.

2. The Church Order

Committee's advice is good.

Adopted

C. Overture 26 — Psalter Hymnal. [See page 95]

1. Recommendation: That a committee be formed to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal.

Grounds:

a. A common psalter hymnal would promote unity among the churches of our federation.

b. The Psalter Hymnal presently used in the majority of our churches is presently out of print.

c. Because the process of producing a Psalter Hymnal is lengthy it would be wise to begin the process as soon as possible.

2 Motion to amend the main motion: "in consultation with churches who have indicated an interest in ecumenical relations with us."

Defeated

3. The main motion is

Adopted

4. Motion is made to appoint several from this synod to serve on this committee, and appoint one as a convener.

Adopted

Committee: Rev. Edward Knott, convener; the Revs. Dennis Royall, Dick Wynia, Stephen Arrick, and Derrick Vander Meulen; Henry Nuiver.

D. [Overture 28](#) — Church Order

[Article 46](#). [See page 95]

Recommendation: That synod leave [Article 46](#) as is.

Grounds:

1. “Under the regulation of consistory. . .” does not require a worship service.
2. The advice of the Church Order Committee speaks our mind.

Adopted

E. [Overture 82](#) — Liturgical Forms. [See page 120]

Recommendation: That synod

accede to Overture 82 by adopting and recommending to the churches for use the said liturgical forms (Form Number 1 for Baptism of Infants, Public Profession of Faith, Baptism of Adults, and Celebration of the Lord’s Supper).

Grounds:

1. These forms are biblically and theologically precise.
2. These forms are historically rooted.

Defeated

[ARTICLE LXIII](#)

The Revs. Peter Vellenga and Richard Stienstra, and Elder Arie Peters request permission to leave.

Granted

[ARTICLE LXIV](#)

[Advisory Committee 9](#), continued from

[Article XXIV](#)

A. [Overture 47](#) —

Desirability and Feasibility of Starting a Church Periodical. [See page 102]

Recommendation: That synod adopt this overture.

Ground: As a young federation the churches need to pursue seriously the Scriptural demand for fellowship and ecclesiastical unity, and also to pursue the confessional requirement for doctrinal conformity, as well as the quest to obtain uniformity in observing the Church Order. (Note added by the Advisory Committee: While growth in doctrinal and practical like-mindedness is a worthy goal and ought to be pursued, we would caution churches and members that the liberty of conscience of our churches and consistories be in no way infringed upon, that is, that we avoid the imposing of any “top down” uniformitarianism.

Defeated

B. [Overture 71](#) — Supervision of the Stated Clerk. [See page 110]

Recommendation: That synod not accede to Overture 71.

Ground: Excessive regulations restrict the job too much.

Adopted

C. [Overture 73](#) — Term Limits for Stated Clerk [See page 111]

1.

Recommendation: That synod specify the term of office of the Stated Clerk of the URCNA to be for three (3) years, and that any one Stated Clerk may not be eligible for more than two (2) consecutive terms.

Grounds:

a. Article 19 of the Church Order encourages the broader assemblies to specify these terms.

b. By having a constricted term of office no one person will receive or be able to exercise undue power or influence

Adopted

2. Motion that the present three year term be until and including the next synod meeting.

a. Motion to amend this to start the three year term with this synod.

Adopted

b. Main motion, as amended,

Adopted

D. [Overture 74](#) — Smaller Classes. [See page 111]

1. Recommendation: That

synod realign the classes of the URC, making them smaller in size and more regional in composition.

Grounds:

a. With our continued growth in number of churches, such a division becomes possible.

b. Smaller and regional classes are more economical because travel expense will not be as great.

c. Smaller and regional classes will keep one classis from becoming more powerful. Historically, Reformed churches were partial to this arrangement for this reason.

d. The need of smaller classes is obvious and it would serve the churches well to have these classes established now.

Adopted

2. Recommendation: That synod adopt the [classical division as pictured on the map](#) (see page 38); and that the following division of churches be accepted:

Classis Western Canada

1. Agassiz, BC--Evergreen Covenant Reformed Church

2.

Calgary, AB--Bethel United Reformed Church

3. Edmonton, AB--Orthodox Reformed Church

4. Grande Prairie, AB--Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church

5. Leduc,

AB--Grace Reformed Church

6. Lethbridge, AB--Trinity Reformed Church

7. Lynden,

WA--Lynden United Reformed Church

8. Neerlandia, AB--Emmanuel Reformed Church

9. Ponoka, AB--Parkland Reformed Church

10. Smithers, BC--Bethel Reformed Church

11. Telkwa, BC--Reformed Church of Telkwa

Classis Southwest U.S.

1. Boise, ID--Cloverdale United Reformed Church

2.

Chino, CA--First Christian Reformed Church

3. Escondido, CA--Escondido Christian Reformed Church

4. Longmont, CO--Pleasant Valley Church

5. Loveland, CO--Calvary United Reformed Church

6. Phoenix, AZ--Phoenix United Reformed Church
7.
Placentia, CA--Christ Reformed Church
8. Santa Ana, CA--Saigon Reformed
Presbyterian Church
9. Walnut Creek, CA--Trinity United Reformed Church
Classis Central U.S.
1. Delavan, WI--Orthodox Reformed Church
2. DeMotte,
IN--Immanuel Reformed Church
3. Doon, IA--Doon United Reformed Church
4. Grant
Park, IL--Faith United Reformed Church
5. Highland, IN--Community Reformed Bible
Church
6. Kansas City, MO--Covenant Reformed Church
7. Lansing, IL--Oak Glen
United Reformed Church
8. Lynwood, IL--Lynwood United Reformed Church
9. Orange
City, IA--Redeemer United Reformed Church
10. Sanborn, IA--Cornerstone Orthodox
Reformed Church
11. South Holland, IL--Bethany Covenant Reformed Church
Classis Michigan
1. Allendale, MI--Allendale United Reformed Church
2. Alto,
MI--Grace United Reformed Church
3. Byron Center, MI--Trinity United Reformed
Church
4. Coopersville, MI--Eastmanville United Reformed Church
5. Grand Rapids,
MI--Christian Reformation Church
6. Grand Rapids, MI--Walker United Reformed
Church
7. Holland, MI--Faith United Reformed Church
8. Hudsonville,
MI--Cornerstone United Reformed Church
9. Jenison, MI--Bethel United Reformed
Church
10. Kalamazoo, MI--Covenant United Reformed Church
11. Wyoming,
MI--Beverly United Reformed Church
Classis Southern Ontario
1. Aylmer, ON--Bethel United Reformed Church
2. Balmoral, ON--Covenant Reformed Church
3. Brockville, ON--Ebenezer Orthodox
Reformed Church
4. Clinton, ON--Grace Orthodox Reformed Church
5. Dunnville,
ON--Grace Reformed Church
6. Guthrie, ON--Grace Orthodox Reformed Church
7.
Hamilton, ON--Rehoboth United Reformed Church
8. Jordan, ON--Immanuel Orthodox
Reformed Church

9. London, ON--Cornerstone United Reformed Church
 10. St. Catharines, ON--Trinity Orthodox Reformed Church
 11. Sheffield, ON--Zion United Reformed Church
 12. Toronto, ON--Covenant Reformed Church
 13. Wellandport, ON--Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church
 14. Woodstock, ON--Independent Reformed Church
 15. Wyoming, ON--Covenant Christian Church Classis Eastern U.S.
1. Cape Coral, FL--Trinity Reformed Church
 2. Ferrisburg, VT--United Reformed Church of Champlain Valley
 3. Newton, NJ--Newton United Reformed Church
 4. Pompton Plains, NJ--Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church Adopted
3. Motion that this classical division will take effect on January 1, 1998. Adopted
4. The following churches are designated convening churches for their respective classes:
- Classis Western Canada: Trinity Reformed Church, Lethbridge, AB.
 Classis Southwest U.S.: Phoenix URC, Phoenix, AZ.
 Classis Central U.S.:
 Covenant Reformed Church, Kansas City, MO.
 Classis Michigan: Grace URC, Alto, MI.
 Classis Southern Ontario: Grace Orthodox Reformed Church, Guthrie, ON.
 Classis Eastern U.S.: Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church, Pompton Plains, NJ.
- E. Overtures [24](#) and [76](#). [See pages 94 and 112]
- Discussion:
- An overture requesting the establishment of a system for the equitable distribution of resources came to the 1994 ARC meeting. The Alliance rejected this overture, believing the Scriptural method of church funding is to present needs and allow the churches to respond to these needs through free will offerings.
- Overture 24 requests the expenses of synodical delegates be pooled and divided equitably among member churches. Overture 76 requests synod to adopt a system of financial stewardship based on the freewill giving of the churches without establishing anything on the order of quotas.
- Recommendations:
1. Your committee recommends the adoption of Overture 76 with its grounds. The grounds given contain the principle by which funds within our churches should be raised. Adopted
 2. That synod not accede to Overture 24 for the same scriptural rationale upon which Overture 76 stands. The needs of the churches should be met by free will offerings taken by the local churches in accordance with Deuteronomy 15:7, 8, and 10; Acts 5:1-5 [voluntary giving]; II Corinthians 8 and 9 [no compulsion or obligation but urging the churches to give freely and willingly]. Adopted

ARTICLE LXV

Miscellaneous Matters from the synod of 1996.

A. [Motion that Church Order](#)

[Article 64 be implemented](#) as of this date, October 23, 1997.

Adopted

B. [Motion that Church Order Article 31 be implemented](#) as of this date,

October 23, 1997, noting the two exceptions made earlier at this meeting for Escondido and Chino, CA. [See [Article III, C and D](#)]

Adopted

ARTICLE LXVI

Closing matters

A. Calling Church and the next meeting of Synod.

1. The

invitation of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI, is accepted by motion.

2. Motion to set the date and time as Tuesday, June 15, 1999, at 1:30 P.M.

Adopted

B. Concept Minutes are read and approved.

C. Expressions of Thanks

1. Rev. Ralph Pontier thanks the delegates for their

help, Joel Dykstra, the Convening Council: Trinity ORC, Rev. Calvin Tuininga, and Chairman Chuck Dykstra for his work in preparation for Synod and his able chairmanship of the synodical meetings.

2. Chairman Chuck Dykstra thanks the secretaries: Jacki Dykstra, Corrie Huizenga, and Audrey Van Vliet, the committee that prepared for synod: Rev. Calvin Tuininga, Bert Gritter, and Teun Hunse, Reita Julien for her organ accompaniment, Rev. John Bouwers for his inspirational address, the vice-chairman, Rev. Ralph Pontier, and the Clerk, Rev. Jerome Julien. Also, he thanks the delegates who made his job easier.

D. The Synod of 1997 is declared adjourned. The Rev. Dick Wynia reads from Colossians 3, calls for the singing of Psalter Hymnal Number 366, and leads in prayer. The delegates join in singing, "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow."

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Jerome Julien, Clerk

**Classical
Realignment**

REPORT OF THE STATED CLERK (preliminary):

The Synod of 1996 held at Lynwood, Illinois, adopted the [motion to approve the "liturgical forms and the Form of Subscription" as printed in the Psalter Hymnal, Centennial Edition \(1976\)](#) for use among the churches. This necessitated slight editing of the Form of Subscription. The edited version follows for your approval.

FORM OF SUBSCRIPTION

We, the undersigned, Ministers of the Gospel, Elders and Deacons of the United Reformed congregation of _____ of the Classis of _____ do hereby, sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-'19, do fully agree with the Word of God.

We promise therefore diligently to teach and faithfully to defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by our public preaching or writing.

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those which were

condemned by the above mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors. And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrines should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose, teach, or defend the same, either by preaching or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the Consistory, Classis, or Synod, that the same may there be examined, being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the Consistory, Classis, or Synod, under the penalty, in case of refusal, of being by that very fact suspended from our office.

And further, if at any time the Consistory, Classis, or Synod, upon sufficient grounds of suspicion and to preserve the uniformity and purity of doctrine, may deem it proper to require of us a further explanation of our sentiments respecting any particular article of the Confession of Faith, the Catechism, or the explanation of the National Synod, we do hereby promise to be always willing and ready to comply with such requisition, under the penalty above mentioned, reserving for ourselves, however, the right of appeal in case we should believe ourselves aggrieved by the sentence of the Consistory or the Classis; and until a decision is made upon such an appeal, we will acquiesce in the determination and judgment already passed.

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
Report of the Stated Clerk
to the
1997 Synod meeting at St. Catharines Ontario

Esteemed Brethren:

It has been enjoyable to be involved in all of the activities of this past year as we as a federation have grown from thirty-seven congregations to almost sixty. (By the time we meet, this number may be even more.) The work of the clerk has been much more active and involved than that of the clerk of the Alliance of Reformed Churches. This, of course, is understandable when you reflect on the nature of the two different organizations.

Throughout the year I have answered correspondence and phone calls requesting information about the URC and copies of the minutes. The helpful pamphlet written by the Rev. Edward Knott has come in quite handy. As new congregations have joined the federation I have sent a letter of welcome. Early in the year I filled out a questionnaire from the Reformed Ecumenical Council which would provide information for a book to be published including all of the Reformed bodies throughout the world. As materials came which were specifically for the committees which we have, it was sent on for their consideration. Minutes from the classes have been filed for future reference. I received notification that the following ministers--emeritated or missionaries--had become part of our new federation: the Revs. Robert DeVries, Harry Dexter Clark, Bill Green, and Jacob Kits. They are all connected with some congregation. A letter reminding the churches about this meeting of synod and giving an update of new churches was sent along with information about a possible Health Insurance program and a letter from the Rev. Anjov Ahenakaa regarding possible missionary support in Nigeria. At one point, I was asked to write a letter to the United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service so that a citizen of Canada could be called to a state-side congregation.

One responsibility that the clerk has because no one else has it, is the compiling of our annual Directory. This is published for us by Reformed Believers United. There are many requests for the information published in this booklet. Since we were steadily growing over the last year there were many times

when I had to supply material not included in the first edition. It is hoped that the new edition due out after the first of the year will provide most of all the material which is requested. At the registration table you received some sheets to fill out and return to me. Please fill them out with the information and statistics as of December 31, 1997, and return them by mail or fax. You will help considerably by doing this. Extra time and expense will be avoided. For one reason or another, several ministers and a congregation or two have contacted me to learn of the proper procedure to become part of us. I had to show them that unless they had been part of the ARC or the CRC, they would need to go through the procedure outlined in the Church Order.

A request came from the Reformed Church in the United States seeking a representative of the URC to bring greetings at their annual synodical meeting. Since it was in California, the committee directed me to send Dr. Don Pauuw of our Walnut Creek, California congregation. His report appears as an appendix.¹ The committee delegated me to attend the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church held at Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania. The decisions of that body are outlined in the correspondence included in your agenda. It was an enjoyable experience to attend and to have fellowship with the brothers there. Also, at the request of the Faith United Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, I represented the URC at the dedication of their beautiful and comfortable facilities. Also, an official statement of delegation was requested by the Rev. J. Ganger so that he could represent us at the meeting of the ICRC in Korea. This was provided.

The preparations for this meeting of synod were ably made by the committee here at Trinity. They have been busily engaged in this for many months. On my part, the agenda had to be prepared. It is a hefty document. Several matters must be brought to your attention. I have found a misprint in [Overture 17](#), ground 1. Where the word "and" must be replaced by "into." Also, a very important line has been omitted in some of the overtures. The statement: "NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East" should appear after Overtures [29-45](#) and [48-71](#), not just the

ones where it presently appears. Please note this in your agenda.² Three different groups requested space for display of their materials for distribution. They have been granted that permission. You should see displays of John Calvin Seminary in Mexico City, Christ for Russia, and Middle East Reformed Fellowship.

All of the credentials have finally arrived. One congregation, the United Reformed Church of Lynden, Washington, will not be sending any delegates to this meeting.

Several letters have been received after the publication of the agenda. These appear as an appendix to this report. One is [from Oak Glen Covenant Community Reformed Church](#); another from the Rev. A. R. Kayayan; still another from his son, Eric. [Another matter was sent on to us by Classis East. It concerns the group of churches in Honduras with which the Rev. Ernest Langendoen has been working.](#) It came to Classis East via the Immanuel council (Jordan, Ontario) and Classis East deemed it to be a matter for synod.

For the information of the Stated Clerks of the classes, I have copies of a Classical Diploma which can be used for classical exams. It was carefully prepared by the Covenant council at Kalamazoo.

Several matters have been gleaned from the minutes of the various classes. They must be brought to your attention.

First, Classis East recommends to synod the following congregations as new members of the federation: Covenant Reformed of Toronto and Ebenezer Orthodox Reformed of Brockville, Ontario. Other classes had new members but they simply

received them in accord with their understanding of the temporary method of understanding the Church Order.

Second, Classis East seeks the advice of synod regarding Classis East RC entering into ecumenical relations with the Independent CRC of Ancaster, Ontario, as per Church Order Articles 33-34.

Third, Classis West seeks the advice of synod, according to Article 34 of the Church Order, to have a regular delegation of observers from Classis West to the meetings of the western OCRC classis.

The following items listed above call for some action:

1. [The Oak Glen communication.](#)
2. The communications from the Kayayans. [Letters on file]
3. The concern of the church in Honduras.
4. The recommendation from Classis East regarding [Toronto and Brockville.](#)
5. [The request for advice from Classis East regarding ecumenical relations with the Independent CRC of Ancaster, Ontario.](#)
6. [The request of Classis West for advice to send regular observers to the meeting of the western classes of the OCRC.](#)

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Jerome M. Julien, Clerk

1 This letter is in the Clerk's file.

2 These corrections have been made in this copy of the overtures.

INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT Synod 1997

Esteemed brothers,

1. Introduction

As one of its concluding items of business, Synod 1996 decided "that the officers appoint an Inter-Church Relations Committee for correspondence and contact with other churches" (Art. 39). The committee members appointed are:

Rev. P. Vellenga, chairman (Clinton ON)

Rev. R. Stienstra, secretary (Dunnville ON)

Elder B. Bruining (Balmoral ON)

Elder R. Clausing (Lynwood IL)

Rev. R. Pontier (Orange City IA)

The committee carried out its work mainly by mail, telephone, and fax. The geographic distances between members may need some attention, should conferences be required in the future. At present the distances do not impede our labours, and the members are humbly grateful they can serve the King of the Church and His people in this way. We request that synod address the length of service of the committee members.

2. Mandate

The committee has attempted to understand the meaning and intent of our rather skeletal mandate. We observe that our name is "Inter-Church Relations Committee," and the task description is "correspondence and contact with other churches." We alert synod to the fact that the Church Order speaks exclusively of "ecumenical relations" in the matter of interchurch relations. The committee also observes that "churches must seek and pursue ecumenical relations with churches outside the federation which manifest the marks of a true church"

(Art.33), while "the churches of a classis may, as a group, enter into ecumenical relations with an individual church or group of churches..." (Art.34), and that "the federation may enter into ecumenical relations with other federations by synodical decision" (Art.35) (emphases added). We mention these things in order to suggest that interchurch relations take place in the framework of the Scriptural and confessional understanding as articulated by the Church Order, so that the objective of such initiated relations is always, where physically possible, integrated church unity in harmony with John 17:20-23, Ephesians 4:3-6, and the Belgic Confession, Articles 27-29.

We believe that in due time synod may wish to request a thorough study of Reformed ecumenicity, or at least consider the parameters and description of our committee's mandate more explicitly. At present we request synod to consider changing the name of the committee to "Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity." We believe this wording is more in harmony with the Church Order, the Scriptures, and the Confession than the current formulation. Although the word "ecumenical" already contains the concept of unity and oneness, we consider it desirable to give expression to this unity in explicitly referring to ecclesiastical or church unity.

Since it is likely that a number of corresponding churches may wish to send a delegation of observers to the synod, and our committee may wish to reciprocate, some suitable and appropriate protocol and procedure should be worked out in coordination with the clerk, Rev. J. Julien and conceivably with the calling church of synod. Thus, our committee requests synod to effect such coordination by adding the clerk as an "ex officio member" to the committee. We also request synod to designate such observers at the present level of relations "Ecumenical Observers" rather than fraternal delegates. Should the time come that a more advanced level of ecumenical relations with another federation is reached, we suggest that synod consider employing the designation "Ecumenical Delegates." As a final note in this section of the report, it may be fitting to alert synod to the fact that it may become necessary to categorize and designate various levels of ecumenical relations our federation may establish with other churches. Such consideration could readily be included in the task of a study of Reformed ecumenicity.

3. Correspondence

The committee decided to begin correspondence with the Reformed Church of Quebec (ERQ) , since they had expressed such interest at the ARC meeting, and several of our churches already relate to them in some way. We also decided to initiate correspondence with three of the faithful Reformed churches which most closely share in or reflect the history of our churches. The churches selected were the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. All four federations are located primarily in Canada, with the latter three also having some congregations in the United States.

The committee sent the same letter of introduction requesting dialogue to each of the federations. We wrote that we are "seeking to establish sufficient unity so that in due time the churches we serve could consider some appropriate form of ecclesiastical unity." We further communicated that the committee "is interested in exchanging information on the similarities and the differences between our two federations, so that if the King of the Church should grant it, increased harmony and unity may result." The committee also conveyed that "by

virtue of divergent paths of history we have developed different emphases on some practices and perhaps also on some particular doctrines."

We now report on the subsequent correspondence with these churches, listing them in the alphabetical order of their names.

A. Canadian and American Reformed Churches

These churches consist of 46 congregations, four of them in the USA, having 14,205 members (in 1995), and are organized into four classes and two regional synods, with the general synod meeting every three years. The federation operates a Theological College in Hamilton Ontario, is active in Christian Education, and has a teachers' college which supplies teachers for the Canadian Reformed Schools. The churches trace their origin to the secession of 1944 from the Dutch Reformed Churches (GKN). The secession is called the Liberation. The Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches wrote back indicating that they "would be most happy to pursue contact..." in response to our request to suggest one or more topics or areas of discussion, the deputies wrote, "Our committee feels that we should perhaps begin by forming an agreed upon view as to the nature of the form of unity which we ought to pursue." They would also appreciate some discussion on the divergent paths of history the two federations have traveled. The deputies add, "It may be helpful to isolate which specific doctrines need discussion, and to concentrate on aiming for a consensus of understanding with regard to them. For our part, we are not aware of any confessional or substantial doctrinal differences..." Our committee responded by outlining briefly the Scriptural and confessional reasons why "the objective of the dialogue needs to be full integrative ecclesiastical unity of the two federations." We sketched a few ingredients of Reformed church history, and noted that their forefathers "were used by God to bring reformation when sadly those churches deviated from the truth. We consider the secession of 1944, or the Liberation, to be God's way and work to bring His people back to Himself from deviant teachings and practices." The committee further wrote "that the formative influence of the Liberation and its leaders on those (Canadian) immigrants, in the setting of relative isolation . . . has produced an emphasis on certain doctrines such as the true church and the covenant."

We sketched a brief history of the Christian Reformed Church, also to indicate "that about half the churches of our federation are in the USA and their members did not experience nor have acquaintance with the Liberation of 1944." We further wrote that "we believe that the CRC should have established ecclesiastical relations with the liberated churches in the Netherlands and discontinued them with the GKN."

The committee conveyed that "from our side we are convinced that Dr. A. Kuyper's teaching on the pluriformity of the Church is unscriptural and contravenes the Belgic Confession, Articles 27-29." We continued to write that "For us the one catholic or universal Church is the holy assembly and congregation of the redeemed, and is first of all local and visible, but is also spread and dispersed throughout the whole world."

Our committee further focused on our perceived difference between the two federations. We articulated our view that "given the autonomy and authority of the local church vested in its consistory, we consider it entirely possible that when in one region or community there are two faithful Reformed congregations who share the same confessions and have similar practices, these two consistories could recognize each other as true churches of the Lord Jesus, and initiate some appropriate interaction and cooperation."

We suggested to the deputies that "in our committee's perception the Canadian Reformed Churches interpret the Scripture and Confession in a way that confers the authority of recognizing other churches as the true church upon the synod."

We noted that "if such a perception is true to fact, it seems to us that the authority and autonomy of the consistory, in its competence to act in this matter (with proper advice of classis) may have been abrogated or at least limited."

The committee has been rather expansive in this part of its report to synod, since the dialogue is substantive and merits the attention of the churches.

B. Free Reformed Churches of North America

At the conclusion of 1996 these churches numbered 15 with three congregations situated in the United States. Total membership amounted to 3,748. The churches meet annually as a synod. They also carry on a weekly radio broadcast, named "The Banner of Truth Radio Broadcast," as well as an active mission endeavour. The Free Reformed Churches find their beginning at the time of the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands, and did not join the Union of 1892 when the GKN was formed.

The External Relations Committee of the Free Reformed Churches responded positively to the committee's initial letter. They also appointed from their number three ministers in Ontario to meet with a delegation of our committee, should their 1997 Synod approve. We have not as yet received further word from them.

Our committee was grateful to receive from them the 1997 Yearbook of the Free Reformed Churches, the Acts of Synod of 1995 and 1996, a 35-page introductory booklet of the FRC, and a copy of the Agenda of their 1997 Synod, containing the External Relations Committee's Study Report on "Church Unity and Fellowship."

We have duplicated this valuable report for all our committee members. The 23-page report is divided into three parts: 1. Foundational Teachings Relating to Church Unity and Fellowship, 2. Principles of Unity and Contact, and 3. Procedure for Local Contact with other Reformed Churches. Two appendixes conclude the report, the first one entitled "Levels of Correspondence Adopted by the CGKN" (sister churches in Holland), and the second appendix, "Concept: Three Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship."

The committee requested the clerk, Rev. J. Julien, to send them the URC Church Directory and Minutes of Synod. We look forward to initiating profitable dialogue with the Free Reformed Churches, should the Lord grant this.

C. The Reformed Church of Quebec / L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec

These six small and struggling churches, mostly in urban Montreal, trace their beginnings back to the seventeenth century when persecuted Huguenots fled their home country of France and settled in New France, the present Quebec, a province of Canada. The churches operate the Institut Farel, a theological training school for lay pastors. The ERQ was supported by the Christian Reformed Church for many years, but lately these French speaking churches have severed their relationship with the CRC.

In response to the committee's letter of introduction, Rev. Jean-Guy de Blois of the ERQ responded by writing that the synod of their churches had delegated

him "to represent our Church with the very goal that you mention and which is also the mandate of your committee."

The letter from the ERQ stated that "we too have a desire to work towards mutually beneficial relationships with like-minded Reformed Churches." Rev. de Blois sent an extensive packet of information, produced in 1987, which contains the history and plans of the ERQ. Included in this material is their position on a number of doctrinal issues. The ERQ officially subscribes to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession of Faith. A copy of their Church's Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline was also included.

Our committee responded in appropriate fashion, and is at present studying the material and is in the process of determining how most effectively to relate to the ERQ.

D. Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches

This federation was begun in 1980 when a number of churches seceded from the Christian Reformed Church in response to the direction of the CRC. Fourteen churches are now part of the OCRC, with five of them located in the USA. Classis East and Classis West meet annually as Synod.

The committee has sent our introductory communication to the Burlington, WA, Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, since it is the calling church for their 1997 synod in September. We have received verbal assurance that the matter of relating to the United Reformed Churches will receive attention at the synod, but have not received a written reply.

4. Additional Contacts

The committee has also received communication from four additional federations. We have corresponded with them as the need and opportunity arose, and in certain instances still have to do so. In this report we highlight each contact.

A. Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar (Burma)

Our committee was alerted by Rev. Julien that one of the ministers of the Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar was studying at Mid America Reformed Seminary and as an officially mandated delegate wished to pursue ecumenical relations with the URC. After a number of telephone calls the committee sent a letter to the church's representative, Rev. Chris Aunglai Matu.

We received a response which noted that "we have no official relationship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America." The CRC of Myanmar is

"seeking to have official relationship with those who remain faithful in teaching and practicing of historic reformed faith." They look forward to further communication. Enclosed with their letter was a brief history of the church, the constitution and Church Order. Also included was information on the beginning of the Reformed Theological College in Yangon, Myanmar. The committee responded to the letter and is studying the material. We wrote them that "since the United Reformed Churches were established so recently, one of synod's tasks will be to formulate a more definitive mandate for its inter-Church Relations Committee, including more precise definitions and practices in our relations with churches such as the Myanmar Christian Reformed Church."

B. Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Another request from Rev. Julien was received for the committee to respond to a call from Dr. N. De Jong of the Ecumenicity Committee of the Presbytery of the Midwest of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The committee wrote to Dr. De Jong confirming that we would be willing to engage in correspondence with the OPC. Dr. De Jong responded with a friendly letter indicating that he was responding "in an individual capacity, and that I speak neither for the Presbytery nor for the denomination." He noted that the OPC General Assembly meeting in 1997 would be considering the matter of exploring fraternal relations with the United Reformed Churches. The committee has not as yet received any direct communication, although the clerk of the URC has received correspondence from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church conveying that they have decided to seek to establish corresponding relations with our federation.

C. South Africa and New Zealand

Rev. Julien passed on to the committee copies of the correspondence between the deputies for Correspondence with Churches in Foreign Countries of Die Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika and himself as clerk of the URC. He also forwarded correspondence with the chairman of the interchurch Relations Committee of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. We have not initiated any action at this time.

5. Concluding Comments

It is with a humble sense of privilege that our committee submits its first report to synod. We are mindful of the Saviour's word, "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." The committee believes that our mandate is not sufficiently explicit in how to pursue ecumenical relations at various levels or in different categories or on several continents. Nevertheless, however frail the labours of our committee may be, to God be all the glory!

Recommendations

1. That synod approve the name "Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church unity."
2. That synod consider refining the mandate of the committee.
3. That synod designate observers from other federations "Ecumenical Observers."
4. That synod assign a retirement schedule for the committee members.
5. That synod approve the work of the committee.

Humbly submitted,

P. Vellenga, chairman

R. Stienstra, secretary

CHURCH ORDER COMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Esteemed brothers,

At its meeting on 1-2 October 1996, the synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America, meeting at the Lynwood United Reformed Church, adopted a

Church Order containing sixty-four articles. In addition, the 1996 synod approved Guidelines for Licensure, Candidacy, and Ordination Exams, Guidelines for a Colloquium Doctum, and Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government.

Three tasks were assigned by that synod to the Church Order committee, whose members are Rev. Joghinda Gangar, Rev. Jerome Julien, and Rev. Nelson Kloosterman. These tasks are identified by the following citations from the [Minutes of the First Synod](#):

1. "That the formulation of an article dealing with the procedure for severing the relationship between pastor and congregation be assigned to the Church Order Committee. Adopted" (Art. [XXIV.F.](#), p. 9).
2. "That the United Reformed Churches in North America adopt the credentials for meetings of classis and synod, certificates, and letter of call, printed in The Polity of the Churches, by J. L. Shaver (4th rev. Ed., vol. 2, 1956, pp. 235-242) for use among the churches, and request the Church Order Committee to edit these materials accordingly. Adopted" (Art. [XXIV.K.](#), p. 9).
3. "A motion is made and supported to request the present Church Order Committee to continue, and serve the next synod with advice regarding the overtures sent to that synod. Adopted" (Art. [XXIV.M.](#), p. 9).

Our own study of the Church Order, and that of several consistories and individuals, has yielded a number of editorial improvements to the wording of the church order, which we present for adoption in Section 4. This report to the second synod is therefore divided into five sections, the fifth section containing our recommendations for synodical action.

Again during this past year, the committee has enjoyed the hospitality of the pastor and congregation of the Beverly United Reformed Church. We express our heartfelt gratitude to Rev. Art Besteman and others who served us with such ready assistance.

SECTION 1: ARTICLE DEALING WITH TERMINATING A PASTORAL RELATIONSHIP

We propose that the following be [adopted](#) and inserted into the Church Order after [Article 10](#) (requiring the renumbering of all subsequent articles):

If, for reasons other than such as warrant ecclesiastical discipline, either a minister of the Word or the congregation he is serving desires to dissolve their pastoral relationship, that dissolution shall occur only upon mutually satisfactory conditions and only with the concurring advice of the classis. If the released minister desires to receive a call to serve another congregation, the council from whose service he is being released shall announce his eligibility for call, which eligibility shall be valid for no longer than two years, whereafter he shall be honorably released from office. If the released minister desires to leave his office in order to seek non-ministerial labor, he must receive the approval of the classis before doing so.

SECTION 2: EDITED CREDENTIALS AND CERTIFICATES

LETTER OF CALL

To brother _____

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

The council of the _____, member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in North America, has the honor and

pleasure to inform you by means of this letter of our call to you to become our minister of the Word and Sacraments.

Should God be pleased to send you to us, your labors will include: preaching twice on the Lord's Day, attending to catechetical instruction, family visiting, and calling on the sick, and all things pertaining to the work of a faithful and diligent servant of the Lord, all of these agreeable to the Word of God, as interpreted by the Three Forms of Unity, and applied by the Church Order.

Convinced that the laborer is worthy of his hire, and to encourage you in the discharge of your duties, and to free you from all worldly cares and avocations while you are dispensing spiritual blessings to us, we, the elders and deacons of this church do promise and oblige ourselves to pay you annually the sum of _____ dollars, as long as you continue being the minister of this church, and to make mutually satisfactory arrangements for your housing and residence. Moreover, we will pay the costs of moving and transporting yourself, your family, and your belongings to our community.

May the King of His church so impress our call upon your heart and give you light that you may arrive at a decision that pleases Him and, if possible, mutually gratifies us.

Done in council, this _____ day of _____ (month, year), and subscribed with our names.

The council of the _____ (church).

Elders

Deacons

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

MINISTER'S CONSISTORIAL CREDENTIAL

The council of the _____, member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in North America, declares by this testimony that the Rev. _____, who has served as minister of the Word and Sacraments in this church from _____ to _____, has ministered faithfully and diligently, adhering in doctrine and life to the Word of God, as interpreted by the Three Forms of Unity and applied by the Church Order.

Considering that sufficient reasons have been adduced for the council to acquiesce in his acceptance of the call of the _____ (church), we

unhesitatingly recommend him to you, the council of that church, with the prayer that the great King of the Church may make him a rich blessing among you.

Resolved to grant him this testimonial at our meeting of _____.

For the council of the _____ (church)

_____, Chairman

_____, Clerk

CLASSICAL CREDENTIAL

To the classis _____ of the United Reformed Churches in North America, to convene on _____ (date), at _____ (place)

The council of _____, member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in North America, has appointed brothers

_____ and _____

as delegates to represent said church at the meeting of the classis. The alternate delegates are

_____ and _____

We hereby instruct and authorize them to take part in all the deliberations and transactions of the classis meeting regarding all matters legally coming before the meeting and transacted in agreement with the Word of God, as interpreted by the Three Forms of Unity, and applied in the Church Order.

By the order of the council, Done in council on

_____ (date)

_____, Chairman

_____, Clerk

CERTIFICATE OF MEMBERSHIP

The Consistory of the _____, member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in North America, hereby certifies that _____ is (are) member(s) of our church, and that as far as is known to this

Consistory, he (she, they) is (are) sound in doctrine and of a godly walk.

At his (her, their) request, this Certificate of Membership is issued to the

Consistory of the _____ (church), in order that

he (she, they) may be admitted to the holy sacraments; to which Consistory he

(she, they) is (are) also commended for Christian supervision and fellowship.

The validity of this Certificate of Membership shall expire four months after

the date of this action; and upon the receipt of the attached form, his (her, their) particular relation to this church shall cease.

Name(s): _____ Status (baptized, communicant): _____

For the Consistory, Done in Consistory _____ (date)

_____, Chairman

_____, Clerk

The Certificate of Membership of

_____ from the

_____ (church) has been duly received and

accepted by the Consistory of the

_____ (church).

For the Consistory, Done in Consistory _____ (date)

_____, Chairman
_____, Clerk

CERTIFICATE OF BAPTISM

To the Consistory of _____ (church)
The Consistory of _____ (church)
hereby certifies that

_____ (name)

is a member by baptism of this congregation and consequently subject to the instruction and discipline of the church. At his / her request we send you this attestation requesting you to take him / her under your Christian direction and to continue to instruct him / her in the doctrine of truth unto godliness.

For the Consistory, Done in Consistory _____ (date)

_____, Chairman

_____, Clerk

SECTION 3: COMMITTEE OBSERVATIONS REGARDING OVERTURES ON THE CHURCH ORDER

In fulfillment of the [mandate given us by the 1996 synod](#), we offer the

following comments regarding the overtures submitted to the 1997 synod.

The word “concurring” is already present in Articles 4, 34, and

Overture 2: 59. Adding the word in [Article 6](#) seems inappropriate. Adding the word in Articles 9 and 21 – and in [Article 33](#) – would be appropriate.

Overture 3: The stated clerk has already prepared something along these lines.

Overture 4: We concur.

Overture 5: We concur.

Permission for a minister to even consider a call from another

Overture 6: consistory is necessary at the beginning of the process, since the freedom to accept such a call requires the freedom first to consider it.

Overture 7: We concur with “1.” And “3.”, but find “2.” to be redundant.

Overture 8: Perhaps the titles “Chairman” and “Vice-chairman” are preferable.

Overture 9: We concur.

Overture 10: We concur regarding both “A.” and “B.”

Overture 11: We concur.

The proposed change would seem to afford too much opportunity

Overture 12: for external interference and for agitation within the congregation before leaving the federation.

The disadvantage of the proposed change is that provisional acceptance of a church will prejudice synodical discussion for ratification.

Overture 13: Moreover, Ground 2. seems to overlook the fact that Articles 33 and 34 contain stipulations governing provisional participation of a church until synodical ratification.

Overture 14: Perhaps the best argument for keeping the present wording of [Article 32](#) is that it was crafted by an attorney.

Overture 15: We concur, although we observe that while ecumenical activities

like pulpit exchange, table fellowship, and membership transfers may be the sole prerogative of the Consistory, entering ecumenical relationships is not.

Overture 16: We concur.

Overture 17: In our opinion, the proposed substitute is no improvement.

Overture 18: We concur.

Overture 19: Concerning the proposed deletion, this obligation is important and should be spelled out. Concerning the proposed addition, we suggest this substitute: "Interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life,"

Overture 20: Regarding "A.," this change is unnecessary, since such consistorial freedom is understood. Regarding "B.," we would argue for keeping this provision on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 and on the basis of the church's liturgical tradition and inheritance.

Overture 21: Regarding [Article 45](#), the present wording reflects the best and classic view of Reformed missions which identifies the church's mission with preaching. The Church Order does not – nor should it – address issues of Christian living or prescribe duties for the office of believer. The church's mission work is, simply and adequately stated, preaching God's Word to non-believers. This work requires much assistance and many helpers. However, we should keep the focus of the church's mission activity on the Bible, its preaching and teaching with the goal of church planting.

Overture 22: Classis meetings provide a check and balance in the process of discipline, for the protection of a possibly innocent party and of the Consistory itself.

Overture 23: The proposed change invites problems for ministers who leave a denomination for doctrinal reasons to enter a church in URCNA.

Overture 27: We suggest leaving this matter to local regulation rather than codifying it in the Church Order.

Overture 28: The phrase "under the regulation of the Consistory" does not necessarily mean "in an official worship service," although that occasion for a wedding is certainly permissible. The current wording is written to permit, but not require, weddings within worship services.

Overture 29: It seems to us that this overture may be improper, since [the substantive arguments advanced by this overture have already been dealt with by the previous synod](#).

Overture 31: The present wording of [Article 10](#) adequately expresses [Foundational Principle #12](#), which identifies officebearers as those through whom Christ cares for His church. Dignity is not the issue; differentiating officebearers is.

Overture 32: The participation of classis is important in giving wisdom, refinement, and analysis. Moreover, because interpretation is needed regarding which matters ought to be discussed on the federative level, the proposed change seems unworkable.

Overture 33: We concur.

Overture 34: We suggest using the divisions "I. Ecclesiastical offices (Articles 1-14); II. Ecclesiastical assemblies (Articles 15-35); III. Ecclesiastical functions and tasks (Articles 36-48); IV. Ecclesiastical discipline (Articles 49-64)."

Overture 35: We observe that if this is the mind of the churches, then additional work needs to be done in defining this class of synodical servants.

- Overture 36: We observe that if this is the mind of the churches, then additional work needs to be done in defining this class of synodical servants.
- Overture 37: We concur.
We concur, although the proposed formulation requires rewording especially in the last two sentences, perhaps as follows: “The elders shall also
- Overture 38: engage in annual family visits, supervise the catechism instruction by the minister(s) of the Word and others designated by the Consistory, assisting as needed, . . .”.
- Overture 39: We concur with both “(a)” and “(b).”
- Overture 41: We concur with both “(a)” and “(b).”
- Overture 42: We suggest retaining the current wording, since the focus of Article 20 is not the relationship of the Consistory to Jesus Christ.
- Overture 43: We concur with the proposed sentence as a substitute for the third sentence of the present article.
It seems to us that the proposed alteration says too much,
- Overture 44: especially by implying that the marks of the true church apply to the federation.
- Overture 45: We concur, with the observation that “the deputies of synod” is an undefined class of servants.
- Overture 48: We observe that the proposed alteration would make it possible for a minority to control the churches.
The proposed alteration departs significantly from classic Reformed polity. Moreover, if civil action should result from a church’s
- Overture 49: discipline, then the church would be more safe within the current procedure. Nevertheless, perhaps it might be necessary that this synod solicit a legal evaluation of this article from attorneys in Canada and in the United States.
- Overture 50: This requirement may need to be examined by legal counsel both in Canada and in the United States.
The committee observes that there is a legitimate and necessary
- Overture 51: place for competent and confessionally Reformed theological education by seminaries.
Again, the committee emphasizes that there is a legitimate and
- Overture 52: necessary place for competent and confessionally Reformed theological education by seminaries.
We suggest leaving Article 12 as it is, since each church is
- Overture 54: free to establish its own policies. One or another position should not be codified in the Church Order.
- Overture 55: While we agree with the sentiment of the proposed change, we suggest that it not be codified, but left to each local Council to regulate.
The proposed alternative leaves the matter too voluntary.
- Overture 56: Moreover, the experience of ministers is a valuable asset for this practice of visiting. Finally, in classis Reformed polity both elders and deacons (the council) are visited.
Regarding “1.,” note the difference between Article 25 and Article 26: the second paragraph of the former involves answers presented by
- Overture 57: way of credentials at the classis meeting, while the latter deals with answers to questions posed by church visitors. More importantly, the proposed changes of “2.” and “3.” would make church visiting optional and open the scope of church visiting conversation too widely.
- Overture 58: We believe the word “godliness,” which is already in the

article, includes the character trait of “God-fearing.”

The purpose behind the historic practice of this route into the ministry was a result of urgent need immediately after the Reformation and in view of persecution. Moreover, the presupposition of this provision by the Synod

Overture 59: of Dort was not that of creating a new avenue into the ministry – which function has now become the focus and use of this procedure. Currently the churches of the URCNA have no such need, and are supporting many theological students preparing through formal academic training for the ministry.

Overture 60: We would suggest that this matter requires further study before an alternative is adopted.

Overture 61: Because the congregational meeting is not an ecclesiastical assembly, its regulation does not belong to the Church Order. Each Consistory is free to do what the proposed change is asking, and each Consistory should regulate the congregational meetings of its church by local by-laws and policies.

Overture 62: Regarding “1.,” we concur, noting that “Article 13” should read “Article 3.” Regarding “2.,” we observe that Article 22 adequately addresses the concern of this request.

Overture 63: Article 19 does not call for a stated clerk, but only for a clerk. Further, simply having a clerk does not create a power position – does not each of our own Consistories have a clerk? Regarding “1.,” Article 19 already covers this concern, and this article provides necessary flexibility.

Regarding “3.,” the proposed change really speaks to Article 28 in the current Church Order. But we would observe that the Church Order is not a theological document, nor a place for theological declarations.

Overture 64: See the committee’s editorial changes, printed below.

Overture 65: The claim that Article 31 confuses the admission of a church and the admission of a minister is inaccurate. Article 31 merely relates these two to one another. The obvious reason for this is that ideally, minister and church “move” together. Other provisions obtain for dealing with a minister apart from a congregation.

Overture 67: We concur, and suggest that this be made a separate article, rather than inserted into the current Article 42.

Overture 68: We observe that though much of this overture is helpful, its concern should not be codified in the Church Order. Delegates must always be mindful of the wishes of their delegating Consistory, but also participate openly in the deliberative process and discussion.

Overture 69: We observe that this proposed change was defeated at the last synod.

Overture 70: We concur, as long as the word “ordinarily” is removed.

Overture 71: We concur.

SECTION 4: PROPOSED EDITORIAL CHANGES

Throughout the past year, the committee has received a number of helpful suggestions from consistories and individuals for editorial improvements of the Church Order. We offer them to the 1997 synod for adoption.

Article 8

A minister who has been ordained in a church outside the federation shall not be admitted to serve in a church within the federation without an examination conducted to the satisfaction of the classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation, whereupon he may be declared by classis eligible for call by his calling sponsoring Consistory. (See [Appendix 4.](#))

[Article 34](#)

The churches of a classis may, as a group, enter into ecumenical relations with an individual church or group of churches such as a classis or presbytery. Before entering into such relations, a classis must seek the concurring advice of a synod, thereby safeguarding the purity of the federation.

[Article 48](#)

The Consistory shall maintain accurate membership records which include relevant names and dates of baptisms, professions of faith, marriages and deaths of members of the congregation.

[Article 59](#)

When a minister, elder or deacon has committed a public or gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions of the Consistory, he shall be suspended from his office only by his own Consistory and only with the concurring advice of the Consistories of two neighboring churches. When he hardens himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot continue in office, he shall be deposed only by his Consistory and only with the concurring advice of classis.

[Article 60](#)

Included among the gross sins, but not to the exclusion of all others, which are worthy of suspension or deposition from office, are these: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre, in short, all sins and gross offenses which render the perpetrators infamous before the world and which in any other member of the church would be considered worthy of occasionexcommunication.

[Article 62](#)

Those who seek membership in another congregation shall request in writing that their current Consistory send to the receiving Consistory of that congregation an official letter of testimony concerning their doctrine and life and including pertinent membership information including pertinent membership information and testimony concerning their doctrine and life.

[Article 64](#)

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they ought to be observed diligently. If it be found that God may be more honored and the churches better served by changing any article, this should be done by shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall be ratified by two-thirds of the Consistories at prior to the next synodical meeting, before taking effect after which meeting they shall take effect.

[APPENDIX 2](#)

- omit the words “inquire concerning” (occurring six times)
- replacing “Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches” with “United Reformed Churches in North America” (throughout entire document)

3. CONTENT

b.

(2) Bible knowledge: inquire concerning the prospective candidate’s doctrine of Scripture, canonicity, hermeneutics, etc., and concerning familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible.

(3) Biblical exegesis: an Old Testament and a New Testament passage should be assigned to the prospective candidate at least three weeks in advance (one of

them in connection with one of his assigned sermons); the examiner should inquire concerning the meaning of the text and the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and with a suitable exegetical method.

(4) Confessional knowledge: inquire concerning the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, concerning the prospective candidate's willingness to subscribe to them by signing the Form of Subscription.

(7) Ethics: inquire concerning the meaning and function of the Decalogue, also in relation to Christian motivation and character, and to various contemporary moral problems.

APPENDIX 3

3. CONTENT

(1) Practica: inquire concerning the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life, his relationship with the Lord, his growth in faith, his background and preparation for ministry, his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking entrance thereto, liturgics, homiletics, pastoral care, and evangelism and church polity.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF REFORMED CHURCH GOVERNMENT

14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, chosen and redeemed, the church, under the supervision of the elders, is called to worship Him according to the Scriptural principles governing worship.

Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1,2,6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; I Peter 2:9

SECTION 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

Here, then, are the committee's recommendations:

1. That the members of the Church Order committee be granted the privilege of the floor during the presentation and discussion of this report and these recommendations.
2. That the synod adopt the proposed article dealing with terminating a pastoral relationship.
3. That the synod adopt the edited Letter of Call, Minister's Consistorial Credential, Classical Credential, Certificate of Membership, and Certificate of Baptism.
4. That the synod adopt the proposed editorial changes of the Church Order.

Respectfully submitted,

J. Gangar

J. Julien

N. Kloosterman

Federative Structure Committee Report

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
RESOLUTION OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE REGARDING FEDERATIVE STRUCTURE
WHEREAS it is essential to distinguish between the ecclesiastical and corporal functions of the Federation of United Reformed Churches in North America;

AND WHEREAS it is appropriate to allow the assemblies of the churches that unrestricted authority for ecclesiastical matters; (Article 16, C.O.);

AND WHEREAS it is appropriate to adequately safeguard assets, rights (including intellectual property), and common undertakings of the churches in common, as distinguished from the property of individual congregations (Article 32, C.O.);

THEREFORE, it is resolved as follows:

1. The Federation shall cause the incorporation of a U.S. and Canadian corporation, which shall be not-for-profit and shall have as its members and directors, the individuals appointed by the Federation at its regular meeting of Synod.
 2. These corporations shall have only restricted powers as granted to them by the Federation, and shall at all times be deemed to be subservient to the Federation, and remain accountable to the Federation, at its regular meetings in Synod.
 3. The corporations shall have the constitution and bylaws as set out in Appendix "A" and "B" attached, subject only to change in form (but not substance) to allow for compliance with the applicable U.S. and Canadian laws.
 4. The corporations shall be conjoined by way of a Joint Venture Agreement to meet the requirements respecting the international use of charitable funds and property.
 5. Any further change to the constitution and bylaws shall only occur after such proposed change is approved by Synod.
- EACH AND EVERY of the foregoing resolutions are hereby passed by the members of the joint committee this 21 day of October, 1997.

SCHEDULE "A"

TO THE RESOLUTION OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE
PROPOSED U.S. VERSION
OF ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
AND BYLAWS

ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
OF

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA

Pursuant to the provisions of the Michigan Nonprofit Corporations Act, Act 162, Public Acts of 1982 (the "Act"), as amended, the corporation executes the following articles:

ARTICLE I

The name of the corporation is: United Reformed Churches in North America.

ARTICLE II

The corporation is a nonprofit ecclesiastical corporation organized and operated exclusively for religious and charitable purposes within the meaning of Section 501 (c) (3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended. The purposes of the corporation are the following:

1. To administer the property, assets, rights, and undertakings of the Federation of United Reformed Churches in North America (the Federation) as directed by the Federation;
2. To carry out such activities for the promotion of the well being of the Federation and its member churches as such churches through their Synod may direct from time to time;
3. To enter into contracts, negotiate agreements and manage moneys of the Federation;
4. To receive funds directly and/or through offerings in the churches for the support of the activities, committees, functions, and programs of the corporation and/or for the purpose of supporting religious, charitable and

educational organizations exempt from taxation under Section 501 (c) (3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended;

5. To conduct a literature ministry for the production and distribution of Christian periodicals and writings, and other publications needed to carry out the religious and charitable objectives and purposes of the corporation, as directed by the Federation.

ARTICLE III

The corporation is organized upon a nonstock, membership basis. The corporation possesses no real or personal property. The corporation is to be financed from contributions for its members.

ARTICLE IV

The street address and mailing address of the initial registered office is 2019 Porter, S.W., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49509. The name of the initial resident agent at the registered office is _____.

ARTICLE V

The name and address of the incorporators are _____

ARTICLE VI

No part of the net earnings of the corporation shall enure to the benefit of, or be distributable to, its members, directors, officers, or other private persons. However, the corporation shall be authorized to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in Article II. No substantial part of the activities of the corporation shall be the carrying on of the propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. The corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing and distribution of statements), and political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for public office. Notwithstanding any other provision of these articles, the corporation shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (1) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under IRC 501 (c) (3) or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code or (2) by a corporation whose contributions are deductible under section IRC 170 (c) (92) or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

ARTICLE VII

On dissolution of the corporation, after paying or providing for the payment of all of the liabilities of the corporation, the corporation's assets shall be distributed (1) for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of IRC 501 (c) (3), or the corresponding section of any future tax code or (2) to the federal government, or to a state local government, for a public purpose. Any assets not disposed of shall be disposed of by the circuit court of the county in which the principal office of the corporation is then located, exclusively for such purposes or to such organization or organizations that the court shall determine and that are organized and operated exclusively for such purposes.

ARTICLE VIII

No member of the board of directors of the corporation who is a volunteer director, as that term is defined in the Michigan Nonprofit Corporation Act (the "Act"), shall be personally liable to this corporation or its members for monetary damages for a breach of the director's fiduciary duty; provided,

however, that this provision shall not eliminate or limit the liability of a director for any other following:

1. a breach of the director's duty of loyalty to the corporation or its members;
2. acts or omissions not in good faith or that involve intentional misconduct or a knowing violation of law;
3. a violation of section 551 (1) of the Act;
4. a transaction from which the director derived an improper personal benefit;
5. an act or omission occurring before the filing of these articles or incorporation; or
6. an act or omission that is grossly negligent.

The corporation assumes all liability to any person, other than the corporation or its members, for all acts or omissions of a director who is a volunteer, as defined in the Act, incurred in the good faith performance of the director's duties. However, the corporation shall not be considered to have assumed any liability to the extent that such assumption is inconsistent with the status of the corporation as an organization described in IRC 501 (c) (3) or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code.

If the Act is amended after the filing of these articles of incorporation to authorize the further elimination of limitation of the liability of directors of nonprofit corporations, then the liability of members of the board of directors, in addition to that described in this Article VII, shall be assumed by the corporation or eliminated or limited to the fullest extent permitted by the Act as so amended. Such an elimination, limitation, or assumption of liability is not effective to the extent that it is inconsistent with the status of the corporation as an organization described in IRC 501 (c) (3) or corresponding section of any future federal tax code. No amendment or repeal of this Article VIII shall apply to or have to or have any effect of the liability or alleged liability of any member of the board of directors of this corporation for or with respect to any acts or omissions occurring before the effective date of any such amendment or repeal.

These Articles of Incorporation are signed by the incorporators on _____, 1997.

Return this Document to: _____ Document Prepared by:

BYLAWS OF UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
PREAMBLE

Believing that all things should be done decently and in order, we hereby adopt the following Bylaws, for the regulation, management, and government of this corporation.

ARTICLE I - Objectives and Purposes of Corporation

The corporation is organized and operated exclusively for religious and charitable objectives and purposes within the meaning of Section 501 (c) (3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended. The general religious and charitable objectives and purposes of the corporation shall be those stated in Article II of the corporation's Articles of Incorporation.

ARTICLE II - The Basis

The basis of this corporation is the Holy Bible which we believe, confess, and declare to be the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, and our only rule for faith and practice.

ARTICLE III - Forms of Unity

The corporation believes and is fully persuaded that the Reformed Creeds do fully agree with the Word of God and therefore do subscribe to the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.

ARTICLE IV - Church Government

The corporation shall be subject to the policies, directives, instructions, mandates and/or guidance of the Federation as expressed by its Synod from time to time. All procedural matters shall, as much as possible, be dealt with by analogy to the church order of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

ARTICLE V

The members of the corporation are communicant members of the United Reformed Churches in North America, duly elected from time to time at the Synod of the churches pursuant to the Church Order.

ARTICLE VI - Meeting of Members

The members of the corporation shall meet at least once every year or as required by the Federation.

ARTICLE VII - Notice of Meetings

Notice of the corporation meetings and assemblies shall be given in writing, 14 days prior to the meeting and shall include an agenda.

ARTICLE VIII - Amendments to Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws

The members of the corporation may alter, amend, or repeal the Articles of Incorporation and/or the Bylaws, by majority vote in the manner provided by law, however no alternatives, amendment or repeal shall take effect unless approved by the Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Dated: _____, 1997

Secretary

SCHEDULE "B"

**TO THE RESOLUTION OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE
PROPOSED CANADIAN VERSION
OF ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
AND BYLAWS**

To the Minister of Industry.

I

The undersigned hereby apply to the Minister of Industry for the grant of a charter by letters patent under the provisions of Part II of the Canada Corporations Act constituting the undersigned, and such other persons as may become members of the Corporation thereby created, a body corporate and politic under the name of

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

The undersigned have satisfied themselves and are assured that the proposed name under which incorporation is sought is not the same or similar to the name under which any other company, society, association or firm, in existence is carrying on business in Canada or is incorporated under the laws of Canada or any province thereof or so nearly resembles the same as to be calculated to deceive and that it is not a name which is otherwise on public grounds objectionable.

II

The applicants are individuals of the full age of eighteen years with power under law to contract. The name, the address and the occupation of each of the applicants are as follows:

NAME OF APPLICANT

address of applicant - profession of applicant

NAME OF APPLICANT

address of applicant - profession of applicant

NAME OF APPLICANT

address of applicant - profession of applicant

NAME OF APPLICANT

address of applicant - profession of applicant

NAME OF APPLICANT

address of applicant - profession of applicant

The said (names of applicants) will be the first directors of the Corporation.

III

The objects of the Corporation are:

1. To administer and carry out the common objectives of the Federation of United Reformed Churches in North America ("the Federation") as follows:

(a) To administer the property, assets, rights, and undertakings of the Federation of United Reformed Churches in North America (the Federation) as directed by the Federation;

(b) To carry out such activities for the promotion of the well being of the Federation at its member churches as such churches through their Synod may direct from time to time;

(c) To enter into contracts, negotiate agreements and manage moneys of the Federation;

(d) To receive funds directly and/or through offerings in the churches for the support of the activities, committees, functions, and programs of the corporation and/or for the purpose of supporting religious, charitable and educational organizations exempt from taxation under Section 501 (c) (3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended;

(e) To conduct a literature ministry for the production and distribution of Christian periodicals and writings, and other publications needed to carry out the religious and charitable objectives and purposes of the corporation, as directed by the Federation.

2. Provided that the objects shall include only those which are, at law, exclusively charitable and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, for the attainment of the above objects and as incidental and ancillary thereto, to exercise any of the powers as prescribed by the Canada Corporations Act or any other statutes or laws from time to time applicable, except where such power is contrary to the statutes or common law applicable to charities and in particular without limiting the generality of the foregoing:

(a) to solicit, receive, hold, invest and administer funds hereafter given to it exclusively for such charitable purposes as above set forth, without being limited to investments authorized by law for trustees, and to that end, to take and receive, by bequest, devise, legacies, gift, grant, donation or benefit of trust, and enter into agreement, contracts and undertakings incidental thereto;

(b) to use, apply, give, devote, accumulate or distribute from time to time any part of the fund or funds of the Corporation and/or the income therefore for the above charitable purposes by such means as may from time to time seem expedient to its directors;

(c) to solicit, accept, receive, acquire by purchase, lease, agreement, grant, donation, legacy, gift, bequest or otherwise, any kind of real or personal property, and to enter into and carry out agreements, undertakings, and conditions in connection therewith;

(d) to acquire rights, privileges, licences, permits and concessions necessary or desirable; and

(e) to acquire by purchase, lease, devise, gift, or otherwise, any kind of real or personal property, and to hold, such real property or interest therein as is determined by the directors of the Corporation to be reasonably necessary

for the actual use and occupation of the Corporation, or for carrying on its charitable undertaking, and to sell, dispose of, and convey the same or any part thereof.

IV

The operations of the Corporation may be carried on throughout Canada and elsewhere.

V

The place within Canada where the head office of the Corporation is to be situated is the City of _____, in the Province of Ontario.

VI

In accordance with section 65 of The Canada Corporation Act, it is provided that, when authorized by by-law, duly passed by the directors and sanctioned by at least two-thirds of the votes cast at a special general meeting of the members duly called for considering the by-law, the directors of the corporation may from time to time

- a) borrow money upon the credit of the corporation;
- b) limit or increase the amount to be borrowed;
- c) issue debentures or other securities of the corporation;
- d) pledge or sell such debentures or other securities of such sums and at such prices as may be deemed expedient;
- e) secure any such debentures, or other securities, or any other present or future borrowing or liability of the corporation, by mortgage, hypothec, charge or pledge of all or any currently owned or subsequently acquired real and personal, movable and immovable, property of the Corporation and the undertaking and rights of the corporation.

Any such by-law may provide for the delegation of such powers by the directors to such officers or directors of the corporation to such extent and in such manner as may be set out in the by-law.

Nothing herein limits or restricts the borrowing of money by the corporation on bills of exchange or promissory notes made, drawn, accepted or endorsed by and on behalf of the corporation.

VIII

It is specifically provided that in the event of dissolution or winding-up of the corporation, all its remaining assets after payment of its liabilities shall be distributed equally among the Independent Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, provided such are charities registered with Revenue Canada Taxation for the purposes of the Income Tax Act of Canada, failing which, to one or more charities registered with Revenue Canada Taxation for the purposes of the Income Tax Act of Canada which adhere to the Statement of Faith contained herein.

IX

The Corporation is to carry on its operations without pecuniary gain to its members, and any profits or other accretions to the corporation are to be used in promoting its objects.

DATED at the City of _____ of _____, in the Province of Ontario, this day _____, 1997.

(name of applicant) _____
(name of applicant)

(name of applicant) _____
(name of applicant)

(name of applicant)

BYLAWS

OF

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

PREAMBLE

Believing that all things should be done decently and in order, we hereby adopt the following Bylaws, for the regulation, management, and government of this corporation.

ARTICLE I - Objectives and Purposes of Corporation

The corporation is organized and operated exclusively for religious and charitable objectives and purposes within the meaning of the Income Tax Act, as amended. The general religious and charitable objectives and purposes of the corporation shall be those stated in Article II of the corporation's Articles of Incorporation.

ARTICLE II - The Basis

The basis of this corporation is the Holy Bible which we believe, confess, and declare to be the inspired, infallible and inerrant Word of God, and our only rule for faith and practice.

ARTICLE III - Forms of Unity

The corporation believes and is fully persuaded that the Reformed Creeds do fully agree with the Word of God and therefore do subscribe to the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort.

ARTICLE IV - Church Government

The corporation shall be subject to the policies, directives, instructions, mandates and/or guidance of the Federation as expressed by its Synod from time to time. All procedural matters shall, as much as possible, be dealt with by analogy to the church order of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

ARTICLE V

The members of the corporation are communicant members of the United Reformed Churches in North America, duly elected from time to time at the Synod of the churches pursuant to the Church Order.

ARTICLE VI - Meeting of Members

The members of the corporation shall meet at least once every year or as required by the Federation.

ARTICLE VII - Notice of Meetings

Notice of the corporation meetings and assemblies shall be given in writing, 14 days prior to the meeting and shall include an agenda.

ARTICLE VIII - Amendments to Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws

The members of the corporation may alter, amend, or repeal the Articles of Incorporation and/or the Bylaws, by majority vote in the manner provided by law, however no alternatives, amendment or repeal shall take effect unless approved by the Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Dated: _____, 1997

Secretary

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
RESOLUTION OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE REGARDING FEDERATIVE STRUCTURE

WHEREAS the Federation of United Reformed Churches in North America has approved the organization of common property by way of a U.S. and Canadian non-profit corporation;

AND WHEREAS it is appropriate to implement the aforesaid decision;

THEREFORE, it is resolved as follows:

1. That the incorporation of these U.S. and Canadian Corporations proceed forthwith.
2. That the following members be elected to act as incorporators and first directors:

(a) for the U.S. corporation:

(b) for the Canadian corporation:

- 3. That the corporations be authorized to enter into a Joint Venture Agreement;
- 4. That the directors report to the next Synod of the Federation with respect to the implementation of this resolution.

ICRC Report

The Fourth Assembly of the International Conference of Reformed Churches met in Seoul, South Korea, at 7:30 p.m., Wednesday, October 15, 1997. The conference was opened with a service in the Seo-Moon Church led by Rev. John Galbraith who stressed the basis and the aims of the ICRC, namely being founded on God’s Word and desiring to work together for mutual support in the pursuit of our ministry. The first major item was the application of seven federations for membership. Our application was considered by a sub-committee and was whole-heartedly recommended for acceptance. There was little debate or discussion because most, if not all, the delegates were well aware of our struggles within the CRC. They were very pleased that we had federated and were very pleased that we had federated and were seeking to stand with them in the ICRC. By unanimous vote the URCNA were received into membership. Six other federations (namely: Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir (Indonesia), Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America) were also received into membership.

This brings the ICRC to 21 federations. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia withdrew their membership from the ICRC following their concerns expressed at the last meeting (Zwolle, 1993) namely that they were still studying the point of what “unity of faith” implies. Their concerns are related to whether it is ethically correct to say that there is unity of faith in the ICRC while at home member churches have not been able to recognize each other as true churches. The ICRC decided to send them (FRCA) a letter expressing their sadness and calling them to reconsider their decision. So far we had presented and discussed two papers. The first was entitled “Principles of Reformed Missions” by Mark Bube (OPC). It was helpful and well-received. The second was entitled “Women in Office: especially about “deaconesses” by Dr. Soon-Gil Hur (president of the Seminary in Pusan, South Korea). This generated much discussion and disagreement in regard to conclusions and exegesis.

The papers to come will be interesting. They are: “Biblical Principles for the Relations between Church and State” by Robert Beckett (Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland), “Ministry of the Word among Asian People” by Rev. David John (Free church of Central India) - this will be about Indian religions; “Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition” by Dr. R. Gaffin (OPC).

It has been an interesting experience and will continue as I preach via a translator on Sunday (Oct. 19). The Korean people are very hospitable and kind. I have met many delegates, many of whom I remember from Zwolle, 1993. There is much interest in developing ecclesiastical relations with the URCNA.

There is much interest in the ICRC in missions, particularly in assisting and encouraging cooperation between member federations. Proposals will be coming up later in the conference to encourage regional conferences in regard to missions. There is a six-monthly newsletter that is put out in which federations are encouraged to share their mission work.

One piece of important news which may prove very useful to you as you consider the mountain of overtures, was shared by one of the delegates at the ICRC amidst a prolonged debate.

He showed that in a similar fashion the chairman of the synod asked, cynically, "Has everything been said?" and was responded by a wise and also cynical delegate "Yes, but everybody has not yet said it." I guess the moral of the story is that we want to hear everything, but everyone does not have to repeat it.

I have included below some important business of the ICRC.

Missions Committee

This committee has the mandate to:

1. Mission information

a. To help member federations share mission news, vacancies

b. To help in

missionary training as well as raise churches' awareness for mission

c. To help

in study of theory of mission, etc. This would be done via a bi-annual newsletter

2. Mission conferences

Seek to encourage and help organize regional mission conferences

3. Mission to Jews

To ask ICRC to have a paper at the 2001

conference dealing with mission to the Jews.

In related business the following recommendations were adopted:

1. The ICRC

suggests to member churches that they keep in mind the benefit of regional conferences on particular, timely, topics and plan such conferences when deemed appropriate.

2. Request the Missions Committee to encourage the member churches to hold regional conferences and assist the member churches in holding and coordinating such conferences.

3. Include in its budget an amount of \$8,000 (US)

per year for assistance, when necessary, to member churches for such

conferences, enabling the member churches to share one another's burdens, and that it be administered by the Missions Committee.

Improving the Relationship of Member Churches:

The ICRC adopted the following

procedures:

1. When a matter arises that would affect the relationship of ICRC member churches to each other, such a change being contemplated by a church in its doctrinal basis or ethical practices, the church should

a. Inform the

interchurch committee of the member churches concerning the proposal;

b. Ask

them for the official position of their church on such a matter, for their

advice (and/or that of colleagues) with regard to it and their help in the study of the matter;

c. Keep the churches informed on developments in the matter as it is progressively dealt with by the church.

2. The ICRC would suggest to the churches that they would do well to seek cooperation in areas such as evangelization, missions, and diaconal assistance, and to promote contacts and exchanges between institutions for training for the ministry.

BUDGET

The budget for the 1997 Seoul meeting was set at \$46,500 (US).

This is raised by assessing the member federations according to numerical size and the per capita income of the country in which the federation is located. There is a limit on the amount any one member federation is assessed (49% is maximum).

Given the size of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) it would roughly amount to \$1,200 (US) per year.

PAPERS

Richard Gaffin's paper on the Charismatic Challenges should prove very useful and I encourage the delegates to study it carefully when the Proceedings of this conference are published.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. J. S. Gangar

OFFICE OF DEACON IN THE CHURCHES

Study Committee Report

I. MANDATE

The mandate for the committee came from the churches when they met as Alliance of Reformed Churches on November 16-18, 1993. The Alliance appointed several church councils as a study committee, when the ARC responded to the following overture from the Grace Reformed Church of Dunnville.

The council of the Grace Reformed Church of Dunnville overtures the Alliance of Reformed Churches to mandate a number of church councils to search the Scriptures and Reformed Confessions for clarification of what the work of deacons entails, suggesting avenues of mutual stimulation and interaction.

Grounds:

1. The current stage of transition of our churches affords an excellent time period for such an undertaking.

2. The divergence of interpretation of Scriptural data concerning the office of deacon, and the resultant differing applications have produced a lack of unified approach to diaconal work.

-AGENDA, 1993. p.20

Specifically the Alliance decided, "That the Grace Reformed Church of Dunnville join with neighboring churches of the Alliance in studying the matter of the work of deacons (Overture 16) and come with an overture to a later meeting of the Alliance."

-MINUTES, 1993, p.9

The following neighboring church councils appointed delegations to form the study committee: Ancaster, Balmoral, Dunnville, St. Catharines Immanuel, and Wellandport. The committee seeks to be principled in its approach rather than pragmatic. Thus we need first to listen to God's Word concerning the idea or concept of office.

II. THE CONCEPT OF OFFICE

Fundamental to grasping the place and work of a deacon is the insight that the diaconal office, in fact any office, is grounded in God's creation of Adam

and subsequently in giving His Son to be "Head of the body, the church." (Col. 1:18).

1. God's Creation and Office

The word office may be defined as "a position of authority, duty, or trust." Such a position was assigned to the newly created Adam when God issued the cultural mandate: "God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule over..." (Gen. 1:28).

God created man in His own image, we read in Gen. 1:27. In doing so He "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). The apostle Paul refers to this creative act and suggests Adam's high calling when he wrote in the chapter on the resurrection, "The first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam a life-giving Spirit" (I Cor. 15:45).

The Reformed churches have confessed God's creation of man and his religious response to his Creator in Lord's Day 3. "God created man good and in His own image, that is, in true righteousness and holiness, so that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love Him, and live with Him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify Him" (Q/A 6). This answer suggests the concept that the calling or office of being human is to be prophet, priest, and king, and thereby to love God above all and one's neighbour as oneself, a concept which both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly teach.

A landmark study of the office of deacon was undertaken in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands by P. Biesterveld, J. Van Lonkhuyzen, and R.J.W. Rudolph. The 600-page work published in 1907 is entitled *Het Diaconaat*, and has assisted the committee greatly with its extensive research materials and helpful insight. In summarizing the fundamental concept of office in Scripture, the author concludes, "To love, to love God above all and one's neighbour as oneself, that was the impulse of life for the in God's image created man" (p. 11, translation provided).

We conclude that also the office of deacon in its fundamental concept finds its origin in God's creation of man and the Creator's mandate to him as His steward on earth. The essential quality of any office is diakonia or service. Abraham Kuyper notes, "Man was created for service. He is born ebed Yahweh, [servant of the LORD], and it is only in the service of his God, that he is clothed with power and dominion" (*Encyclopaedie Der Heilige Godgeleerdheid*, 1909, III. p. 472, translation provided). We now move the focus to the last Adam.

2. Christ and Office

God sent His Son into the sinful world to save lost sinners who had broken the covenant and destroyed the image of God in which they had been created. As Saviour, Jesus was God's Image-Bearer, the Servant of the LORD. He was the Christ, the Anointed One. In answer to the question "Why is He called Christ, that is, Anointed?" Lord's Day 12 provides this answer, "Because He has been ordained by God the Father, and anointed with the Holy Spirit, to be our chief Prophet and Teacher...our only High Priest...and our eternal King." (Q/A 31). When "the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14), He took upon Himself the office of Servant of the LORD, and "such a high priest meets our need - One who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners" (Heb. 7:26). Christ, "Who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...He humbled Himself and became obedient to death..." (Phil. 2:6-8).

Thus Jesus entered into the Father's diakonia or service teaching its essential nature to His quarreling disciples as He said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant," adding, "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (Matt. 20:26,28).

Since Christ came to redeem and to restore His own in their proper service to God, He also renewed the image of God in them as it had been in Adam. With that restoration comes the call to the office of life, which is often referred to as the office of (all) believers.

The office of believer is suggested in the question of Lord's Day 12, "Why are you called a Christian?" The answer echoes Christ's re-creation of Adam's office, "Because I am a member of Christ by faith and thus share in His anointing, so that I may as prophet confess His Name, as priest present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him, and as king fight with a free and good conscience against sin and the devil in this life..."(Q/A 32). Since every special office in the Church proceeds from the office of believer, the focus of our consideration now needs to be more directly on the office of deacon in the setting of the New Testament Church.

III. A NEW OFFICE IN A NEW CHURCH

The special offices in the Church are temporary and function only on this earth where sin, the devil, and the world constantly attack God's children. Thus we confess in the Belgic Confession, "This Church has existed from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects. This holy Church is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world..." (Art. 27). The Confession further states that "this true Church must be governed according to the spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word" (Art. 30).

This "spiritual order" refers to ministers, elders and deacons who together form "the council of the church." The purpose of these special office-bearers is that "by these means they preserve the true religion; they see to it that the true doctrine takes its course, that evil men are disciplined in a spiritual way and are restrained, and also the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need" (Art. 30).

God's Word refers to the office-bearers as Christ's "gifts to men", "to prepare God's people for works of service (diakonia), so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:8,12,13).

1. The Beginning of the Diaconate

a. Use of the Word diakonos in the New Testament

The meaning of the New Testament diakonos (deacon) is considerably broader in usage than using it for the office of deacon exclusively. As noun it is used thirty times in different ways such as, "It will be good for those servants whose master..." (Luke 12:37), "I became a servant of this gospel" (Eph. 3:7), "He (civil authority) is God's servant to do you good" (Rom. 13:4), and "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). In general the word diakonos means servant.

b. Use of the Word diakonos for the Office of Deacon

There are only two places in the New Testament which clearly refer to the office of deacon. One such usage is in Paul's address to the Philippians, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons" (Phil 1:1). Each designation is clearly an office of an official and accepted nature.

The second usage is in 1 Tim. 3:8,12, where God's Word presents the Qualifications for office-bearers, first for overseer/elder and then the two references under consideration. "Deacons likewise are to be men..." (8), and "A deacon must be the husband..," (12). The comparison of the office of deacon with that of overseer/elder leaves no doubt that at the time of Paul's writing, around AD 60, the office of deacon was part of the Church leadership.

c. Choosing of the Seven in Jerusalem

Luke, the author of the Book of Acts, carefully conveys that the happenings recorded in it are under the direction of Jesus, the ascended Lord. He begins, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day He was taken up to heaven" (Acts 1:1,2). Since Christ is Lord of His Church, the need for relief for the apostles "in the daily distribution (diakonia) of food" (Acts 6:1,2), and the dissatisfaction of the Grecian widows all led to Christ instituting the office of deacon through the choosing of the congregation and the subsequent ordination by the apostles. This institution of the diaconate is recorded: "They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them" (Acts 6:6).

In the Lord's wisdom the initiation of the diaconate is one ingredient in the growth of the Church, as is seen from the next verse. "So the Word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly" (Acts 6:7). With God's evident blessing on the Jerusalem Church, the dynamics and means were developing that would produce new churches "in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). It is clear from the New Testament that the apostles, directed by the Holy Spirit, considered the functioning and place of the deacons to be part of the leadership of every congregation in the developing Body of the Lord.

2. The Nature and Authority of the Diaconate

Since the essence of all offices in the Church is service (diakonia) to its Lord and Head in exercising love for the neighbour, we need to spell out the particular responsibilities of the diaconate. A more detailed outworking of the diaconal work in our contemporary setting will appear in a later section. In focusing on the nature and authority of the deacon and his office, a number of questions structure our presentation.

a. What Is the General Task of the Deacons Revealed in Scripture?

The New Testament does not come with a detailed task description for the diaconate. Throughout the Scriptures, however, God's special care for the widows, the orphans, the strangers, and the poor is evident and well-known and we will not document them. Perhaps the practices of the Jewish leaders in the synagogues and the rulers of the local sanhedrins in collecting and distributing food and other goods for and to the poor and needy were known to the Jerusalem Church. Yet these did not serve as models for the new office.

All the Church of Christ has received in terms of God's revelation in this matter are the use of the word diakonia along with the related words for deacon and serving, the reference to "waiting on tables" as the Greek widows complained in Acts 6, and the requirements for deacons in Acts 6 and 1 Tim. 3, as well as the combination of "overseers and deacons" in Phil 1:1 written to a congregation that had received financial assistance from the Church of Jerusalem.

The result of the limited revelation has led to uncertainty, degeneration and under-development. Much has been written on the subject, and in the Reformed Churches a level of insight has been gleaned from God's Word which has resulted in the functioning of an office which is distinct from that of elder but is equal to it in honour and dignity.

In the formative stages of the new Church the deacons were ordained as office-bearers in order to facilitate, direct, and develop the communion of the saints or the loving and caring fellowship of God's people. This basic description rests on a particular interpretation of the circumstances surrounding the beginning of the office in Jerusalem. These circumstances were such that as the Church was growing rapidly, the practice of meeting together in the temple and in each other's homes became difficult. Some direction and organization was needed for the proper working of caring for each other when the believers may have numbered 25,000.

It is heart warming to read Luke's account of the Jerusalem communion of saints: "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:43-45). "There were no needy persons among them, From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need" (Acts 4:34,35). The pressure on the twelve apostles builds as Ananias and Sapphira are dealt with in a powerful way (Acts 5: 1-11), as they healed many sick (Acts 5:12-16), and as they were arrested and persecuted (Acts 5:17-42). It is "in those days" (6:1) that the problem with the Greek widows developed. Some have said about this event that the Greek widows "were being overlooked" and thus received no food. Others have said they "were being overlooked" in that they received no responsible assignment in the distribution and were upset. There are also those who suggest that the neglect was due to favouritism of the Jewish widows and a certain bias against the Greek widows.

In assessing the various explanations, we conclude that there can be no certainty that one view is exclusively correct. It can be said with certainty that a variety of needs existed at this time in the history of the Church and they were the occasion for the King of the Church to initiate the new office of deacon. Although the task of the deacon is not defined precisely, it finds its fulfillment in a loving and willing service (diakonia) for the continued happiness, joy and peace in the fellowship of believers.

Thus we understand the rationale or evaluation of the apostles not as limiting the description of the diaconate to a task of hunger relief exclusively. Their evaluation was: "it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the Word of God in order to wait on tables" (6:2). The last clause in the original Greek language states, "to serve (diakonein) tables", and refers to "the daily distribution of food" which in the original reads, "the daily service (diakonia)", which in turn refers to the daily practice of the believers: "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God..." (Acts 2:46,47).

The priority of the apostles is "The Word of God" (that is how 6:2 appears in the original, while in 6:4 it says "the service (diakonia) of the Word"), and the growing responsibility of caring for the welfare, happiness, and joy of the very large numbers of Christ's children, designated as "serving tables" is now

transferred to the seven men who are chosen by the congregation ("all the disciples," 6:2). The apostles "turn this responsibility over to them" (6:3). Since the Scriptures do not provide any other concrete revelation about the general task of the deacons, we conclude that the Word of God teaches that the mandate for the diaconate contains these ingredients as normative:

1. The office of deacon is a particularized and specialized expression of the office of all believers.
2. In their task and calling the deacons demonstrate, model, and teach the Saviour's love for His own.
3. The primary objective of the particular duties and tasks of the deacons is to facilitate, promote and develop the communion of the saints.
4. The application of the diaconal mandate varies, depending on circumstances and need.

b. What Are the Scriptural Characteristics of the Deacon?

There are two texts in the New Testament addressing the qualifications for believers in the Church who serve as deacons. The first one, Acts 6:3, describes a general principle, while the second passage, 1 Tim. 3:8-12, provides practical virtues.

The condition the apostles place before the Church is based on the reputation of seven men to be selected. Whatever the election process may have been, the congregation must choose men "who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom" (Acts 6:3). The risen Saviour had mandated the apostles on Easter day, and "with that He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit"" (John 20:22). Furthermore, on Pentecost day the ascended Lord had sent His promised "Counselor" to the entire Church, with the result that "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit..." (Acts 2:4).

Thus when some (short) time after Pentecost the apostles instruct the disciples to choose seven men filled with the Holy Spirit, they were to elect them on the basis of how the Spirit functioned in them. The nominees were to have a demonstrated wisdom which would be needed to manage the feeding and fellowship of the huge congregation. God's Word through Paul observes that "we have different gifts according to the grace given us ... if it is in leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully"

(Rom. 12:6-8). The particular gift deacons require is spiritual discernment so that as a leader among God's people, the deacon is a "spiritual man [who] makes judgments about all things" (1 Cor. 2:15).

The general principle revealed in Jerusalem also undergirds the practical virtues that become Scriptural characteristics for the deacons in Ephesus. It is here that the apostle Paul has sent the disciple Timothy and to whom he sends his First Letter. He notes, "I am writing these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the Church of the living God.--" (1 Tim. 3:14,15). The nature of the office of deacon, its importance, and dignity can be clearly seen from the eight characteristics listed in 1 Tim. 3:8-12. We will merely present them here in summary form, noting that they are almost identical to the requirements for elders.

1. worthy of respect
2. sincere
3. not indulging in much wine
4. not pursuing dishonest gain

5. maintain deep truths of the faith
6. tested and found blameless
7. husband of one wife
8. manage children and household

c. Is There Scriptural Support for Women Deacons?

In Biblical times the question of women office-bearers did not arise. In exceptional times, however, in the Old Testament two women office-bearers are mentioned, Deborah the judge and Hulda the prophetess. In the New Testament the practice does not exist. In fact, there are several concrete reasons that the choice of deacons (and elders and ministers) must be limited to men.

1. Acts 6:3 uses a word for men that focuses on the idea of "male" rather than the generic "man".

2. 1 Tim. 3:12 specifies that the deacon "must be the husband of but one wife", and also refers to "their wives" in verse 11.

3. 1

Tim. 2:12 teaches that a woman cannot be an office-bearer since she cannot teach or have authority over a man.

There are, of course, many women in the New Testament who serve their Lord in the setting of the Church. Phoebe is one of these. She is called "our sister Phoebe, a servant (diakonos) of the church in Cenchrea" (Rom. 16:1). The RSV and some other translations use the word "deaconess." Tabitha, also called Dorcas, is called "a disciple...who was always doing good and helping the poor" (Acts 9:36). In Ephesus and perhaps in other Churches there was a "list of widows" who were over sixty and devoted themselves "to all kind of good deeds" (1 Tim. 5:9,10). We conclude categorically that the Scriptures do not allow nor support women deacons.

d. Do the Deacons Have Scriptural Authority?

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (Matt. 28:18), the King of the Church said to His office-bearing disciples. He exercises that authority as He rules in heaven, seated at the Father's right hand. The Church confesses Christ's Lordship with these words in Lord's Day 48, "So rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that more and more we submit to Thee" (Q/A 123).

We have noted previously that Christ as Head of the Church is the second and last Adam, and the great Office-Bearer who calls all who believe in Him into the life of being prophets, priests and kings. The Word says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

This office of believer in the Church is guided and directed by the special office-bearers Christ has appointed in His Church, ministers, elders and deacons. It is sometimes said that a local Church council is "autonomous," which means self governing and refers to the fact that no other Church body can properly exert its authority on a particular congregation. The office of deacon or the diaconate of a Church, however, is not autonomous. The very nature of the service of the deacon calls for the supervision of the office of elder/overseer.

We will return to this matter in a later section.

Nevertheless, the deacon's office is also vested with diaconal authority. It follows from the institution of the office in Jerusalem that the apostles

endowed the deacons with authority. They said, "We will turn this responsibility over to them" (6:3). The grammar of the original Greek language indicates an authority which is accompanied by responsibility. That the office of deacon has its own significant worth and standing is further highlighted by the ordination prayers and the fact that the apostles "laid their hands on them" (6:6), indicating, that they were set apart by the Holy Spirit for a special task, in the same way that Barnabas and Saul in Antioch were sent off as missionaries (Acts 13:2,3).

The real source of a deacon's authority rests in the fact that the Lord Himself called him to the office. And whom the Lord calls He also empowers with ability and authority. In fact the Greek word used for this in the New Testament is translated with the word "power" (as in John 1:12) and with "authority" (as in Matt. 28:18).

e. Is the Analogy of Priest Scripturally Applied to the Deacon?

In concluding the presentation of the Biblical nature of the office of deacon, we need to mention briefly the frequently used analogy of prophet, priest, and king as applied to ministers, deacons, and elders. The express and direct use of the analogy to the office of deacon does not occur in Scripture. Yet, when the three offices are viewed in the light of their unity in Christ, and their close connection with the office of all believers (sometimes called the priesthood of all believers), there can be considerable profit in the three-fold usage.

Perhaps it must be admitted that the use of "analogy" in this context is somewhat imprecise, for the intent is to convey that Christ as the second Adam and Head of the Church carries out His labours as our chief Prophet and Teacher, our only High Priest, and our eternal King (cf LD 12) in His Body also by means of the three offices. Separation of the three "offices" in Christ is impossible, and we may only learn from the Word of God to distinguish them.

Caution should be exercised in referring to the deacon's "priestly" function, for the Church would move toward formalism if the minister painfully guards against transgressing the borders of the elder, who in turn keeps a distance from all priestly activity, while the deacon avoids anything related to prophecy or ruling. It should not escape our attention how carefully the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons treats the subject. The Form states, "the office of elder is based on the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ," while "the office of deacon is based upon the interest and love of Christ in behalf of His own" (Psalter Hymnal, p. 175). Such caution is helpful, since the analogy applied to the deacon is not as clear as that of the minister and elder.

IV. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF DEACON

Knowing its history not only helps the Church to avoid errors of the past, but also enables God's people to see the LORD'S faithfulness. There is a wealth of material available on the history of the diaconate, most of which falls outside the scope of this report. We have selected only a few characterizing sketches, focusing on the two formative time periods for the office of deacon, the Early Church and the Reformation era.

1. Development and Deterioration, AD 100-500

At the conclusion of the Biblical times, it cannot be said with certainty that the diaconate had developed greatly beyond its starting point of "serving at tables". Only when the successors to the apostles planted Churches around the Mediterranean Sea can the reports of the unfolding work of the deacons be found in their writings. These Apostolic Fathers, as they are called, encouraged regular offerings to be taken, and developed more or less independent diaconates in the Churches, yet always under the direct supervision of the Church's overseer. These early writings are found in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. J.B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, 1962.

The gradual decline of the office of deacon is closely linked with a growing trend toward hierarchy in the early Church. It was in the encounter with Gnosticism during the second century, a heresy that many consider the equivalent of today's New Age phenomenon, that the view developed that the episcopate formed an unbroken succession with Christ's apostles, and that their authority in certain instances was unquestionable. The consequence was also a division and sharp distinction between "the clergy" and "the laity".

The office of deacon became a fully paid position in the Church, subject to the overseer. The latter was seen as "the mediator between God and the poor," while the deacons were "the ear and eye of the bishop." The Council of Nicea in AD 325 discussed the place of the deacon in the Church and recorded in Canon 28 that they are "servants (hypertai) of the bishop."

The Church was beginning to teach that poverty was an honour and begging a virtue. In the succeeding centuries numerous prosperous landowners deeded their holdings to the Church, which became very rich, while well-to-do people and nobles took up a life of begging and many became recluses. Increasingly good deeds became a means to earn salvation.

As the Middle Ages were about to begin, the office of deacon in the way the Bible teaches it no longer existed. The Church historian Philip Schaff concludes: "When the bishop was raised above the presbyter (elder) and the presbyter became priest, the deacon was regarded as Levite, and his primary function of care for the poor was lost in the function of assisting the priest in the subordinate parts of public worship and the administration of the sacraments. The diaconate became the first of the three orders of the ministry and a stepping stone to the priesthood," (*History of the Christian Church*, Vol 1, p. 231).

2. The Reformation of the Diaconate

During the Middle Ages the development of monasteries and religious orders such as the Dominicans and Franciscans had a profound impact on the social, educational, and charitable ministries of the Church. These parachurch institutions were instrumental in building and providing staff for hospitals, orphanages, and schools. The care of the destitute was undertaken by some orders, but in general the state took care of the poor.

When in God's gracious care for His Church He raised up the Reformers in the sixteenth century to call His children back to His Word, there were no contemporary models on which to base the reformation of the diaconate. Luther initially did seek to establish independent diaconates, calling them "service of mercy" in his brochure *To the German Nobility*. However, while the great Reformer was consumed in having God's Word preached and sinners saved, he had no interest in nor talent for organizational matters. He challenged the nobility and the civil authorities to stop the begging and to provide for the poor.

In keeping with Luther's view of the Church, the Lutherans in Germany developed the Territorial Church system in which there were no self-ruling Churches but only a national Church. The Church and state are closely connected

in Lutheran countries. The Churches collected money for the needy, but the funds were distributed by civil authorities. It is evident when reading the various historical accounts that the Scriptural concept of office in general, and that of deacon in particular did not develop in the Lutheran countries, a failing that is reflected in their well-known creed, the Augsburg Confession of 1530. We note that in all Lutheran Church Orders produced after 1550 congregational deacons' care for the needy is not mentioned at all.

Since Zwingli is also a significant Reformer, his treatment of the diaconate is noteworthy. Zwingli considered that it was the responsibility of the government of Zurich, where he laboured, to regulate the care of the poor and needy. The result was that the diaconate as a ministry of the Church was nonexistent. In fact no collections were even taken in the worship services for diaconal causes. In passing we note that the Zwinglian view of the intimate relationship between Church and State was adopted by Henry VIII in England. Thus the Anglican Church became the State Church. Here too the government provided for the poor and needy, while the office of deacon remained undeveloped, even though later kings attempted unsuccessfully to bring in some changes.

It was John Calvin in Geneva who was used by God to reform the office of deacon. What stands out in his writing is the conviction that Christ gathers His people as the Church locally, and that such a congregation in its visible manifestation has received from its Lord office-bearers who form a council which governs the local Church autonomously. In his influential work, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin considers the office of deacon as one of the Church offices. He concludes his treatment of this office focusing on Acts 6, observing, "See what were the characters of the deacons in the apostolic Church, and what ought to be the character of ours, in conformity to the primitive example" (IV,3,9).

In contrast with Luther whose view of the Church led to the abandonment of the diaconate, Calvin's ecclesiology based on his reading of the Scripture, led to the adoption of a new Church Order in Geneva in 1541 which also spelled out the task of the deacons. The deacons "were assigned the care of the poor and the supervision of the hospital", reports Williston Walker in *A History of the Christian Church* (1959, p.354). Calvin himself explains his interpretation of Romans 12:8 in the *Institutes*, "Unless my judgement deceive me, the former clause refers to the deacons who administered the alms; and the other (clause) to those who devoted themselves to the care of poor and sick persons" (IV,3,9). Thus Calvin envisioned "two classes of deacons, of whom one will serve the Church in dispensing the property given to the poor, the other in taking care of the poor themselves" (IV,3,9). It pleased God to establish in Geneva a strong Reformation Church and Academy. Many Reformed leaders studied there and returned to their own countries to implement and adapt the teaching of John Calvin to their setting. Strong Reformed influences were at work in France, The Netherlands, Scotland and among the Puritans in England. While much of Calvin's language finds its way into the Reformed Confessions of those countries, not all of Geneva's views and practices are taken over.

Thus the French Huguenots recognized only three offices in the Church rather than the four that Calvin taught (IV,3,4), omitting his "teachers". The French spelled these matters out in the French Confession, and in greater detail in the French Church Order, adopted at the Synod of Paris, 1559. A.D.R. Polman quotes the job description of the deacon from that Church Order in *Onze Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis* (Vol. 4, p.21), "With respect to the deacons, their task is to receive and distribute, with advice of the consistory, the monies for the poor, those in jail, and the sick; to visit them, and also to catechize in the homes"

(translation provided). The Synod of Orleans (1562) deleted the reference to public catechizing as the proper work of the deacons.

In God's gracious providence He preserved His Reformed Churches in Europe when economic hardship and political persecutions in France, the Netherlands, and elsewhere drove many of their members into exile. As refugee Churches were established in Geneva, London, the English islands of Normandy, and in southern Holland, the office of deacon prospered. None of these congregations kept the two classes of deacons Calvin prescribed, and all of them developed active diaconates.

These refugee Churches and their diaconates, were more directly influenced by the French Church Order than by the one of Geneva. It was at the Convent of Wezel (1568), under the leadership of Petrus Dathenus, that these various strands converged, and a detailed description of the work of the deacons was spelled out and thus began to function in the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands. These Churches also adopted the Form of Installation of Deacons as produced on the Islands of Normandy and altered somewhat in London. Thus God in His sovereign ways used an amazing variety of people and circumstances to provide for His people throughout the centuries, and even in the 20th century He continues the office of deacon.

V. THE PLACE AND TASK OF THE DIACONATE TODAY

The King of the Church instituted the office of deacon as a permanent provision for His people throughout all centuries. Thus "the spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in His Word" contains also deacons who see to it "that the poor and all the afflicted are helped and comforted according to their need" (BC 30). This particular formulation of the place and task of the diaconate occurred in 1561 at the time of the Reformation. The Confession expresses the Scriptural revelation concerning the office of deacon in terms of the principle that applies to all centuries and the entire Church, but the

practice of working it out will vary depending on needs and circumstances. We draw attention to the importance of this distinction, so that a slavish adherence to one historical Church Order, for instance, would not take place.

1. Task Description of the Deacon

The responsibilities of the deacons in the Reformed Churches of the sixteenth century were generally described in their Church Orders and Forms for Ordination. Those that endured originated in the refugee Churches and via the Convent of Wezel (1568), entered the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands at the Synod of Embden (1571). At the Synod of Dort (1618/19) a revised version of these documents was adopted and have guided the Reformed Churches up to the present time. We note that the Reformed refugee Churches faced severe political and economic hardship, and poverty was widespread. The result was that their Church Orders stressed that the main task of the deacons was hunger relief and care for the poor and distressed. It is that emphasis that was incorporated in the Church Order of Dort, and regulated the work of the deacons during the succeeding centuries.

It is helpful to observe how the Church Order of Dort and the Form for the Ordination of Deacons entered the English language in North America at the beginning of the twentieth century, and how both documents function at the conclusion of the century. The development and adaptation illustrates the changing practical mandate for the deacons in a changing social and economic climate, while continuing to be faithful to the Scriptures and Confessions. We

have selected the formulation of the Christian Reformed Church of 1914, and the current Church Order and Ordination Form of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

a. The Task and Mandate in 1914

i. The office peculiar to the deacon is diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity, and after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require it; to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the alms are not misused; of which they shall render an account in consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such a time as the consistory may see fit. In places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, the deacons shall seek a mutual understanding with them to the end that the alms may all the better be distributed among those who have greatest need. Moreover, they shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them. It is also desirable that the deaconates assist and consult one another, especially in caring for the poor in such institutions.

(Art. 25 and 26, Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church)

ii. The office of deacon is based upon the interest and love of Christ in behalf of His own. This interest is so great that He deems what is done unto the least of His brethren as done unto Him, thus appointing the needy to represent Himself in our expression of sympathy and benevolent service on earth. The work of the deacons consists in the faithful and diligent in gathering of the offerings which God's people in gratitude make to their Lord, in the prevention of poverty, in the humble and cheer distribution of gifts according to the need, and in the relief of the distressed both with kindly deeds and words of consolation and cheer from Scripture.

(Form for the Ordination of
Deacons in the CRC)

b. The Task and Mandate in 1995

i. The specific duties of the office of deacon are to see to the good progress of the service of charity in the congregation; to acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties and exhort the members of Christ's body to show mercy; and further, to gather and manage the offerings and distribute them in Christ's Name according to need. They shall encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's love, and promote with word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the table of the Lord.

(Art. 23, Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches)

ii. Also today the Lord calls on us to show hospitality, generosity, and mercy, so that the weak and needy may share abundantly in the joy of God's people. No one in the congregation of Christ may live uncomforted under the pressure of sickness, loneliness, and poverty.

For the sake of this service of love, Christ has given deacons to His Church... It is therefore the responsibility of the deacons to see to the good progress of this service of charity in the Church. They shall acquaint themselves with existing needs and difficulties, and exhort the members of Christ's body to show mercy. They shall gather and manage the offerings and distribute them in Christ's Name according to need. They are called to encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's love. They shall promote with word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy

Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the table of the Lord. In this way God's children will increase in love to one another and to all men.

(Form for the
Ordination of Deacons in the Canadian Reformed Churches)

c. Notes of Comparison

The 1914 Church Order was based on the Dutch Church Order of 1905 which closely followed the Church Order of Dort. The deacon is to "collect alms" and

"distribute the same to the poor"; he is "to visit and comfort the distressed."

The deacons "shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy." The work of the deacons is exclusively a ministry to the poor and distressed. The emphasis of the Form for Ordination is identical, adding "the prevention of poverty."

The current Church Order and Form for Ordination quoted above have a striking change in focus and emphasis. The reference is to "the good progress of the service of charity (love) in the congregations, to "exhort the members of Christ's body to show mercy," and only after that the task description lists that the deacons are "to gather and manage the offerings and distribute them in Christ's Name according to need." The summary is that "in this way God's children will increase in love to one another and to all men." The principle of the Confession in Art. 30 is adhered to, but the practical application is much different and much broader than the Church Order of Dort.

2. The Place of the Deacons in Council/Consistory

There is a difference of opinion and practice about how the office of deacon relates to that of elder. It has pleased God not to spell out this difference in Scripture. What is clear, however, is that the elder's task is supervisory, and that his office comes with the authority of overseeing the flock, including the work of the diaconate. Yet, the elder's authority must be exercised also as diakonia. The lack of consensus and the resultant ambiguity in the Reformed Churches can be traced to the time of the Reformation.

John Calvin stressed the distinction of the Church offices. He wrote, "Therefore, from the beginning, every Church has had its senate or council, composed of pious, grave, and holy men, who were invested with that jurisdiction in the correction of vices ... This office of government is necessary, therefore, in every age" (IV,3,8). The result of this emphasis was that deacons were not included in the senate or council. (This designation was changed to "consistory" at the Synod of Nimes in 1572 in order to avoid confusion and comparison with the secular government Senate).

The French Confession focused more on the unity of the offices in Christ, and their interrelatedness. This Confession reads, "The elders and the deacons are the senate of the Church, over which the ministers of the Word must preside (Art. 24). The Confession explains, "With respect to the true Church, we believe that she must be governed according to the polity instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ, namely, that there are ministers, elders, and deacons, in order that purity of doctrine may continue, that sins may be punished and curtailed, and that the poor and all other needy may be helped and that the meetings may take place in the Name of God for the edification of old and young" (Art. 29).

The two factors or facets of unity in Christ, and distinction in task are always present in the government of the Church. The question was never whether deacons are part of the Church government, but whether they should be part of

the council/consistory. Wherever the French Confession and the French Order Church shaped the mind of the Church, the deacons were regularly part of the council. But where the teachings and practices of Geneva prevailed the deacons were not part of the council. It was in London where the refugee congregation was led by the competent and resourceful John a Lasco that the practice was begun to include the deacons in regular monthly meetings while the elders and minister met without them on a weekly basis.

Reformed scholars have written much about the supposed discrepancies between Article 30 of the Belgic Confession which includes the deacons in the council, and the Canons of Dort which does not. A.D.R. Polman in his commentary on BC 30, after surveying the subject at great length, concludes, "Thus it has become clear to us how it was possible that the Fathers never saw any discrepancy between our Confession and the Church Order" (Vol.4, p.29). P.Y. DeJong in his commentary on the Belgic Confession observes, "Neither position, it would seem, ought to be pushed to an extreme. The underlying unity of all three offices in Christ may never be obscured. Yet the distinctive contribution of each office ought not to be forgotten either ... The differences in emphasis supplement each other beautifully, and we do well to preserve them" (The Church's Witness to the World, 1980, p. 296).

In today's setting, we believe, an appropriate measure of cooperation should function between elders and deacons. The deacons should meet regularly as diaconate to conduct and facilitate their task, and should meet on a monthly basis as part of the Church council participating in the general leadership of the congregation. Appropriate report of their work should then be made to the council.

3. The Task of the Diaconate, Congregational or Global?

In seeking to clarify the work of the deacons as well as its extent, it is valuable to gain a proper perspective. It has pleased God to show His people in Scripture that the roots of the diaconate originate in the Old Testament, while the shape or structure of the office is a New Testament introduction. In designating the task of the deacons as a "Ministry of Mercy" as is often done, the Church indicates thereby the diaconal task is covenantal in essence, and is undertaken within parameters of the covenant people.

The LORD Himself led His people out of Egypt where they had been slaves for over four centuries, suffering oppression, poverty, and abuse in many ways. As the LORD guided them into the wilderness He established His covenant with them and gave them His law and numerous prescriptions for living as a covenantal community in the promised land of Canaan. The summarizing reason for such observance recurs frequently; "I am the LORD your God!" God Himself will live with His people, revealing His nature or Name as He did on the mountain to Moses saying, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Exod. 34:6,7). The central ingredient in God's covenant is His mercy and love which must be echoed and reflected by His people.

Thus they were to observe the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee as they are outlined in Lev. 25, with the reason given: "I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 25:55). There must be rejoicing in Israel as the special feasts are observed, for God has set His people free. In remembrance of that captivity and hardship the injunction comes: "And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place He will choose as a dwelling for His Name - you, your sons and daughters, your

men-servants and maid-servants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you" (Deut. 16:11).

Thus the covenant is the soil in which all diakonia grows and prospers. And it is the covenant people whom the deacons in the New Testament are to motivate and mobilize for "works of diakonia," as God's Word teaches (Eph. 4:12). It is that covenant community or congregation that the Saviour came to gather "in the unity of the true faith [as] a church chosen to everlasting life" (Q/A 54). The word for Church in this clause is Gemein in the original German, indicating congregation or community.

At the very centre of the congregation is the Table of the Lord, where God's people, with the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, celebrate their salvation and freedom from the tyranny of Satan. The Saviour said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," (I Cor. 11:24,25) as the apostle Paul reports. We also remember at that celebration the fact that Jesus demonstrated His I at the institution of the Supper, when He washed the disciples' feet and said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15). These words form the heart of all diaconal service.

We conclude that the task and place of the deacons is essentially local, in the midst of the congregation and not global in the sense of world relief which seeks to address the needs of mankind when disasters, famines or earthquakes strike. Thus when our Lord shortly before His death illustrated the details of compassion and love in the story of the Sheep and the Goats, He pointedly explains, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did it for Me" (Matt. 25:40). We do not suggest that Churches in a federation should not assist each other in diaconal matters. It is quite evident from the financial support the Jerusalem Church received from the Corinthian congregation, conveyed to them by Paul (2 Cor. 8:1-15), that such is not the case. We now focus more directly on the work of the deacons.

4. The Diaconal Ministry of Mercy

In some Reformed congregations the deacons are charged with the administration, maintenance, and financial arrangements of the Church. In some instances they even have to prepare and submit the annual budget for all projected financial expenditures, as well as presenting to the council and congregation a financial statement. Such assignments in the diaconate fall outside the Scriptural mandate for the office, and do damage to the effective ministry of the deacons. There are two faces to the work of the deacons, and we will focus on each in turn.

a. A Biblically Goal Oriented Diaconate

The first and perhaps the deacons' most important task is to help the Church members to help each other when needs arise. In the Old Testament there was no special office mandated by the LORD to assist His people in being a merciful community. The responsibility belonged to the farmer in harvesting as well as to the money lender in assisting the needy. All of God's people must be merciful, the Head of the covenant taught. He said in the New Testament, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

Deacons may consult with those of sister Churches, and even together undertake some special labours. Yet the primary goal of the deacons is to stimulate the congregation to be caring, loving, and as such to be a witness in today's selfish, individualistic and materialistic society. In this way the freedom God's people have in Christ comes to obedient expression in the way the apostle Paul instructs: "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not

use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13). In that same Letter, Paul summarizes: "therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Gal. 6:10).

The goal of every diaconate is to be catalysts in order "to prepare God's people for works of service", to refer to Eph. 4:12 once more, so that the communion of saints of Lord's Day 21 may become a functioning reality: "Everyone is duty-bound to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the benefit and well-being of the other members" (Q/A 55). The first part of that answer addresses the communion each and all believers have with Christ, and how they "share in all His treasures and gifts."

Such sharing and caring needs to be taught, guided, and structured by the deacons. To work out this objective requires that the deacons visit every family regularly, preferably once per year. They should visit every new member as well as every newly married couple in order to learn what needs there are and to encourage the members to exercise the communion of saints. The annual visit of the elders in family visiting is for the purpose of focusing on the member's life and doctrine. The visit of the deacons does not compete with that, but seeks to promote the use of the member's gifts for the mutual benefit of all.

Deacons ought not to wait until an urgent need arises in a family setting, but enter in before such a crisis comes. Many church members wait to ask for help because they fear the stigma, and perhaps such a request for help is a blow to their dignity. When the deacons are in tune with congregational events, they often are able to marshal others to minister to developing problems before they reach critical proportions. The Scriptural and Confessional view of the diaconal task as facilitators of the communion will be blessed by God for the maturing of the saints.

b. An Obediently Active Diaconate

It has frequently been contended in the Church that the elders deal with spiritual matters, and deacons with material ones. In light of all the Scriptural and Confessional evidence presented we conclude that this distinction is unwarranted, unacceptable, and counter-productive. To function well in his office a deacon needs to be a deeply spiritual man who "must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience" (I Tim. 3:9). They are "faithful men chosen in agreement with the rule that the apostle Paul gave to Timothy" (Belgic Confession Art. 30).

When an accident happens or sickness occurs, it is the deacon's task to be involved. Clearly the deacons are not the only office-bearers ministering at such times, and coordination should be arranged. In an accident with subsequent hospitalization transportation may be needed. Family members should be involved (I Tim. 5:9), but in many instances friends and church members should be mobilized. This is a diaconal task. When there is prolonged hospitalization, loneliness and other needs may arise. One Reformed Ordination Form for deacons states, "No one in the congregation of Christ may live uncomforted under the pressure of sickness, loneliness, and poverty."

The diaconal care extended to older widows and widowers, or other singles is a measure of the deacons' obedience to their mandate. They should be visited by the district deacon on a regular basis, minimally every three months, and a report of this and all such meetings should be made at the monthly deacons meeting. Sometimes these aging members need transportation to Church or for shopping. Sometimes lawn care, snow removal, or home care is required. If no immediate family takes care of these needs, the deacons must assume responsibility for doing this or arranging for the needs to be filled. In

assisting such members the deacons "look after orphans and widows in their distress" (James 1:27), where God's Word assesses that such "religion ... God our Father accepts as pure and faultless."

Death takes place in every congregation eventually. When God in His sovereign wisdom translates one of His children into eternity, comfort and consolation is needed by the family members. Even though the other office-bearers are involved, deacons need to provide proper diaconal care. Sometimes food, funeral arrangements, or grave plot selection call for diaconal involvement. In almost every death the deacons are part of the loving, sustaining comfort provided by God's people, which gives expression to the communion of saints.

Prolonged unemployment or business reverses and bankruptcy generally call for the helping involvement of the deacons. In the first place these tension-producing situations in life generate a need for loving understanding and emotional support. For the deacons and other members to show interest in such or other hardships demonstrates the love of Christ, Who lay down His very life for His own. Some Church members live beyond their means and income, and may need admonition and assistance in how to restructure their lives. Some may plead an inability to give for Church causes because of their burden of Christian School tuition. Deacons need to look for avenues to have such members live the Christian life with joy and full participation. In such sensitive visits, also when family budgets are monitored, confidentiality is an essential ingredient in the deacons' ministry. In reporting these matters to the elders, great care must be taken not to betray confidences.

It is in these ministries of mercy the deacons follow and exemplify the great Deacon (diakonos), the Lord Jesus Himself in His diaconal and sacrificial service. At the final Assessment of history, He will say to the faithful and obedient deacons and to all His children, "I was hungry and you gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me." He will then also say, "Come, you who are blessed by My Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matt. 25:35,36,40,34).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having come to the conclusion of the report, the committee formulated the following recommendations.

1. That the Report is recommended to the Churches for further study and implementation.
2. That the diaconates of the Churches are urged to cooperate regionally on a regular basis for mutual stimulation and interaction.
3. That in formulating and adopting a Church Order Article to frame a task description for the office of deacon the contents of this Report be considered and implemented.
4. That in formulating and adopting the part of the Form For Ordination of Elders and Deacons that deals with deacons, the contents of this Report be considered and implemented.

Submitted by the Study Committee delegates from

Ancaster

Balmoral

Dunnville

St. Catharines, Immanuel

Wellandport

R. Stienstra, chairman
J. Bouwers, reporter
R. Van Oostveen, secretary

COMMUNICATION

I: Give Consideration to Some of The Concerns of Dutton Independent Reformed Church About the Church Order

At our Consistory meeting of July 30, 1997 we dealt with a letter from the Dutton Independent Reformed Church of Dutton MI. of which we enclose copy. We discussed their concerns in regards to some articles in the new Church Order of the URCNA.

For the sake of unity amongst the churches who have left the CRC during the course of the last 5-7 years, is it a possibility that at our next Synod meeting Oct. 21-23, 1997 their concerns be discussed under correspondence?

Possibly the articles in question could be discussed and clarified, hopefully to their satisfaction.

Yours in Christ;

Covenant Christian Church, Wyoming, ON
Arend Korvemaker,
Clerk

Dear Brothers in Christ,

The consistory of Dutton IRC has spent a fair amount of time considering the issue of federation in the past year. We are of the mind that it is biblical and beneficial to belong to a federation, so the issue then becomes "Which federation to join?" We invited Dr. Nelson Kloosterman to speak to us one evening to go over questions regarding the United Reformed Churches of North America's church order. On another occasion we were able to hear from and ask questions of Rev. Charles Krahe regarding the nature and type of biblical Federation

We realize that any church order may have points with which we do not agree 100 percent. We also realize that the church is called to display visible unity to the world (John 17). So, please understand that this letter does not come in the tone of demands for change, but rather in a spirit of concern for areas that we feel compelled to address prior to federating. Dr. Kloosterman suggested to us that we put our areas of concern in writing, and submit them to the member consistories of the URCNA in the hopes that one (or all) of you would bring it officially before your next Synod for discussion and response. We would also welcome responses from individual consistories regarding your sentiments or comments about our concerns.

Here, then, are our areas of greatest concern:

1. Art. 34 - regarding Classis approval for ecumenical relations by a church. As defined in the article, "ecumenical relations may include pulpit exchange, table fellowship, membership transfer" . . . and . . . "other means of manifesting their unity." We would like clarification of this point. If this means that we cannot have a pulpit exchange with for example, a PCA minister unless we get prior approval from classis, then we have strong opposition to the article. Does it mean that we must get classis approval before accepting a family into our congregation from anyone other than an URCNA church? We think that the current wording is subject to misinterpretation and/or abuse.
2. Art. 46 - We strongly object to the notion that the missionary task of the church is limited to the ordained preaching of the gospel. We understand and agree that ordained preaching is a part of the mission task, but it is far greater than this limited role. All members must be involved in the promotion of the gospel wherever the Lord has placed them.

3 . It appears that this church order "micro-manages" without scriptural warrant (e.g. Art. 45) regarding the frequency of and format for celebrating the Lord's Supper.

4. There are no means given for dealing with a situation of incompatibility of a pastor and his congregation.

5 . Last, but not least, we are of the understanding that at your last synod meeting there was a change in your Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government section. This change regarded the calling of the Church "she". We would like an explanation of the reason(s) that caused the change to "it". In scripture there is overwhelming reason to call the Church "She" or "Her" and we are very concerned that grammatical "correctness" would supercede scriptural teaching.

We look forward to hearing that these issues may be brought to the floor of your next Synod in an official capacity. if your consistory needs any clarification or has any questions or suggestions, please contact us.

In His Service,

Bob Mast

Clerk of Consistory

Dutton Independent Reformed Church

COMMUNICATION

II: Inter-classical Conference of the Christian Reformed Church

Robert G. den Dulk

5335 Dover Avenue

Hanford, CA, 93230-9722

November 16, 1996

Rev Jerome Julien, Clerk

United Reformed Church

3646 - 193rd Place

Lansing, IL 60438

Dear Rev. Julien

At the Inter-Classical Conference of the Christian Reformed Church which was held on November 7 & 8, 1996, a motion was passed to express our appreciation for your letter of encouragement and prayer for the conference. The letter was read to the body during the course of the meetings.

While the persons present were not all of one mind as to when they might be compelled to leave the Christian Reformed Church, everyone was appreciative of the Spirit of your letter and the invitation to join the United Reformed Church. The decisions which face both congregations and individuals are difficult. We covet your prayers in the months ahead both for those churches which have come to the conclusion they must leave now and for those churches who will work toward leaving in the next few years unless significant changes take place in the Christian Reformed Church.

You will be interested to know a committee is being established to gather information about the Reformed and Presbyterian churches with whom we have fellowship. You will be contacted in the next few months by someone from that committee to provide information. The information will be shared with interested congregations as they make plans to leave the denomination.

Future correspondence may be sent to either Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel who is chairman of the interim committee, or Rev. Norman Shepherd who will serve as secretary.

With sincere appreciation for your interest and concern, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

Robert G. den Dulk, Reporter
Inter-Classical Conference
Office: (209) 585-2027 Fax (209)582-5743 Residence: (209) 897-3949 Fax (209)
897-4275

Communication

III. Orthodox Presbyterian Church - Office of the General Assembly

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Office of the General Assembly

The Rev. Donald J. Duff, Stated Clerk

Phone 215/830-0900 • Fax 215/830-0350

June 30, 1997

United Reformed Churches in North America

The Rev. Jerome M. Julien, Clerk

3646 - 193rd Place

Lansing, 11, 60438

Dear Rev. Julien,

The Sixty-Fourth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, meeting June 4-11, 1997, at Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania welcomed the Rev. Jerome M. Julien, Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America, who was seated as corresponding member of the Assembly. We were pleased to have him address the Assembly.

The Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations reported as follows concerning the United Reformed Churches in North America:

United Reformed Churches of North America [URCNA]

A significant number of the

churches which were previously members of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, and which have seceded from the Christian Reformed Church of North America have now organized themselves as the United Reformed Churches of North America. At the close of the 1995 meeting of Alliance these churches met informally to plan for the call of an organizing Synod. This Synod was held in October of 1996 in the Lynwood, Illinois Church with 36 churches taking part. Since that time another ten churches have joined the federation. Charter membership remains open to any churches which have seceded from the CRCNA, and/or which have been members of the Alliance, until this next Synod meeting. It will be held in St. Catharines Orthodox Reformed Church in Ontario, Canada. The Committee is taking action to establish correspondence with these churches.

The Committee plans to invite the

URCNA to a meeting of representatives with this committee in Philadelphia or with representatives of this Committee for the purpose of discussing the relationship that our churches should have to each other.

The Committee has

determined to send Messrs. Tyson and Williamson as observers, unless the General Assembly disapproves, to the next meeting of URCNA, at Trinity Church, St. Catharines, Ontario, October 19-25, 1997, who shall be authorized to give greetings. In the event one or both are unable to attend, the Chairman shall be authorized to appoint alternates.

The Assembly took the following actions in connection with recommendations of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations.

1. The 64th General Assembly expresses to the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) its thankfulness to God for their love for the truth of God and the purity of the church of Jesus Christ, welcomes them to the family of Reformed churches, and prays for the blessing of God on their ministry.
2. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church invites the United Reformed Churches in North America to enter into Corresponding Relations:

Ground: See what the Committee has reported about this Church.

I will be

sending you a copy of what the 64th General Assembly passed with regard to the church's policy with regard to ecumenical relations.

3. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church recommends to the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) that the United Reformed Churches in North America be received into the membership of the ICRC.

Grounds

a. The Committee has had close contact with these Churches even before they were federated as the United Reformed Churches in North America. Their confessional standards are the Three Forms of Unity. Their church order has been examined favorably by the Committee.

b. Representative of the federation attended the 1993 ICRC meeting Zwolle, the Netherlands, showing their interest in international ecumenics.

I have written to the International Conference of Reformed Churches concerning our recommendation concerning the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Yours in Christ's service,

Donald. J. Duff, Stated Clerk

Communication

IV. Orthodox Presbyterian Church - Office of the General Assembly

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Office of the General Assembly

The Rev. Donald J. Duff, Stated Clerk

Phone 215/830-0900 • Fax 215/830-0350

June 30, 1997

United Reformed Churches in North America

The Rev. Jerome M.

Julien, Clerk

3646 - 193rd Place

Lansing, IL 60438

Dear Rev. Julien,

The Sixty-Fourth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, meeting June 4-11, 1997, at Geneva College, Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania passed the following recommendation of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations:

Restructuring "Ecclesiastical Fellowship"

That the assembly authorize the Committee to seek the advice of the churches that are in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC with regard to revising the policies for interchurch relations as in A and B below and approve the provisional use of use of B as of this assembly:

A. That the implementation of the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship, as it presently exists (see Minutes, 45th (1978) General Assembly, Report of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations V.A.6.3 and V.B.1, pages 116--7,123), be amended to read as follows-

3. That where churches enter Ecclesiastical Fellowship with other Reformed churches, that relationship be implemented where possible and desirable by:

a. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies

b. Occasional pulpit

fellowship (by local option)

c. Intercommunion, including ready reception of each other at the Lord's Supper but not excluding suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership, as regulated by each session (consistory)

- d. Joint action in areas of common responsibility
 - e. Consultation Communication on issues of joint concern, particularly before instituting changes in polity, doctrine, or practice that might alter the basis of the fellowship
 - f. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity.
 - g. Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another
 - h. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies
 - i. Exchange of denominational church directories (yearbooks)
 - j. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the confessional standards
 - k. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order
 - l. Exchange of the most recent denominationally published edition of hymnal or Psalters
- B. That in order to i) reflect more accurately the nature of the fellowship we either do, or desire to, enjoy, and ii) define the corresponding privileges and duties granted and undertaken therein, the official ecclesiastical relationships of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church be augmented by adding to the one present relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship two other relationships as follows:
1. "Corresponding Relations" is that relationship in which mutual contact with another church is undertaken to become better acquainted with one another with a view towards entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship at some time in the not-too-distant future. The relationship of "Corresponding Relations" shall be implemented where possible and desirable by:
 - a. Exchange of official representatives at major assemblies
 - b. Joint action in areas of common responsibility
 - c. Consultation of issues of joint concern, particularly before instituting changes in polity, doctrine, or practice that might alter the basis of the relation
 - d. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies
 - e. Exchange of denominational church directories (yearbooks)
 - f. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the confessional standards
 - g. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order
 - h. Exchange of the most recently denominationally published edition of hymnals or Psalters
 2. "Restricted Contact" is that relationship with another church with which it is desired to have some form of mutual contact so as to fulfill our stated "responsibility to call all churches, including our own, to faithfulness in order to seek the unity of the whole church" (Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church, concluding paragraph), even though present circumstances are such that we are unable to have either Corresponding Relations or Ecclesiastical Fellowship with her. The relationship of "Restricted Contact" shall be implemented where possible and desirable by:

- a. Exchange of official observers at the broadest assemblies
 - b. Consultation on issues of joint concern, particularly before instituting changes in polity, doctrine, or practice that might alter the basis of the contact
 - c. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies
 - d. Exchange of denominational church directories (yearbooks)
 - e. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the confessional standards
 - f. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order
- Yours in Christ's service,
Donald J. Duff, Stated Clerk

**COMMUNICATION
V: OAK GLEN COVENANT COMMUNITY REFORMED CHURCH**

COMMUNICATION To THE 1997 SYNOD OF THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES

Esteemed Brothers,

The Council of the Oak Glen Covenant Community Reformed Church of Lansing, IL respectfully seeks to communicate the following information to the delegates of the 1997 synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America:

1. As of January 1, 1998, the Oak Glen Covenant Community Reformed Church will have changed its name to the Oak Glen United Reformed Church.

2. The

Council of the Oak Glen Covenant Community Reformed Church respectfully requests that the 1997 synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America give its careful consideration to the suitability of imposing a one year moratorium, to commence after the conclusion of the 1997 synod, on all overtures pertaining to the Church Order.

Grounds:

1. Such a moratorium will afford more time for the necessary implementation and evaluation of the current Church Order.

2. Such a moratorium

will allow the churches the opportunity to devote more time and energy to other pressing ecclesiastical matters at the broader assemblies.

3. Such a moratorium

may help to prevent the United Reformed Church Order from becoming what some have described as a "loose-leaf notebook." One of our criticisms of the Christian Reformed denomination in recent years was its continual and often needless revising of the Church Order at its annual synod meetings.

Done in Council: September 8, 1997

Rev. Paul R. Ipema, President of Council

COMMUNICATION VI: HONDURAN CHURCH

Tegucigalpa M.D.C. February 1, 1997

To the United Reformed Churches in North America

Dear Brothers,

Receive our greetings in the blessed and glorious name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this letter is to request of you your valuable support to work together in the different aspects of the Reformed Church of Honduras for the furtherance of the Kingdom of God in Honduras (Psalm 133).

History:

The evangelistic work of our denomination began in the year 1962 under the name of "Christian Reformed Church of Honduras" in the Tegucigalpa, then with the support of mission Agency of the Christian Reformed Church headquartered in Michigan, U.S.A. The evangelistic work of our Lord Jesus Christ was extended to various departments of our country, which now includes 40 congregations with 2,500 confessing members. In 1974 we obtained legal status and the Bylaws of the Christian Reformed Church of Honduras through the Ministry of Governance and Justice in Honduras.

Reasons:

The reasons for which we solicit your support to work together are the following:

1. That one of our churches, The Christian Reformed Church of Barrio Abajo, changed the Bylaws of the whole Church, but without taking into consideration the rest of the churches, and these were approved by the Ministry of Governance and Justice on October 30, 1996, excluding the rest of the Reformed Churches on the national level.
2. That the main leaders of the Church of Barrio Abajo have changed the sound reformed doctrine (Calvinist) for the doctrine of the Liberation Theology (2 Timothy 4:3).
3. That we are not, nor will we receive any more support from the Mission Agency of the Christian Reformed Church headquartered in Michigan, U.S.A.

Purposes:

The purposes of soliciting the support to work together the different aspects of the church are the following (Acts 2:44).

1. Fraternal: Create and maintain a fraternal and friendly relationship among the United Reformed Churches in North America and Honduras.

2. Doctrinal:

Maintain a doctrinal relationship with all the United Reformed Churches in North America which have a sound doctrine (Calvinist).

3. Evangelistic: That the

United Reformed Churches in North America send missionaries to Honduras to continue to advance the Kingdom of God in our country, Honduras.

4. Training:

That the United Reformed Churches in North America and Honduras build a SEMINARY for the training of the pastors and leaders of the Reformed Churches in Honduras.

5. Pastoral: Fellowship with all the pastors of the United Reformed Churches in North America and Honduras by way of spiritual retreats, conferences and others.

6. Social Work: That we help physically and spiritually, the needy, brothers of the reformed church and the community of Honduras as commanded by the Word of starting with the brothers of the faith (Galatians 6:10).

7. Legal:

Solicit and obtain in the least time possible (1 year) the legal status and the bylaws of the Reformed Church of Honduras before the Ministry of Governance and Justice in Honduras.

Conclusions:

We hope to receive your valuable support, because our only goal is the extension of the kingdom of God and Reformed witness Honduras in a serious and responsible manner before our Lord Jesus Christ obeying and completing the command of the Word of God, to go and make disciples of all the nations (Matthew 28:19,20). We ask that you answer in writing. This letter signed in a meeting of pastors and leaders that now will be called "THE REFORMED CHURCH OF HONDURAS", for the glory of God. Attention, Your fellow servants in Christ.

[signed by members of the churches
in Honduras]

COMMUNICATION VII: EASTMANVILLE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

October 14, 1997

Dear Rev. Julien:

Recently Rev. John Tucker and his wife Trudy visited our congregation to update us on their mission work in Mexico for Mexico Maranatha Mission. He asked me to fax this to you while wondering if there was some way for you to forward it to the Churches. He is very excited about the United Reformed Churches as a denomination and hopes that we will see the value of taking over the work they have accomplished there so far.

We had a good visit with the Tucker's and I hope that the United Reformed Churches would find a way to together consider this valuable Mission effort.

In His Service:

Rev. Stephen De Boer

COMMUNICATION VIII: MEXICO MARANATHA MISSION

October 1, 1997

United Reformed Churches in North America Synod and/or Groups or Individual Churches

Dear Brethren of the United Reformed Churches:

It would be an answer to prayer if you would take over our Mission Field in Mexico as your own. After a transition, we would leave. You would place your own missionary, or missionaries, on our Mission Field to build on what, the Lord using us, has already been established.

You would already have:

1. A Bible Institute, which could be upgraded into a seminary in the future. There are excellent facilities of classrooms, dormitories, baths and showers, apartment for dorm parents, kitchen and dining hall. It is for your use, for maintaining it.
2. Three Bible Institute professors already trained by us.
3. Fourteen acres, with missionary homes, our own well, good water, good land and facilities. It is for your use, for maintaining it.
4. Churches and Missions started, and church planting progressing. Much more needs to be done, and a presbytery needs to be established.
5. Separation, true to the Reformed Faith. This Mission Field has been united with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico. This is the only denomination of the Reformed Faith in Mexico that is separated from liberalism. (See article by Dr. P.Y. De Jong in the Christian Renewal, March 17, 1997, p. 7, on "Advancing the Reformed Faith in Mexico.")
6. You would be able to continue the missionary work you once had. The Christian Reformed Church formerly had missionary work with the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico; however, they sent liberal missionaries. One even taught Liberation Theology in the Juan Calvino Seminary. The Seminary and the denomination separated and broke away from the Christian Reformed Church, at great cost and sacrifice. Here is your opportunity to make amends for doing this to them. You can now be a great help to them, by taking over this Missionary Field, building on it, and building and establishing a Presbytery, in this part of Mexico - the Monterrey area.

Please very prayerfully take this into most earnest consideration. My wife, Trudy, and I are getting older, which makes this opportunity possible and

available. We rejoice over your organization, and we pray for our Lord's riches blessings for you.

Yours in Our Lord's Service,
Rev. John A. Tucker, D. D.

OVERTURES (Corrected)

Overture 1: Ecumenical Relationships

Classis Midwest overtures synod to pursue the establishment of ecumenical relations with the following ecclesiastical federations:

1. The Canadian Reformed Churches
2. The Free Reformed Churches
3. The Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches
4. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church
5. The Presbyterian Church in America
6. The Protestant Reformed Churches
7. The Reformed Church in the United States
8. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

Grounds:

1. The Lord calls us to manifest visibly our spiritual unity with congregations sharing our common bond of faith. Furthermore, this unity should strive for the mutual edification of member congregations as well as the development of an effective witness to the world. (John 17:20-23; I Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:1-6; 4:11-16; Philippians 2:1-2).
2. Our Reformed confessions reflect the ancient ecumenical creeds concerning

"one holy catholic and apostolic Church." (Belgic Confession, Articles 27, 28, and 29; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

3. By engaging in ecumenical relations, as defined in Articles 33, 34, and 35 of the Church Order, we intend to accomplish the following:

- a. To advise one another regarding questions and problems of import pertaining to the spiritual welfare and the Scriptural government of the churches;
- b. To confer together, as far as advisability or necessity may require, regarding missionary work of the churches at home and abroad;
- c. To strive to attain a common course of action with respect to common problems; likewise to issue joint resolutions regarding movements, practices or dangers, when joint statements are deemed necessary;
- d. To give united testimony to our common Reformed faith in the midst of a world living in error and groping in darkness, particularly to the many churches which have so lamentably departed from the truth of God's Holy Word, and which are in dire need of a return to the faith of the fathers;
- e. To express our precious unity in Christ and our oneness as Reformed churches, though scattered over the earth. (Cf. Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, 1963, p. 130.)

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier, clerk

Overture 2: Church Order--Use "Concurring" before "Advice"

Classis West overtures synod to amend each article in which it is required that the "advice" of an assembly be sought (e.g. 4,

6, 9, 21, 34, and 59), as

follows: by adding the "concurring" before "advice," making the usage throughout the church order consistent, and indicating more clearly what is meant by the term, advice.

Ground: This is one of the commitments that the member congregations make to one another, that these are matters in which we will not act without the agreement of our sister congregations. "The particular churches, united in federative bonds according to their intrinsic unity in Christ and the injunctions and examples of Holy Writ, have agreed to abide by the opinion of the majority, unless, to the mind of the church or consistory abide by the opinion of the majority is clearly a violation of God's Word and our basis of union. In that case, the way of protest and appeal is open . . ." (Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Revised Church Order Commentary*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967, p. 318).

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 3: Church Order--Headings and Table of Contents

Classis West overtures synod to identify each article of the Church Order with a heading/title and to provide a table of contents (e.g. Canadian Reformed Church).

Ground: User friendly and ease to access.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen,
clerk

Overture 4: Church Order--Article 2

Classis West overtures synod to add the following statement to the end of [Article 2](#): "All his work shall be supervised and regulated by the Consistory."

Grounds:

1. Although the above addition may be taken for granted perhaps, it is not anywhere clearly spelled out.
2. This addition prevents the Minister from engaging in ministry-related work outside of his local church without approval of his consistory. (For example: preaching in other churches, doing community-related work, etc.)

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 5: Church Order--Article 6

Classis West overtures synod to delete the provision for the approbation by members of the calling church, after the name of the minister has been announced for two successive Sundays and no lawful objection has arisen.

Ground: [Article 6](#) seems to preserve a procedure found in Article 4 of both the Dort Church Order and the 1914 CRC Church Order. However, those church orders envision the possibility of a consistory extending a call without having

a congregational vote. Since, in the procedure outlined in [Article 6](#), the advice of the congregation in step three is redundant.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 6: Church Order--Article 7

Classis West overtures synod to make the following change to [Article 7](#) of Church Order: Replace the sentence "He shall consider a call only with consent of his current council," with "Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current council regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent."

Grounds:

1. The present reading of this article gives the impression that a minister may not even consider a call without the consent of his current consistory. This would be unjust both for the minister and for the church which is extending the call.
2. The present requirement is over restrictive and may prevent the legitimate needs of vacant congregations from being met.
3. The suggested replacement sufficiently safeguards the interests of the ministers' present congregation, while leaving the minister private freedom in which to consider the call.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 7: Church Order--Article 13

Classis West overtures synod that [Article 13](#) be revised to include the following list of duties:

1. "To maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments"
2. "Supervise the doctrine and conduct of the Minister of the Word"
3. "Actively promote the work of evangelism and missions"

Grounds:

1. These duties (1, 2, 3) are consistent with the nature of the office.
2. These duties (1, 2) are specified in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 8: Church Order--Article 18

Classis West overtures synod to provide consistency of wording. In [Article 18](#) we use the terms "president" and "vice-president," and then in

[Article 25](#) we use the term "chairman."

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 9: Church Order--Articles 20 and 21

Classis West overtures synod to add the following sentence after the first sentence in [Article 20](#): "In smaller churches, deacons may be members of consistory."

In [Article 22](#), replace the sentence: "when deacons meet together with the consistory, the body is referred to as the council," with "In churches where the deacons are not members of the consistory, the joint body of consistory and deacons is referred to as the council."

Grounds:

1. Smaller churches will not always find it necessary or helpful to have separate meetings of the consistory and council.
2. Smaller consistories will especially benefit from having the deacons contribute their wisdom at consistory meetings.
3. Such changes to our Church Order would be consistent with our historic practice.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 10: Church Order--Article 25

A. Classis West overtures synod to replace in the first sentence the "six" with "twelve."

Grounds:

1. Not every classis will find it necessary or feasible to meet twice a year.
2. Such change would still allow for a classis to meet regularly every six months.

B. Classis West further overtures synod to add the following sentence immediately after the first sentence: "If three consistories in the classis deem it necessary that a classis meet earlier than the regular time determined, the consistory charged with convening the meeting shall determine when and where the meeting is to occur."

Ground: This change would allow for earlier meetings, should an urgent need arise.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 11: Church Order--Article 26

Classis West overtures synod to change the opening sentence to read "each consistory of the Classis shall invite two experienced office-bearers appointed by classis, either two . . ."

Grounds:

1. The purpose of the visit is not only to exhort the office-bearers of the local church, but also to satisfy the classis that each church is living according to our agreement.
2. For classis to appoint these visitors is not high-handed or hierarchical, but it does prevent local church councils from choosing visitors according to their preferences who would be unlikely to challenge any weaknesses.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 12: Church Order--Article 29

Classis West overtures synod to amend [Article 29](#) as follows: "A church may withdraw from the federation after she has availed herself of all the avenues of appeal, taken all reasonable measures to warn her sister churches of any disobedience in the federation which led to her decision to leave, and informed her sister churches of her intent to leave."

Grounds:

1. We have federated together out of love for one another, and this love obliges us to exhaust every reasonable means for preserving and restoring unity before we break the bonds of the federation.
2. Our love for one another also obliges churches who feel it necessary to leave the federation for reasons of deformation or disobedience to warn their sister churches of the danger before they leave the federation.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 13: Church Order--Article 31

Classis West overtures synod to delete the last sentence of [Article 31](#) of the Church Order, and replace it with the following: "Any such church shall be provisionally accepted into membership in the federation by the classis, pending ratification by the following synod."

Grounds:

1. According to [Article 8](#) of the Church Order, and [Appendix 4 \(Guidelines for a Colloquium Doctum\)](#), classis has the responsibility to examine such ministers and to declare them eligible for call. As it now stands, Article 31 gives the responsibility of examination to the classis, but does not allow it to accept such church/minister into the federation. This appears to be somewhat ambiguous. To clear matters up and provide consistency in our rules, classis should be able to provisionally accept such congregations and/or ministers until ratified by the following synod.
2. According to the present reading of [Article 31](#), a minister and/or congregation desiring to join the federation could be required to wait for three years before being admitted, since synod will ordinarily meet every three years.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 14: Church Order--Article 32

Classis West overtures synod to delete most of the article. Change to "Each congregation shall have exclusive control over all of its temporalities, nor shall the exercise of its property right through the decisions of its consistory be subject to the supervision of the broader assemblies nor shall the broader assemblies have the right to revise those decisions."

Grounds:

1. There is a redundancy in the original that is reactionary and unnecessary.
2. To simplify the document wherever possible makes it more readable in the whole.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 15: Church Order--Article 33

Classis West overtures synod to make the following change in [Article 33](#) of the Church Order. That the second sentence in [Article 33](#) be changed to read: "A church shall keep classis informed of such ecumenical relations, thereby honoring our federative bond."

Grounds:

1. Replacing "must" (as in churches must seek and pursue) with "shall" is consistent with the usage of the rest of the Church Order.
2. While it is good to seek the advice of classis regarding ecumenical relations, nevertheless, the present reading is too restrictive in not allowing for such relations until after the advice of classis is sought.
3. Matters such as pulpit exchange, table fellowship and membership transfer are the sole prerogative of the consistory. Classis need not give its prior approval in such matters.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 16: Church Order--Article 34

Classis West overtures synod that the second sentence in [Article 34](#) be changed to read "The classis shall keep synod informed of such ecumenical relations, thereby honoring our federative bond."

Grounds:

1. As it now stands, a classis might have to wait a total of three years before being able to initiate ecumenical relations which it deems necessary and beneficial.
2. The present wording of these articles tends in the direction of hierarchy-rule from the top down.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 17: Church Order--Article 37

Classis West overtures synod to change the second half to read: "Namely: that the preaching of the Word have the central place, that confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered."

Grounds:

1. In the context in which we live, there is a collapsing of worship into praise.
2. We wish to make clear that preaching and hearing the Word of God is to be central.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 18: Church Order--Article 41

Classis West overtures synod to add to [Article 41](#) the wording "with the use of the appropriate liturgical forms," so that it reads: "Adults who have not been baptized shall receive holy baptism upon public profession of faith, with the use of the appropriate liturgical forms, and be thus accepted as members."

Grounds:

1. This would ensure a greater consistency in usage as also used in Articles 12, 40, 42, and 44.
 2. This also simply guards for proper practices of adult baptism in the public worship services.
- Classis West
Dick Vander Molen, clerk

**Overture 19: Church
Order--Article 42**

Classis West overtures synod to delete: "And shall be obliged to preserve in the fellowship of the church not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper," and to add "Interviewed to the satisfaction of the consistory both as to their doctrine and godly walk of life and their public profession . . ."

Grounds:

1. The last sentence again is redundant, it is covered in the forms for membership.
2. There is a temptation to avoid hard questions regarding a Christian walk of life. There are conservative Reformed Churches that do avoid it. There is also a resistance on the part of people to be questioned on these things. We should stress that this is absolutely necessary as part of the interview since we receive members from each other's churches without examination.

Classis West
Dick Vander Molen, clerk

**Overture 20: Church
Order--Article 44**

A. Classis West overtures synod to change to "shall ordinarily administer the Lord's Supper at least every three...."

Grounds:

1. It is very possible that a consistory might wish to suspend the celebration of the Sacrament due to a concern rising shortly before the scheduled use leaving too little time to deal with the matter.
2. Christ only says "Do this as often as ye do it."

B. Classis West further overtures synod to delete: "The administration of the Lord's Supper shall ordinarily be preceded by a preparatory sermon and followed by an applicatory sermon."

Ground: It is overly prescriptive.

Classis West
Dick Vander Molen, clerk

**Overture 21: Church
Order--Article 45**

Classis West overtures synod to change this article to read as follows drawing on the present CRC Church Order Article 73: "In obedience to Christ's great commission, the churches must seek to bring the gospel to all men at home and abroad, bringing them into fellowship with Christ and His church and teaching them to obey all things whatsoever He has commanded us.

In fulfilling this mandate, each council shall stimulate the members of the congregation to confess Christ in word and serve Him in deed and to support the work of home and foreign missions by their interest, prayers and gifts.

Where this task is being carried out beyond the field of an organized church, it is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart for this labor, who are called, supported and supervised by their consistories.

The churches should assist one another in the support of their missionaries."

Grounds:

1. The original article does not do justice to the important place that the members of the congregation have in bringing the lost to the knowledge of the truth (Ephesians 4:11-13).
2. It must be the explicit purpose of the consistory to stir up the congregation to works that adorn the gospel of salvation and bring the lost to hear it proclaimed.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 22: Church Order--Articles 53, 54, and 57

Classis West overtures synod to amend the fifth sentence of [Article 53](#) as follows: "in the second, the consistory shall inform classis, for the purpose of discussion, before proceeding, where upon His name will be mentioned."

[Article 54](#) to be amended as follows: "The consistory shall inform classis for the purpose of discussion before proceeding to . . ."

Further, that [Article 57](#) be amended in a similar fashion, namely, "The church shall inform classis, for the purpose of discussion, before proceeding to such exclusion."

Grounds:

1. The exercise of the key of discipline is given by the Lord Jesus to the elders of the local church, and they alone are responsible to Him for its use in the local church (Matthew 18:18, Acts 20:28).
2. The amendment safeguards the concern of the churches for mutual accountability and unity.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 23: Guidelines for Colloquium Doctum

Classis West overtures synod to add the following procedure to the [guidelines for a colloquium doctum \(Appendix 4 to the Church Order\)](#). "The calling consistory must request letters of reference from the two churches served by the examinee prior to his relationship with the calling consistory (or the one church, should the examinee have served as pastor in only one church). The calling consistory will see to it that these letters are distributed among the churches of classis prior to the colloquium doctum."

Ground: Letters of reference will give the classis a perspective on how the examinee has fulfilled his office in the past, and thus they can help the classis determine the examinee's ministerial competence.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 24: Synodical Delegate Expense

Classis West overtures synod that delegates' expenses to synod meetings might be pooled and divided equitably among the member churches.

Grounds:

1. [Article 27](#) of the Church Order requires that each consistory in the federation send two delegates to each synod meeting. However, this can be

difficult for the smaller and more distant churches, as they cannot always afford the expenses for two delegates. Sharing the expenses will help to insure that all member churches will be able to fulfill the requirements of this Church Order article.

2. Assisting one another in this matter would be consistent with the spirit of generosity encouraged in Scripture. "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality, as it is written: 'he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little'" (II Corinthians 8:13-15).

3. The churches are already asked to contribute money for meeting expenses. Sharing the other costs would simply be a recognition that these costs are also part of the meeting expenses.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 25: Revenue Canada

Classis West overtures synod to appoint a committee to consult with Revenue Canada regarding the obtaining of a Canadian tax number for organizations which had their beginnings in the last couple of decades, and also to discuss rules governing the taking of offerings for worthy, non-profit agencies which have no Canadian tax number.

Grounds:

1. It appears well-nigh impossible to satisfy the requirements of Revenue Canada in trying to obtain a Canadian tax number for a variety of causes.

2. When Revenue Canada has the right to tell churches for which agencies they may or may not take collections for, it seems that the government is over-stepping its lawful authority.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 26: Psalter Hymnal

Classis West overtures synod to initiate the process of producing a Psalter Hymnal for the United Reformed Churches in North America, by appointing a committee.

Grounds:

1. The revision of certain songs, and the addition of others, can lead to more meaningful worship, especially for the youth of our churches.

2. Accepted liturgical forms can be included in such a Psalter Hymnal.

3. A common Psalter Hymnal would promote unity among the churches of our federation.

4. The Psalter Hymnal presently in use in the majority of our churches is out of print.

5. Because the process of producing a Psalter Hymnal is lengthy, it would be wise to begin this process as soon as possible.

Classis West

Dick Vander Molen, clerk

Overture 27: Church Order--Article 44

The Consistory of Trinity Reformed Church in Lethbridge overtures the synod to add the following to [Article 44](#) of the Church Order: "In special circumstances the Lord's Supper may be administered to members who are confined to institutions of mercy, e.g. hospitals, nursing homes, etc., provided at least one elder is present at such occasions."

Grounds:

1. This would allow members who by reason of long-term illness or disability are unable to attend worship services in church, to celebrate the Lord's Supper from time to time.
2. Several churches already have had this practice for some time. However, this would now be in conflict with the present reading of Article 44 of the Church Order.

Consistory of Trinity Reformed Church, Lethbridge, AB

Dick Vander Molen,
clerk

NOTE: This overture was submitted to Classis West but was not adopted.

Overture 28: Church Order--Article 46

The Consistory of Trinity Reformed Church in Lethbridge overtures synod to clarify [Article 46](#) of the Church Order.

Ground: As it now stands, the phrase "under the regulation of the consistory," could be taken to mean that the marriage must take place in an official worship service, whereas it should mean that the consistory must approve the marriages that take place in the congregation. The latter is proper, the former optional at best.

Consistory of Trinity Reformed Church, Lethbridge, AB

Dick Vander Molen,
clerk

NOTE: This overture was submitted to Classis West but was not adopted.

Overture 29: Continue to Use the 1934 Church Order

Classis East overtures synod that for constitutional, procedural and historical considerations continue to use the Church Order of 1934 until such time as a new Church Order has been reviewed, examined and fully completed.

Grounds:

1. Constitutional: A constitution or rules of synodical procedures must be in place before overtures can be dealt with properly. This would include grounds for decisions rendered that are contrary to decisions made previously.

2. Procedural:

A) According to the decisions made at the founding meeting of the Independent Reformed Churches held November 15-16, 1995 in Article VII, "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." There is no overture from the churches adopting the "new" church order and replacing the 1934 Church Order. As such, then, the 1934 Church Order is the adopted Church Order to be used by the Churches until the work has been completed with regard to the "new" church order has been overturned and adopted by the churches.

B) Adopting the "new" church order contradicts a

[decision made on October 2,](#)

[1996 "to continue with the 1934 Church Order for the time being while work continues on the new proposed church order".](#) The work on the new church order has not been completed.

C) The First Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America held October 1 - 2, 1996, in fact, permitted an undelegated person, all-be-it spokesman of the Church Order Committee, to make a [recommendation rather than an overture \(that he and the committee he represents could not make\)](#) to make the "new" church order as part of the basis for its federation.

D) Sufficient time, for study and preparation, was not allotted to each and every church prior to the First Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America held October 1 - 2, 1996 [as requested, in particular, by the Reformed Church of Telkwa.](#)

E) Synodical decisions are binding unless proven with error according to God's Holy Word.

3. Historical Reference: Approximately 50 years were required to complete the Church Order adopted at the Synod of 1618-1619. As well, the Church Orders of 1914 and 1934 though very similar to the Church Order of 1618-1619, also required years to complete. Currently a church order "in the workings" in the Netherlands by various denominations has been given a time frame of 15 years to complete.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

Footnote from Grace Orthodox Reformed Church, Clinton, ON:

Further re: this overture sent to Classis East by the Grace Orthodox Reformed Church at Clinton, Ontario, the council of the Grace Orthodox Reformed Church at Clinton, Ontario would like to stress the fact that in the effort to seek closer ties and relationships with other reformed federations that have adopted the 1934 church Order or amended versions thereof, the Federation of United Reformed Churches would be in a much stronger position to promote unity by provisionally adopting the 1934 Church Order until such a time as a new church order has been completed. This would also permit this federation to more effectively deal with the numerous overtures submitted to the Synod of 1997 regarding the church order. For example, this would permit the federation to address the articles concerning ecumenical relations (which would benefit from a more clear definition) and ecclesiastical relations (which is not currently mentioned) with churches of other like minded federations.

Council of the Orthodox Reformed Church, Clinton, Ontario

R. Lubbers, Clerk

Done in Council

July 29, 1997

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 30: Appoint Committees of Pre-advice on the Church Order

Classis East overtures synod that for the procedural purposes of our deliberation concerning the Church Order, divide the delegated body into four advisory committees. Each committee would consider the overtures and materials submitted concerning the Church Order according to the Church Order's own divisions (The Offices of the Church, Articles 1-14; The Assemblies of the Church, Articles 15-35; The Functions and Tasks of the Church, Articles 36-48; and Ecclesiastical Discipline, Articles 49-64). Thereafter, the body as a whole would deal seriatim with each church order article calling for attention.

Grounds:

1. This procedure will ensure that adequate discussion is given to the entire Church Order.
2. This procedure will ensure an orderly way of discussing the Church Order.

3. Committees of pre-advice (in this case) will help structure our deliberations, discussion, debate and decisions.

Classis East
Charles Paas,
clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 31: Church Order--Article 10

Classis East overtures synod to delete the last sentence (of [Article 10](#) of the "new Proposed Church Order under discussion") starting with "Those who . . ." and replace with "Those who have been granted Emeritus as Ministers of the Word, shall retain their ministerial credentials as Minister of the Word and Sacrament. His ministerial credentials shall be placed in trust with the Church of which he is or will become a member."

Grounds:

1. An Emeritus Minister has not necessarily become inactive. The Bible does not teach retirement.
2. The Church of Christ does not operate under titles and dignity. The dignity of a minister is not different or higher than that of an elder or deacon, or organist or caretaker of a church. Remembering that in Christ Jesus and that, by grace alone, through His redemptive work, as the Bible teaches, we are all equal in dignity but have different offices or callings.
3. By changing the last sentence in Article 10 it will read with much more honor and edification with reference to the previous sentence.

Classis East
Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 32 Church Order--Article 24

Classis East overtures synod to amend [Article 24](#) to indicate matters that have bearing on the entire federation, may be sent directly to the synod meeting or, that this article be clarified to explain why all matters must be considered by classis before being considered by synod.

Grounds:

1. With the formation of our new federation, where each church is delegated to the synodical meeting, it would seem that matters that pertain to the whole federation should be sent directly to the federation meeting.
2. Classis need only deal with matters that deal with the local region.

Classis East
Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 33: Church Order--Introduction

Classis East overtures synod that the words "for the sake of the purity of doctrine and the holiness of life" be added to the fourth sentence so that it reads, "This headship is exercised in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the God-ordained offices, for the sake of the purity of doctrine and the holiness of life."

Grounds:

1. The confessional nature of the Introduction is enhanced in its clarity when the purpose of the church offices is included, as is also the case partly in the Church Order of Dort and its English version of 1914 in Article 1.

2. Scripture and the Reformed Confessions teach that "purity in doctrine" and "holiness of life" are essential ingredients in a summary introduction of the purpose of church offices: Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; Titus 2:1-15; Heidelberg Catechism, Answers 82, 83, 84, 85; Belgic Confession, Articles 30, 31, 32; Conclusion of the Canons of Dort.

Classis East
Charles Paas, clerk
NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 34: Church Order--Introduction

Classis East overtures synod that the wording of the division of the subject matter be changed to reflect greater consistency of expression in this way:

I.

The Offices of the Church

II. The Assemblies of the Church

III. The Functions

and Tasks of the Church

IV. The Discipline of the Church

Ground: Currently divisions I and III indicate the singular of "of the church," while division II employs the plural "of the churches." Division IV uses the adjective "ecclesiastical" meaning churchly, or pertaining to the church. We propose to eliminate possible imprecision, ambiguity, and confusion by applying the same possessive designation to all divisions.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 35: Church Order--Article 4

Classis East overtures synod that the words "and of the deputies of synod" be included in the last sentence, so that it reads, "upon sustaining this exam in the presence of his Consistory and with the concurring advice of the delegates to this meeting of classis, and of the deputies of synod, his Consistory shall declare him a candidate for the office of minister of the Word."

Grounds:

1. We confess that the church of the Lord is "a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith," Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 54. Since the candidates will serve all the churches of the federation, we contend that all the churches need to be present, which is best accomplished by deputies of synod.
2. The "[Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government](#)" of the church note that "even though the churches stand distinctly next to one another, they do not thereby stand disconnectedly alongside one another," ([Principle 7](#)). [Principle 8](#) states "the exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the unity of faith and confession." We contend that these principles suggest that all the churches in appropriate fashion need to have an input in the examination of future ministers, and ever since the Order of Dort deputies of synod have served in that need.

Classis East
Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 36: Church Order--Article 6

Classis East overtures synod that the words "and the concurring advice of the deputies of synod" be included in item two, so that it would read, "Second, the examination of both doctrine and life, which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the delegates to the classis of which the calling church is a participant, and the concurring advice of the deputies of synod, according to the regulations adopted by the federation."

Grounds:

1. We confess that the church of the Lord is "a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith," Heidelberg Catechism, Answer 54. Since the candidates will serve all the churches of the federation, we contend that all the churches need to be present, which is best accomplished by deputies of synod.
2. The "[Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government](#)" of the church note that "even though the churches stand distinctly next to one another, they do not thereby stand disconnectedly alongside one another," ([Principle 7](#)). [Principle 8](#) states "the exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the unity of faith and confession." We contend that these principles suggest that all the churches in appropriate fashion need to have an input in the examination of future ministers, and ever since the Order of Dort deputies of synod have served in that need.

Classis East
Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 37: Church Order--Article 13

Classis East overtures synod that the words "in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced," be added to the first sentence. It would then read, "The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of ruling the Church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced."

Grounds:

1. The confessional nature of the Introduction is enhanced in its clarity when the purpose of the church offices is included, as is also the case partly in the Church Order of Dort and its English version of 1914 in Article 1.
2. Scripture and the Reformed Confessions teach that "purity in doctrine" and "holiness of life" are essential ingredients in a summary introduction of the purpose of church offices: Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; Titus 2:1-15; Heidelberg Catechism, Answers 82, 83, 84, 85; Belgic Confession, Articles 30, 31, 32; Conclusion of the Canons of Dort.

Classis East
Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East

Overture 38: Church Order--Article 13

Classis East overtures synod that the third sentence of [Article 13](#) be altered and expanded to read: "In exercising the oversight over Christ's church, together with the minister(s) of the Word, the elders shall faithfully visit the church members, and according to their needs shall comfort, instruct, and admonish them with the Word of God. They shall exercise Christian discipline according to the command of Christ, seeing to it that the sacraments are not profaned. The elders shall also engage in annual family visits, supervise the catechism instruction by the minister(s) of the Word, assisting him as is needed, in particular with counsel and advice. They shall promote covenantal, God-centered schooling for the youth of the church, and ensure that everything is done decently and in good order."

Grounds:

1. Re-arranging and expanding the elders' mandate as based on "the principles of Scripture," as we propose, brings the primary tasks in serving as a shepherd, more to the forefront (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Peter 5:2,3). In supervising the congregation, the elders and minister(s) of the Word are co-laborers (1 Timothy 5:17; Form for Ordination).
2. Maintaining the sanctity of the sacraments is a significant part of the elders' mandate and task, 1 Corinthians 10:21; Colossians 2:6-23; Heidelberg Catechism, Answers 82, 83; Belgic Confession 29.
3. One of the important tasks of the minister of the Word is "catechizing the youth" (Article 2), which is not directly part of the proper mandate of the elders. The minister regularly preaches the material of the Catechism, and by virtue of his education and experience is singularly qualified for this crucially significant task (John 21:15; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 5:17). In our view the elders should teach catechism only when special needs arise, and then only for a limited period of time.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 39: Church Order--Article 13

Classis East overtures synod:

(a) to add to [Article 13](#) the words: "continuing in prayer," so that the article reads: "The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of continuing in prayer, ruling the Church of Christ. . . ."

(b) to add to [Article 13](#): "to promote the work of evangelism," so that the article reads: ". . . to engage in family visiting, to promote the work of evangelism, to exercise discipline. . . ."

Ground: Promoting the work of evangelism belongs to the essence of the elders' work.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 40: Church Order--Article 14

Classis East overtures synod that the following sentence be inserted and included between the first and second sentences of [Article](#)

[14](#): "The duties

belonging to the office of deacon also include promoting with Word and deed the unity and fellowship in the Holy Spirit which the congregation enjoys at the Table of the Lord." Thus it would be placed between ". . . receive the gifts of Christ's mercy." and "Needs of those outside the congregation . . ."

Ground: In 1995 the Alliance of Reformed Churches adopted the recommendation of the study committee of "The Office of Deacon" which stated, "That in formulating and adopting a Church Order Article to frame a task description for the office of deacon, the contents of this Report be considered and implemented." Minutes, Article XX. Since the Report was produced by four member churches of the federation, and since that report contains the proposed sentence, we request now that it be included.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 41: Church Order--Article 14

Classis East overtures synod

(a) to add to Article 14 the words: "continuing in prayer," so that the article reads: "The duties belong to the office of deacon consist of continuing in prayer, supervising the work . . ."

(b) to change the words "charity among" to "Christian mercy in," so that the article reads: ". . . supervising the works of Christian mercy in the congregation . . ."

Ground: The word "charity" has taken on a distinct negative connotation in today's society.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 42: Church Order--Article 20

Classis East overtures synod that the second sentence, beginning with "The Consistory is the only assembly..." be deleted and replaced with these words: "The Consistory receives the authority and mandate to be shepherds of God's flock under their care from the Word of God, and the office-bearers owe their final accountability to the Chief Shepherd who alone rewards 'the crown of glory that will never fade away' (1 Peter 5:4)."

Ground: The task description of the elders in Scripture contains these words, "Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock," 1 Peter 5:3. We believe that the sentence we ask to be removed tends to stress authority at the expense of service with such clauses as "direct authority within the congregation," "authority directly from Christ," and "directly accountable to Christ," in stark contrast with 1 Peter 5:1-4.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 43: Church Order--Article 28

Classis East overtures synod that beginning with the third sentence, "The decisions of a broader assembly . . ." the remainder of [Article 28](#) be deleted and replaced with: "The decisions of a broader assembly are to be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order."

Grounds:

1. We contend that the subject of appeals and the reception of decisions of broader assemblies has sufficient substance to be considered in one article, without including also the churches' withdrawing from the federation, which is better treated in a separate and subsequent article.
2. The formulation ". . . insofar as they agree with the Word of God . . ." raises the potential of members and churches submitting with mental reservations, producing undesirable and unscriptural consequences, as in the history of the churches this has indeed happened in the Netherlands when in 1816 the Dutch Reformed Church adopted new Regulation (Algemeen Reglement), which allowed the churches to accept the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order "insofar as they agree with the Word of God." The resultant turbulence produced the secession of 1834.
3. Since the unity and the nature of the unity of the federation are at stake in this article, we propose to return to the formulation of the Order of Dort, rather than proceed with the questionable direction of the current wording. We call to mind that when Article 31 (which [Article 28](#) replaces) was questioned in the Dutch churches when a doctrinal disagreement was discussed during the Second World War, the result was the Liberation (Vrijmaking) of 1944. We should be extremely cautious to change the content of this article.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 44: Church Order--Article 29

Classis East overtures synod that the wording of [Article 29](#) be replaced with the following: "Having availed themselves of the avenues of appeal, a consistory or church may withdraw from the federation only when they are convinced that the decisions or actions in question are in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order, and when they are also convinced that the federation exhibits the marks of the false church. (Belgic Confession Article 29)."

Grounds:

1. The rather cavalier withdrawal formula prescribed in articles [28](#) and [29](#) in our view is at variance with the Scriptures and the Confessions. We confess that the Church of Christ is "a holy congregation of true Christian believers" (Belgic Confession, Article 27), and "that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it . . ." (Belgic Confession, Article 28). We also confess that Christ's Church is "the true Church . . . from which no man has a right to separate himself" (Belgic Confession, Article 29). Some Scriptural references in this matter are Psalm 87; Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; Ephesians 4:3-5 and Colossians 1:18.
2. We contend that in withdrawing from the Church the only Scriptural and Confessional reasons that are valid, are those which adduce that the marks of the false church have become apparent. Thus we confess: "As for the false Church, it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ" (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 45: Church Order--Article 59

Classis East overtures synod that the current wording of [Article 59](#) be entirely replaced with the following: "When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed a public or gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions of the Consistory, he shall be suspended from his office by his own Consistory with the concurring advice of the consistories of two neighboring churches. Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot continue in office, he shall be deposed by his Consistory with the concurring advice of classis, and in the case of a minister, also with the concurring advice of the deputies of synod."

Grounds:

1. The use of the word "only" four times in so short and sensitive an article may indicate a reactionary spirit, which should be avoided.
2. We refer to the grounds of [Overture 35](#), and to the [Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government](#), "Member churches meet together in consultation to guard against human imperfections and to benefit from the wisdom of a multitude of counselors . . .," [Principle 9](#).

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 46: Report: The Office of Deacon in the Churches

Classis East overtures synod to recommend to the churches for study and implementation the [report on The Office of Deacon in the Churches](#) as presented by a study committee to the ARC meeting in 1995, and that synod take steps to make this report available in booklet format.

Ground: The acquaintance with and the availability of this report will assist the deacons in the churches to understand more clearly the Scriptural foundation, the confessional description, and the contemporary need for the work of the deacons.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This report is [printed in its entirety](#) on pages 68-79 of this document.

Overture 47: Study Desirability and Feasibility of Starting A Church Periodical

Classis East overtures synod to appoint a number of churches or persons to study the desirability and feasibility of starting a church magazine or periodical, and to pay particular attention to:

- i. the need to develop greater unity and familiarity among our churches,
- ii. the need to have a forum for developing greater doctrinal and practical uniformity among the churches and members.

Ground: As a young federation the churches need to pursue seriously the Scriptural demand for fellowship and ecclesiastical unity, and also to pursue the confessional requirement for doctrinal conformity, as well as the quest to obtain uniformity in observing the Church Order.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 48: Church Order--Article 28

Classis East overtures synod to amend Church Order [Article 28](#) by inserting the words "having sustained a 2/3 majority vote" after the words "The decisions of a broader assembly." The sentence would then read: "The decisions of a broader assembly, having sustained a 2/3 majority vote, are to be received with respect and submission insofar as they agree with the Word of God, without which they are not binding."

Grounds:

1. The Bible calls us to unity in our churches. (Psalm 133:1; John 17:23; Romans 15:5; Philippians 2:2; Ephesians 4:3,13; Colossians 3:14) We must strive for unity in our deliberations, reasoning with one another with open Bibles, trusting in God to bring consensus. A simple majority promotes disunity.
2. We have seen the need to safeguard our Church Order by requiring a 2/3 majority vote and subsequent 2/3 ratification for any future changes. If a decision of classis or synod cannot sustain a 2/3 majority vote then it should not be adopted for the same reasons.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 49: Church Order--Article 53

Classis East overtures synod to amend [Article 53](#) by removing the following:

"This shall be done in three steps. In the first the name of the sinner need not be mentioned, that he be somewhat spared. In the second, the consistory shall seek the advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon his name shall be mentioned. In the third."

Grounds:

1. Discipline is clearly the task of the local church. The word "church" in Matthew 18:17 means the local congregation.
2. Due to the very real possibility of civil action it is very dangerous to prescribe procedures (i.e.: three steps) that do not exist in Scripture. The only defense in the event civil action is brought against a council as result of church discipline is that "We were following the procedure laid down in Scripture." Therefore we must ensure that this article complies with what the Scriptures teach.
3. [Article 54](#) requires that the advice of classis be sought before proceeding to the extreme step.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 50: Guidelines for a Candidacy Examination

Classis East overtures synod to amend [Appendix 2 -- Guideline for a Candidacy Exam, point 1.b. of the Church Order](#) by deletion of this point.

Grounds:

1. A requirement for a medical certificate of good health is totally irrelevant to the person's ability or competency as a minister of the Word. The health requirement should be one of good spiritual and mental health, in which case this is to be determined by process of the candidacy exam. Those who have physical disabilities or handicaps are not necessarily incapable of performing the tasks required for ministry; in fact, there have in past been ministers with handicaps who have been a great asset to God's church within their calling. A physical disability, when handled with true faith in God, can be a very real witness of true Christian character and an example to others. Those who have never faced difficult trials in life and learned to overcome them with thankfulness and praise to the Lord may be less suitable for the ministry than those who have.
2. Such a requirement can be viewed as being truly discriminatory, and there are no Biblical grounds for such a requirement. This can also be viewed as being discriminatory according to the Canadian Charter of Rights.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 51: Guidelines for a Candidacy Examination

Classis East overtures synod to amend [point 1.c. of Appendix 2 ---Guidelines for a Candidacy Exam](#), by substituting it with the following: C. A document certifying a thoroughly Reformed theological education."

Grounds:

1. In the past, some candidates have undergone academic training through programs such as Parsonage Training programs. They have been examined and were found fit for the ministry.
2. After the candidate has completed academic training under the watchful eyes of his teachers and mentors, the candidacy exam itself is designed to fully test his competency. The clause as written would exclude many competent men who already have passed candidacy and ordination exams from serving in the ministry.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 52: Guidelines for a Candidacy Examination

Classis East overtures synod to amend [point 1.d. of Appendix 2 -- Guideline for a Candidacy Exam](#), by appending the words "where applicable."

Grounds:

1. In the past, some candidates have undergone academic training through programs such as Parsonage Training programs. They have been examined and were found fit for the ministry.
2. After the candidate has completed academic training under the watchful eyes of his teachers and mentors, the candidacy exam itself is designed to fully test his competency. The clause as written would exclude many competent men who already have passed candidacy and ordination exams from serving in the ministry.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 53: Fraternal Delegates to the Alliance of Reformed Churches

Classis East overtures synod to send two fraternal delegates representing our churches to the Alliance of Reformed Churches at its meeting due to convene this fall of 1997.

Grounds:

1. John 17:11, 23; Ephesians 4:3 all speak of the need for the body of Christ to be unified. Our sending delegates is an action of seeking unity.
2. It would be good to have delegates from our federation there to field question re: issues that concern URCNA that may be raised at the ARC meeting.
3. Part of the discussions at ARC will be re: church order issues. It may be that as they discuss these issues that we may hear something that will improve our church order so it is even more of a benefit to the churches and to God's glory as our own [Article 65](#) says.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 54: Church Order--Article 12

Introduction

When [Article 9](#) prescribes that "a minister of the Word is bound to the services of the church for life . . ." and [Article 12](#) prescribes that

"elders and deacons shall be elected to a definite term of service . . ." and, when [Article 16](#) requires the "laying on of hands" for the ordination of ministers, but [Article 12](#) does not so specify for the ordination of elders and deacons--then the Church Order,

1. introduces a distinction between the office of the elder--which is understood to be for a limited time--and that of the minister--which is understood to be for life--that has no basis in Scripture;
2. legislates for the churches what rightly belongs to the authority of a consistory;
3. and aids and abets the danger that some office bearers--ministers--lord it over other office bearers--the elders.

Therefore, Classis East overtures synod to change the reading of [Article 12](#) to read: "Those called to the office of elder and of deacon shall be called to and hold office for a term specified by the consistory of the congregation. Upon subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity, by signing the Form of Subscription, they shall be ordained with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. The public ordination before the congregation shall take place with appropriate instructions, admonitions, prayers and the laying on of hands by the elders and minister(s) of the congregation."

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 55: Church Order--Add an Article In Section I, "The Offices of the Church"

Classis East overtures synod to add the following article to the [Church Order](#): "Men who aspire to the office of elder or of deacon must be appropriately trained to fulfil the demands of that office. The training for the specific office is to be conducted by, and is to be under the supervision of the consistory."

Grounds:

1. In his first letter to Timothy, chapter 3:2, Paul specifies that an elder must be "apt to teach." However, one cannot teach what he does not know. (See also Dr. Sittema's article, ad. rem. in Outlook, October 1996.)
2. In his second letter to Timothy, chapter 2:2, Paul instructs Timothy that he is to entrust the Word to faithful men "who will be able to teach others also."
3. Since both elders and deacons are called to minister the Word, it is not too much to ask that they receive some training/instruction re: the demands/requirements of their office. (See [Foundational Principles, Article 13](#)).

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 56: Church Order--Article 26

Classis East overtures synod to delete from [Article 26](#) the following: "either two ministers or a minister and an elder", so that the opening sentence reads: Each consistory of a classis is encouraged to invite (presently reads "shall invite," but see [Overture 57](#)) two experienced office bearers--ministers or elders--to visit the consistory (presently reads "council," but see [Overture 62](#))

once every two years . . ."

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 57: Church Order--Articles 24-27

Introduction:

[Article 24](#) introduces the subject of the power--be it negatively--of the broader assemblies. We believe that such language is misleading.

Classis East therefore overtures synod to change the last sentence of [Article 24](#) to read: "No broader assembly has the authority to depose an office bearer . . ."

Furthermore, [Article 25](#) and [26](#) erroneously use the imperative "shall"--implying that what is regulated in these articles belongs to the power/authority of a classis. To wit: [Article 25](#), second paragraph,

"Furthermore, the classis shall inquire of each consistory . . ."

[Article 26](#),

first sentence, "Each consistory of the classis shall invite . . ."

[Article 26](#),

second sentence, "These visitors shall inquire . . ." (emphasis added)

Since

classis has no such power/authority (see [Article](#)

[20](#)), Classis East overtures the

synod to drop the imperative "shall" in [Article 25](#) and

[26](#), and to alter these

articles as follows:

1. Drop the second paragraph of [Article](#)

[25](#). Its concerns are dealt with in [Article 26](#).

2. Change the first sentence of [Article](#)

[26](#) to read: "Each consistory is a

classis is encouraged to invite two experienced office bearers . . ."

3. Change the second sentence of [Article](#)

[26](#) to read: "These visitors may,

inter alia, speak with the consistory about matters relating to

--faithfulness

in preaching the Word and administering the Sacraments,

--the care of the poor,

--the Christian nurture of the youth, and

--the ministry of the church in

fulfilling her task in evangelism and missions.

Also, Classis East overtures synod to change the last sentence of [Article](#)

[25](#):

"Each classis shall inform the other classes . . ." to read: "Each classis is

encouraged to inform neighboring classes regarding matters . . ."

Also, [Article 27](#) exceeds what a classis may properly regulate when it says:

"Each consistory shall delegate two of its members . . ." It should read: "Each

consistory may delegate . . ." We so request.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without

discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 58: Church Order--Article 3

Classis East overtures to synod add the words "God-fearing" to [Article](#)

[3](#), so

that it reads: "Competent, God-fearing men should be urged . . ."

Ground: The word "competent" by itself fails to express the spiritual

dimension for the qualification required of a student for the ministry.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without

discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 59: Church Order--Add an Article in Section I, "The Offices of the Church"

Since the Churches of the Reformation have always recognized that men who have not pursued the regular course of study for the ministry--but who possess "exceptional gifts of godliness, humility, modesty, common sense, and discretion" (See [Article 8](#), Church Order of Dort)--may, upon examination be

admitted to the gospel ministry, Classis East requests synod to consider whether such an article is required in our Church Order for our Federation of Churches.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 60: Church Order--Article 2

Introduction:

If it is correct that a minister serves the churches for life, and that he may leave the ministry only for weighty reasons, and only upon the approval of his consistory and classis (see [Article 19](#))--which we do not

dispute-- and if it is true that the duties of said minister are such as they are spelled out in [Article 2](#)--with which we wholeheartedly agree!--we believe that it is the better part of wisdom that our Church Order then also articulate that a minister who desires to fulfil his ministry outside of the parish/pulpit may do so only when it has been demonstrated by him/his consistory that such work will allow him to fulfil "the duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word" as summarized in [Article 2](#).

Therefore, Classis East overtures synod to add a second paragraph to [Article 2](#), as follows: A minister of the Word, desiring to accept a call to engage in other than a parish/pulpit ministry, shall do so only upon the concurring advice of his consistory, and only upon it having been demonstrated by him/his consistory to classis/synod that the work he is to engage in will allow him to fulfil the duties belonging to the office of the ministry of the Word, and only upon his consistory thereupon giving its approval. He shall then work under the supervision of his calling Church.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 61: Church Order--Add an Article on Congregational Meetings

Since it is clear from Scripture--(e.g., 1 Peter 5:1-3)--that a consistory may not domineer over the flock, Classis East overtures synod to incorporate into the Church Order an article regulating the calling of a congregational meeting, as follows:

Since the consistory is specifically admonished in Holy Scripture not to domineer over the Flock, (1 Peter 5:1-3) it shall call a congregational meeting, of members in good and regular standing, at least once per year where matters such as the following will be presented:

--questions

relating to the worship service

--the election and/or appointment of office bearers

--the financial statement, the proposed budget, and questions relating to the assets of the church

--matters relating to the evangelism and mission work of the church.

Such meetings shall be conducted by the consistory, and only those matters which it presents shall be considered. Moreover, although full

consideration is to be given to the judgment expressed by the congregation, the authority for making and carrying out final decisions remains with the consistory, the governing body of the church (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2)
Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 62: Church Order--Articles 3, 6, 9, and 11

Introduction

[Article 15](#) identifies three assemblies, viz. the Consistory, the classis, and the synod. If that is indeed the case--which we do not here dispute, (we will let the question of particular synods rest)--then it follows that the Council in a local congregation is not one of the assemblies of the Church.

That is, apparently, also the understanding of the Church Order. [Article 20](#) affirms: "The Consistory is the only assembly in the church(es) whose decisions possess direct authority within the (a) congregation, since the consistory receives its authority directly from Christ, . . ." Moreover, [Article 22](#) says not only that "the council shall operate under the authority of the consistory-- implying that a council has no independent authority,

(independent of that of the consistory), but that it functions rather as a standing committee for and in behalf of the consistory--it also says "when the deacons meet together with the consistory"--implying, allowing for the situation that deacons do not have to meet with the consistory. (Emphasis added). If then there are only three assemblies--with the consistory being the acknowledged "authority" assembly in the local congregation, then

1. the Church Order is--at

best--confusing matters when it assigns various "authority" responsibilities/decisions to a council. For example,

--[Article 3](#): "The council of his church should ensure that his--[a student for the ministry]--financial needs are met."

--[Article 6](#): "First, the election of the council of one who has been declared a candidate . . ."

--[Article 9](#): ". . . upon the approval by his [a minister's] supervising council with the advice of classis."

--[Article 11](#): "The council shall present to the congregation nominations for the offices of elder and deacon." (Emphasis added).

2. The Church Order seeks to legislate for the churches--what ought rightly to be left to the discretion of a congregation. The congregation has the right to choose to function with a consistory and a diaconate --with joint meetings (council meetings) called only then and only when a local situation makes that advisable.

Classis East overtures synod:

1. to change the word "council" in [Article 3](#) to "diaconate," and to change the word "council" in [Articles 6, 9, and](#)

[11](#) to "consistory."

2. to incorporate an article into the Church Order that spells out the place/task of a council for the benefit of churches which choose to utilize the services--ministry!--of a council. Such an article should include the following:

a. The council shall operate under the authority of the consistory (see [Article 22](#))

b. The council shall not assume to itself what is rightly the task of the consistory and/or diaconate.

c. The council, functioning as a standing committee, is charged to see to the temporalities--the "business"--of the congregation.

Further, we suggest that when a congregation chooses to utilize the services of a council, the council, operating under the authority of the consistory, shall not assume to itself the task of either the consistory or the diaconate. It may do only such work as will expedite dealing with the temporalities--the business--of the congregation.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 63: Church Order--Article 19

Introduction

[Article 19](#), calling for a (stated) clerk "in the broader assemblies," introduces a practice long in use in the CRC--and other, but not all--Reformed/Presbyterian Churches. It is our conviction that such a "stated"

clerk position is only one step removed from that of General Secretary--a position fraught with dangers for the church.

--it promotes the creation of a

"power" position. One man, by virtue of his "stated" office, is placed in a position where he can effectively influence the appointment of members to committees and functions of the broader assemblies.

--it inevitably leads to an

undermining of the principle: ". . . no office bearers shall lord it over other office bearers."

Classis East overtures synod to:

1. Add the word "clerk" to [Article](#)

[18](#), so

that its opening sentence reads: "In every assembly there shall be a president, (assisted by) a vice-president, and a clerk."

2. Change [Article 19](#) to read:

"Each broader assembly shall request the consistory of one of the member churches,

--to appoint a clerk,

--to host the next meeting of the assembly,

--to

receive all communications for the assembly, and

--to prepare the agenda--which

is to be acted on by the assembly.

3. Add a new article:

Since Christ is the

Supreme Head of His Church, who chooses to exercise that headship through the consistories of the congregation, and since Christ gave authority to rule only to the elders of the congregations, they may not be deprived of the authority entrusted to them alone by those who, from their midst, are delegated to attend the broader assemblies.

Such assemblies, gathered for the well-being of the churches, may not make binding, authoritative decisions for, or on behalf of, the churches.

All

decisions of the broader assemblies will be considered settled and binding only when the consistories have approbated the acts of the broader assemblies.

Grounds:

1. "No church shall in any way lord it over other churches . . ."

([Article 63](#))

2. [Foundational principles, Article 9](#) ". . . the decisions of such assemblies derive their authority from their conformity to the Word of God." It is the responsibility of the consistories to judge whether the decisions made are indeed in conformity with the Word.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 64: Church Order--Article 20

Classis East overtures synod to change the reading of [Article 20](#), for the

sake of uniformity of language, as follows: In all the congregations there shall be a Consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The Consistory is the only assembly in the church(es) whose decisions possess direct authority within a congregation, since the Consistory receives its authority directly from Christ, and thereby is directly accountable to Christ.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 65: Church Order--Article 31

[Article 31](#) confuses two matters: the admission of a church and the admission of a minister into the federation. Since the admission of a minister is regulated in [Article 8](#), that matter should be dropped from

[Article 31](#).

Therefore, Classis East overtures synod to change [Article 31](#) to read:

"Any

church may be admitted into the federation provided that its office bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with the Church Order. Any such church shall be recommended . . ."

Grounds:

1. It is conceivable that a church wishes to join the federation whose minister does not sustain an examination. Is such a church, ipso facto, prevented from joining the federation? We think not.

2. Since [Article 8](#) and

[Appendix 4](#) clearly spell out what procedure is to be followed when a minister wishes to be received into the federation, adding a reference to it here serves only to confuse the matter of admission of a church into the federation.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 66: Church Order--Article 64

Since it is our conviction that a Church Order, though important for the life and well-being of the church(es), has no greater importance, than the ongoing task of various assemblies of the church, and since decisions of the assemblies are commonly reached by a majority vote of an assembly, Classis East overtures synod to change the last sentence of [Article 64](#) to read: "by a majority of consistories . . ."

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 67: Church Order--Article 42

Classis East overtures synod to [add a second paragraph to Article 42](#), as follows:

Persons coming from other denominations shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. The consistory shall determine in each case whether or not public profession of faith shall be required. Their names shall be announced to the congregation for approval. Ground: It is the task of the elders to examine the life and conduct of those who seek membership in the congregation.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 68: Church Order--Articles 24, 25, and 27

Classis East overtures synod concerning [Articles 24](#), [25](#), and [27](#). This

overture seeks to recognize the responsibility of the delegates, when representing their home church council, during the broader assemblies. We overture as follows:

"The delegates representing their home councils are required to defend, support and vote, in agreement with the stand and decisions taken by their home councils--on all matters during the session of the broader assemblies.

The delegates may change their position at the broader assemblies, only when weighty arguments, not known to their council, would become evident during the meeting. The delegates may then change their position, but only if both delegates from that council agree on the issue.

These delegates are then required to give a detailed explanation about their change of position to their home council."

Grounds:

1. Many times in the past it has happened that the two delegates from the same church, have voiced, defended, and voted entirely differently, and not in conformity with the decisions taken in their local council.
2. The council should be making the decision, and the delegates should be true representatives of the local council.
3. During the first session of the Synod of the United Reformed Churches, a proposal was discussed to have three delegates from each church. The idea was to

have a majority of elders, representing the churches in the broader assemblies. This proposal was voted down, but the concern therein expressed was real. This overture would address that concern.

We request that this be a separate article in the Church Order, or else be an addition to either article 24, 25, or 27.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 69: Church Order--Articles 25 and 27

Classis East overtures synod to change Articles 25 and 27 of our Church Order

to read:

". . . delegate three of their (its) members, at least two of these being elders . . ."

Grounds:

1. In Scripture, there is a distinction between ruling elders and "those who labor in the word and doctrine," 1 Timothy 5:17. Since broader assemblies are for the purpose of ruling rather than teaching and preaching, representation of churches should be weighted on the side of ruling elders.

2. The Biblical purpose for the church's deliberative assemblies is also reflected in our Belgic Confession, Article 32:

"In the meantime we believe,

though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the Church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church, yet that they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted."

3. This weighting of representation is a strong reminder to the ruling elders and to the ministers to be found faithful in their duties. Church history tells a dismal story of ruling elders keeping silent or being led astray by the dominance of unfaithful ministers and professors at deliberative assemblies, narrow and broad.

4. Since Biblical principle ought always to overrule pragmatic consideration and also be proved in love, let closer, less needy churches help the farther away and more needy churches in achieving this representation.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 70: Church Order--Articles 25 and 54

Classis East overtures synod to revise Church Order Articles 25 and 54 as

follows:

Article 25: To change the wording: "within the next 6 months" to "ordinarily within the next year"

Ground: We expect that all the normal requirements of classis can be met by meeting once per year. If we are obliged to meet twice per year we create pressure to invent agenda for the meetings. If additional meetings are really necessary, these can always be arranged if requested by three councils.

Article 54: To delete the phrase "with the advice of classis"

Grounds:

1. According to **Article 53** the consistory has already sought the advice of classis before proceeding to the second step of discipline. If the sinner remains unrepentant after obtaining the concurring advice of classis to proceed, there should be no need to seek the advice of classis a second time in order to proceed.
2. Such an emphasis on the need for classis' advice tends to undermine the authority of the consistory of the church, and puts too much weight on the classis.
3. Because our classes might meet only once per year, such a double requirement could in fact render the discipline process less effective.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 71: Supervision of the Stated Clerk

Classis East overtures synod to define the meaning of "supervision" as it appears in **Article 19** of the Church Order. As a means of initiating the discussion on this matter we include the following rules with which the present supervising consistory is operating:

1. The Clerk shall give quarterly written reports to the supervising consistory (SC) of his activities, informing it of his activities on behalf of the federation.
2. The Clerk shall seek the advice of the SC when confronted with matters about which he is uncertain, or in which, for his own protection, he feels he needs advice or adjudication.
3. The Clerk shall prepare for synod a written report of his activities on behalf of the federation. A copy of this report shall be forwarded to the SC prior to synod.
4. Expenses incurred by the Clerk shall be covered by the funds received from the churches. These funds are supervised, as decided by synod, by Pompton Plains and Trinity, St. Catharines. If major expenses are incurred, for his own safety, the Clerk should seek the advice of the SC.
5. In preparation for synod the Clerk shall remind the churches of upcoming deadline, and upon receiving materials, develop an agenda which will be sent to the churches in the most efficient manner (time and cost). He shall present a copy of the agenda to the SC in sufficient time for appropriate plans to be made (pre-advice committees, schedules, etc.)
6. The SC shall assist the Clerk in any matter in which he needs assistance, upon the Clerk's request.
7. If a difference of opinion on any matter arise, the Clerk shall follow the advice of the SC, but may raise the matter at synod for adjudication if either party believes such attention is warranted.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

NOTE: This overture is forwarded without discussion, endorsement, or comment from Classis East.

Overture 72: Federative Structures

Classis East overtures synod that Model 2 for the federative structure be adopted. Information regarding the two options are provided through the work of lawyer, Mr. Herman Faber.

Grounds:

1. This structure gives less opportunity for the federation to become bureaucratically top heavy.
2. This model keeps the exercise and responsibility of ecclesiastical work in the hands of the churches instead of various federative boards.
3. Other Reformed federations function perfectly well under this structure.
4. History has shown repeated abuse of authority when churches allow the structure to permit bureaucrats to control various ministries such as Missions, Publications, Education, Ministerial Training, etc.
5. We should be careful not to allow the governments to force us to take on a business model for the Federation.

Classis East

Charles Paas, clerk

Overture 73: Limit Term of Denominational Clerk

Classis Midwest overtures synod to specify the term of office of the Stated Clerk of the UCRNA to be for three (3) years, and that any one Stated Clerk may not be eligible for more than two (2) consecutive terms.

Grounds:

1. [Article 19](#) of the Church Order encourages the broader assemblies to specify these terms;
2. By having a constricted term of office no one person will receive or be able to exercise undue power or influence.

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier,
stated clerk

Overture 74: Create Smaller Classes

Classis Midwest overtures synod to realign the classes of the URC, making them smaller in size and more regional in composition.

For example, there could

be a classis in Western Michigan, one in the Illinois/Indiana/Wisconsin area, several in Ontario, etc.

Grounds:

1. With our continued growth in number of churches, such a division becomes possible. (We have grown to 51 congregations, and more are coming.)
2. Smaller and regional classes are more economical because travel expense will not be as great. (Travel expenses, especially in the large U.S. classis can be burdensome.)
3. Smaller and regional classes are easier to schedule for meetings.
4. Smaller and regional classes will keep one classis from becoming more powerful. Historically, Reformed churches were partial to this arrangement for this reason.

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier. stated clerk

Overture 75: Revise Church Order Article 33 - Fraternal Relations

Classis Midwest overtures synod to revise [Article 33](#) of the Church Order to read: Congregations are encouraged to pursue official ecclesiastical relations

with Reformed congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and demonstrate faithful allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Each congregation is to give an account of its ecumenical activities to classis. Fraternal activities between congregations which need not be reported to classis may include pulpit exchanges, table fellowship, membership transfer, as well as other means of manifesting unity.

Grounds:

1. This helps to clear up the ambiguity of [Article 33](#) that has been demonstrated at synod and classis.
2. This removes from the local church the excessive oversight of classis presently mandated by [Article 33](#).
3. It keeps the local church accountable to the classis for its ecumenical activities.
4. When taken together with [Articles 34](#) and

[35](#), this revision encourages initiative for reformed ecumenism at the local level in addition to the classical and synodical levels.

5. It serves to guard against the wrongheaded "executive ecumenism" of liberalizing communions.

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier, stated clerk

Overture 76: Denominational Funding

Classis Midwest overtures synod to adopt a system of financial stewardship based on the free-will giving of the churches without establishing anything on the order of quotas. The treasurer of the Synod shall make known the need and the churches shall be asked to respond to that need each according to its ability.

Grounds:

1. This is the system of financial stewardship indicated among the New Testament churches in matters of mutual concern (cf. II Corinthians 8 & 9).
2. We should try to avoid any system of financial accountability among the churches that might be viewed as compulsory.
3. Churches will be more apt to keep expenses down if funds are made available according to need rather than according to precept.
4. As the financial needs of synods become better known, the churches will then be able to budget as they deem appropriate, thus allowing financial obligations to be decided locally.

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier, stated clerk

Overture 77: Closer Ties With OPC

Classis Midwest overtures synod to study the Confessional Standards and Form of Government of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with regard to the similarities and differences between them and the Confessional Standards and Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America in order to work toward ecclesiastical unity with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Grounds:

1. At its 1997 General Assembly the Orthodox Presbyterian Church expressed its close affinity with the United Reformed Churches in North America when it severed ties with the Christian Reformed Church in North America and voted to enter into "corresponding ecclesiastical relations" with the United Reformed Churches in North America.

2. We need to build upon a long history of seeking ecclesiastical unity with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church which began in the Christian Reformed Church and continued for many years until it was prematurely cut off in 1963 when the CRC Synod rejected the recommendations of the Committee on Closer Relationships with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (see following addendum taken from the Acts of Synod, 1963, pp. 274-282). Unity with the OPC was once again pursued when the Alliance of Reformed Churches studied the confessional similarities and differences and in 1994 and 1995 adopted the Westminster Standards as part of its Confessional basis.

ADDENDUM:

The 1963 CRC Synod Report of the COMMITTEE ON CLOSER RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

ESTEEMED BRETHREN:

In order that we may be able to have the question under discussion clearly before us, the following brief history is given as background material.

I.

History

As early as 1940 a fraternal delegate from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) expressed the hope to our Synod that the two denominations might soon become fully recognized sister churches (Acts 1940, p. 83). It was urged at the Synod by a study committee that the OPC be recognized as a sister church. However, it seems that because no well defined study had been made concerning principles for relationships with other churches, Synod decided to withhold action and appointed a committee to study and formulate guiding principles for ecumenical relationships (Acts 1940, p. 63).

In 1944 this study committee presented a lengthy report to Synod (Acts 1944, pp. 330-367). This report was summarized in 12 principles or propositions which were adopted by the Synod upon the recommendations of the advisory committee (Acts 1944, pp. 83-85). It seems that these well-defined principles have not received the attention that they deserved. In subsequent years little mention was made of them. Wide circulation and emphasis was not accorded them. It has been encouraging, however, to note that in more recent years these principles are again being brought to the attention of our churches. In 1961 the standing Synodical Committee on Ecumenicity included them in its report (Acts 1961, p. 478). We mention these principles because they have direct bearing upon the question before us and we shall have occasion to refer to them again.

From 1946

until 1955 there was exchange of fraternal delegates between the OPC Assemblies and the CRC Synods. Little was done by way of progress towards closer relationships in those years beyond this exchange of fraternal greetings. In 1951 Dr. N. B. Stonehouse concluded his remarks to our Synod by saying that, "beyond cooperation beckons union of these two churches."

Then in 1955 an

overture from Classis Pacific was received asking Synod to appoint a committee to investigate possibilities for closer relationships with the OPC. Among the grounds given, one referred to the decisions of the Synod of 1944 and the 12 principles already mentioned. The Synod of 1955 adopted the overture of Classis Pacific and referred it to the standing Committee on Ecumenicity.

In 1956 the

standing Synodical Committee on Ecumenicity recommended that Synod appoint a committee of four and invite the General Assembly of the OPC to appoint a

similar committee, which committees should confer together and investigate the possibilities for closer relationships between the denominations. This recommendation was adopted and a contact committee was appointed to meet with a similar committee from the OPC.

In 1957 a statement of three paragraphs was agreed upon by members of the joint committees (the combined OPC and CRC committees). These three paragraphs were presented to Synod as a working basis for further conversations. These paragraphs were adopted. the first of which is quoted here (Acts 1957, p. 104):

"In view of the unity of the body of Christ and in view of the basic community that exists between the Christian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in doctrine, polity, and practice it is an obligation resting upon these two churches to make every legitimate endeavor to bring this unity and community to their consistent expression in the organic union of the two denominations."

From 1957 until 1961, a period of 5 years, the joint committees worked to explore and understand the similarities and differences which exist between the two denominations. Each year the Synod received a report on the progress being made. These reports are contained in the Acts of Synod for these years. Each year Synod encouraged the committee to continue its efforts. In 1959 the advisory committee on Church Order gave this strong encouragement:

"Synod encourage the committee not only to continue its work, but also to increase its efforts to establish sisterly relationships with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church so that the way may be paved to possible eventual union" (Acts 1959, p. 22).

In 1962 the contact committee submitted a report to Synod in which it stated that the differences between the two denominations which seem to provide the main obstacles to union lie in the area of polity, not in the areas of doctrine or liturgy. This is, of course, not to suggest that there are no differences in doctrine or liturgy. It is judgment of the committee that the differences in polity are the most significant at this juncture in our discussions with the OPC. If the two denominations should be able to resolve the differences in polity, this committee is confident that we shall be able to resolve other differences in a mutually satisfactory manner.

Our report in 1962 pointed back to the decisions of the Synod of 1944, and proposed that at that time Synod had caught a vision of the Biblical teachings regarding the necessity of union and the consequent obligations resting upon such a vision. A part of the twelfth principle of 1944 was quoted:

"It need hardly be said, that if the Christian Reformed Church should make agreement with itself alike in essentials and non-essentials an inexorable condition of ecclesiastical federation, the hopeless abortion of the plan would be a foregone conclusion" (Acts 1944, p. 361).

The report also reminded Synod that in 1944 it was already suggested that a study be made of:

"the basis on which the Christian Reformed Church could and should unite with the Reformed Churches of North America that would be worthy of a proposal of union and would entertain such a proposal, with particular reference to the distinction (of principle No. 12); viz., that between essentials and non-essentials on the score respectively of doctrine, polity, and liturgy" (Acts 1944, p. 361).

The contact committee in its report of 1962 also reminded Synod that so far no such committee had ever been appointed to study and formulate a guide for the discernment of the distinction between "essentials and non-essentials." We felt that such a study would greatly benefit this committee in its contact with the OPC. We specifically asked for such a study to be undertaken giving special

attention to matters of polity. We felt that more concrete progress could be made in our discussions with the OPC if we had a Synodical clarification of what is to be considered "essential and non-essential" in the areas of polity. Such a study, we felt, would be in accord with the decisions of the Synod of 1944. The Synod of 1962, however, did not accept our recommendation to undertake such a study, and gave instead the following mandate to the committee:

"That Synod request the Committee on Closer Relationships with the OPC to present to synod a list of the points at issue in matters of church polity between the OPC and the CRC with specific suggestions for the resolution of these points, or areas of disagreement."

The remainder of this report is an attempt to comply with this request of Synod.

II. Differences in Polity

There seem to be two possible ways to approach the problem before us. 1) First, we might list in a piecemeal fashion all the differences that exist between the two denominations. We could then discuss the relative merits of our respective positions on each of these points and try to resolve the differences in some mutually acceptable fashion. On the other hand, another approach recommends itself. 2) We can seek to establish the basic, underlying principle or principles which lead to the practical differences in polity, and try first of all to reach some agreement on matters of principle. The first approach, we feel, has certain weaknesses. In the first place, how could we ever be certain of drawing up a list of differences that would be exhaustive and yet satisfying to all concerned? A second disadvantage noted is that such a list of differences would certainly be lengthy and perhaps unwieldy. Furthermore, as long as the differences in principle are not resolved, then practical differences will continue to proliferate between the two denominations. These considerations have led our committee to pursue the second approach to the problem, viz., the approach that looks to the principles involved.

After much discussion and exploration we are ready to state that most of the differences between the OPC and the CRC (with reference to church polity) stem from the difference in authority that the two denominations assign to their major assemblies. This fact was stated to Synod last year by way of this committee's report (Acts 1962, p. 355). The principles that seem to be involved in this difference will be pointed out as this report proceeds.

At this point we turn to a comparison of the most relevant parts of the CRC Church Order and the OPC Form of Government to illustrate the precise point that is before us. The present Church Order of the CRC (Art. 31), reads:

"If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the Articles of the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by a General Synod."

An analysis of this article of the CRC Church Order indicates that it presupposes a certain principle regarding the authority of major assemblies as that authority is related to the Word of God. The principle underlying the article seems to be the assertion that the instituted church may, in its major assemblies, bind minor assemblies and also the conscience of individual believers with its decisions as long as such decisions do not go contrary to the Word of God. The church thus, in its binding authority, may not go contrary to the Word of God, but it may go beyond the Word of God. The idea seems to be that as long as the decision of a major assembly is not forbidden by the Word of God, it can be made binding alike upon the office-bearers and the members of the churches.

Now it might be argued that Art. 31 of the present Church Order considers the authority of the major assembly in a very limited context, viz., that of an appeal, and that therefore this article does not rest upon a principle regarding the general authority of the major assembly, as our previous paragraph suggests. Such an argument for the limited context of Art. 31 is not supported, however, by the proposed revision of Art. 31 of the Church Order (Acts 1962, p. 417).

"a. Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration, and whenever possible by common consent; if unanimity on an issue cannot be reached the minority shall abide by the judgment of the majority. The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding.

"b. Ecclesiastical assemblies and church members have the right to appeal to the assembly next in order when they are convinced that a decision of an assembly is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order, or is detrimental to the church, or has done injustice to them.

"c. Appellants shall observe all ecclesiastical regulations regarding the manner and time of appeal." It will be noted that point "a," the first part of the article, does not limit the authority in question to appeals, and does not qualify or limit that authority for it is simply stated that "The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding." Notice also that point "b" reasserts the relationship between the authority of the major assemblies and the Word of God that has already been referred to.

By way of sharp contrast to this article of our Church Order we compare the following Section of the OPC Form of Government:

"That all church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or in the way of representation by delegated authority, is only ministerial and declarative that is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of its own authority; and that all its decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God. Now though it will easily be admitted that all synods and councils may err, through the frailty inseparable from humanity, yet there is much greater danger from the usurped claim of making laws, than from the right of judging upon laws already made and common to all who profess the gospel; although this right, as necessity requires in the present state, be lodged with fallible men." (Form of Government, Chapter I, Section 7)

This section of the OPC Form of Government follows from the creedal statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1643, Chapter XX. Sec. 2:

"God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word, or beside it, in matters of faith, or worship."

The principle underlying the OPC Form of Government at this point seems to be the assertion that Scripture as the Word of God, and nothing else, may bind the consciences of men; especially in matters of faith and worship. A major assembly has no authority in and of itself apart from the Word of God to allow it, for instance, to go beyond the Word of God in determining what is to be binding upon the churches, and the individual believers. Ecclesiastical authority, lying solely in Christ and His Word, can only be "ministerial and declarative." These principles of the OPC stem from one of the fundamental principles of the Protestant Reformation, viz., that the Scriptures are to be the only rule of faith and practice, and that as such they are sufficient to the needs of the church. Nothing may stand alongside the Scriptures with equal authority and therefore be equally binding on the conscience.

Thus we conclude that there is a clear clash between the OPC and the CRC with reference to the relationship that is thought to exist between the authority of major assemblies and the sufficient, and unique authority of the Word of God. For the reasons given above the OPC is most unwilling to bind its membership, especially in the areas of faith and worship, with anything that is not directly prescribed by Scripture. And, on the other hand, the OPC cannot accept the willingness of the CRC to bind its membership with precepts that, though they may not contradict Scripture, do go beyond Scripture, and this in the areas of faith and worship. References to a few of the items in the proposed revision of the Church Order may serve to illustrate the sort of thing to which the OPC would be expected to take exception.

1. Art. 50-Synod is to designate the Bible versions to be used in the worship services.
 2. Art. 54-The congregation shall assemble for worship at least twice on the Lord's Day to hear God's Word.
 3. Art. 54-Worship services shall be held in commemoration of the specified days.
 4. Art. 55-Synod stipulates the versions, liturgical forms, and songs that are to be used in worship services.
 5. Art. 56-At one of the services each Lord's Day, the Word shall be preached as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism.
 - 6 Art. 58-Sacraments shall be administered with the use of the ecclesiastical forms.
 7. Art. 63-Specifies frequency with which the Lord's Supper shall be administered.
 8. Art. 63-Specifies that Lord's Supper be preceded by a preparatory sermon, and be followed by an applicatory sermon.
 9. Art. 64-Specifies the contents of public prayers.
 10. Art. 68-Specifies annual home visitation.
 11. Art. 72-Marriage shall be solemnized with the use of the ecclesiastical form.
- The above listing is not exhaustive. More illustrations could be cited. Many synodically binding decisions would fail under the same objections of the OPC. The question for the OPC is not whether such practices, as are referred to above, are good or not, but whether such practices may be made binding upon the local congregations. The OPC judges that such practices may not be made binding upon the churches since such practices are not prescribed by the Word of God, the sole source of authority in the church. The OPC concludes that those matters about which the Word of God is silent should be assigned to the realm of ecclesiastical adiaphora (i.e., things neither required nor forbidden by God). and as such cannot be made binding upon the churches.

Now it might be argued that the church may exercise authority in the realm of the adiaphora in order that "all things be done decently and in order." (cf. I Cor. 14:40). Article I of the present Church Order apparently has this in mind when it states "For the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ it is necessary that there should be . . ." The OPC, as well as the CRC, is committed to this principle for it is clearly stated in the Word of God with reference, as the context indicates, to the worship of the church. The point to consider however, is whether the application of this principle may be allowed to eclipse more fundamental Scriptural principles, viz., those having to do with the unique and sufficient authority of Scripture, the liberty of the individual conscience, and the nature of the church and its authority. Such weighty matters cannot be set

aside by a simple appeal to I Cor. 14:40. Reference at this point may be made to the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Sec.6:

"The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life. is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the Worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed."

This section of the Confession points us in the direction in which the OPC understands that harmony is to be achieved between the principle that the Word of God is the unique and sufficient authority in the church, and the principle that all things are to be done decently and in order. To the faith and life of the individual nothing is to be added as binding beyond the Word of God. In the affairs of the instituted church "the light of nature. and Christian prudence" may, however, suggest that certain things should be made common to the churches. At this point, it is noticed. the Confession places a limitation upon such decisions in that the circumstances involved must be "common to human actions and societies." That is to say such decisions must submit to and make allowance for the catholic (universal) nature of the church. The church, in such decisions, must give due consideration to the varying needs and circumstances in which the local congregations find themselves. So, for instance, the local consistory may specify that two worship services are to be held each Lord's Day because it can make such a decision giving due allowance to that which is "common to human actions and societies," while it is more questionable whether Synod, which represents a wider range of needs and circumstances, is in as good a position to make a like judgment. Or, for instance, the local church may determine for itself how many members there ought to be in the consistory, what time of day the worship services are to be held, etc., because it is in the best position to make such decisions since it alone is cognizant of the "human actions and society" that is involved.

In this report we have limited our analysis of the differences in principle between the two denominations to an exploration of the relationship that is thought to exist between the authority of the major assemblies and the sufficient and unique authority of Scripture. We also could have entered into an exploration of the differences of principle by exploring 1) the relation between the authority of the major assembly and the liberty of the individual conscience, or 2) the relation between the authority of the major assembly and the nature of the church. A pursuit of either path would have led to the same conclusions that have already been presented.

III. Resolution of the Differences

If we have correctly analyzed the nature of the differences between the polity of the CRC and the OPC with respect to the authority given to major assemblies, we must conclude that the position of the OPC is more nearly correct than our own. This becomes evident when we consider the matters that have been mentioned above, viz., 1) the sufficient, and unique authority of Scripture, 2) the liberty of the individual conscience, and 3) the nature of the church.

This committee therefore concludes that our ecumenical discussions with the OPC have brought into clear focus the fact that a resolution of that which is perhaps most basic of all to the differences in polity (the authority given to major assemblies) rests upon the willingness of

the CRC to reconsider its position. It is difficult to conceive how we may, in good conscience, ask the OPC to accept our customs and habits as binding upon their membership. By what authority may we ask them to accept as binding precepts and practices about which the Scriptures are silent?

There can be

little doubt of the truth of the assertion that CRC adiaphora, as long as they remain mandatory upon our membership and the terms by which fellowship is to be established with other denominations. will constitute an impossible impediment to union with the OPC (and for that matter, with other denominations). Valid reasons may be given for not uniting with the OPC (or other denominations), but the unwillingness of the CRC to "let loose" of the adiaphora should not be one of them. Should this be the "rock" upon which our ecumenical efforts with the OPC flounder and perish, then a most regrettable thing will have happened. It is our hope that the prayers of Christ for the unity of His church, and the claims of our Christian brothers for our fellowship (on the basis of terms that are set by Christ as King of the Church) will be more compelling than the claims of our own habits and customs. We hope that the vision that came to the Synod of 1944 will not be lost. We must learn to distinguish between essentials and non-essentials in matters of Reformed Church polity, and must be willing to forsake the non-essentials when circumstances call for this.

If the CRC can make

adjustments in this matter, then this committee can hope for definite progress in the future of our ecumenical relationships with the OPC. Without this sort of adjustment, the prospects of uniting the two denominations. which we have held before ourselves as an ideal for many years, are not promising.

IV. Recommendations

It is realized by this committee that a rectification of our polity in the direction proposed will not be a simple or easy matter. In a very real sense our polity has become enmeshed with the fabric of our denominational life, and modification is bound to cause some apprehension and fear among us. We must, however, move toward the resolution of the conflict demonstrating thereby our good intention with the Lord and our brethren in the ecumenical discussions that are taking place, and our willingness to submit ourselves, and others who may unite with us, to the Word of God alone.

We,

therefore, recommend to the Synod of 1963:

(1) First, that the chairman of the committee, Rev. Robert Prins, be allowed to represent the committee before the advisory committee and Synod.

(2) Second,

that Synod restudy and reconsider the authority which is now ascribed to our major assemblies.

Grounds:

(a) The teaching of the Word of God concerning the sufficient and unique authority of the Scripture, the liberty of the individual conscience, and the nature of the church call for such a reevaluation.

(b) Our ecumenical discussions with the OPC compel us to make such a reevaluation and reconsideration at the present time, which the Synod of 1944 indicated should happen.

(c) By accepting this recommendation Synod will take a constructive step toward resolving the differences in polity, which it has asked this committee to clarify.

(3) Third, that Synod do not accept the proposed revision of the Church Order at this time.

Grounds:

(a) The principles upon which the revision is based need to be clarified.

(b) Adoption of the proposed revision of the Church Order will serve to weaken our opportunities for progress in the ecumenical discussion we have with the OPC.

Sincerely,

Rev. N. Robert Prins, chairman

Rev. Edson T. Lewis, Jr., Secretary

Rev. John E. Meeter

Mr. Peter Watz

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier, stated clerk

Overture 78: Grandfather Clause for Evangelists

Classis Midwest overtures synod concerning any church which is admitted into the United Reformed Churches which already has an ordained evangelist working under its supervision, to allow that church to continue the evangelist in office according to its own rules even though the United Reformed Churches do not recognize the office of evangelist. This permission shall be limited as follows:

- a. The office of evangelist in that church shall be terminated when the position becomes vacant.
- b. The evangelist's supervision shall be an entirely internal matter with his calling church.
- c. The evangelist shall not exercise his office outside the field to which he has been called.

Grounds:

1. This permission will help minimize potential impediments to churches considering membership in the United Reformed Churches. At least one church considering membership in the United Reformed Churches has an ordained evangelist.
2. By requiring that the office be terminated when the position becomes vacant, this permission seeks to uphold the high standards embodied in the Church Order for those who would preach the Word of God, namely a seminary education including training in the original languages of Scripture, something not required for the office of evangelist where that office is recognized.
3. This permission is preferable to having the church "upgrade" the evangelist's office to that of minister of the Word before entering the federation.

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier, stated clerk

Overture 79: Church Order Article 31 - Classis To Approve Reception Of New Churches

Classis Midwest overtures synod to amend [article 31](#) of the Church Order in the following manner: Instead of the last sentence reading: "Any such church shall be recommended by the sponsoring classis to the synod and shall be received into membership upon approval by a majority vote," change the last sentence to read: Any such church shall be received into membership upon approval by a majority vote of classis.

Grounds:

1. If synod meets only once in three years, as in [Article 27](#), it is conceivable that a congregation wanting to join the federation may have to wait almost three years for admittance, an unreasonable delay.

2. Even if synod meets annually, a congregation wanting to unite with the federation may be under undue constraints to disunite with another denomination in a timely manner if it had to wait almost a year.

3. Vesting the power of federation in the classis is in keeping with the rest of the Church Order's intention of reposing power and authority in the lower assemblies, granting synod only delegated responsibilities.

a. [Article 21](#). The organization of a congregation takes place under the supervision of a neighboring consistory and with advice of classis.

b. [Article 29](#). The withdrawal of a congregation from the federation requires only a written statement to its classis.

c. [Articles 25 and 26](#). The need of a consistory for help and advice is taken care of at the classical level. The assistance that directs "all things toward the peace, edification, and greatest profit of the churches" reflects the essential fellowship that congregations have in classis.

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier, stated clerk

Overture 80: Establish Federation As A Tax Free Corporation

Classis Midwest overtures synod that the federation, already established and recognized as the United Reformed Churches in North America, be permanently established as tax-free corporations in both the United States and Canada. These corporations then to be conjoined by a Joint Venture Agreement. The corporations will exist and be governed by By-laws to be adopted at a meeting of Synod, and the Church Order which was adopted at the organizational meeting of the federation in 1996. Officers of the corporation will be a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer, and shall each serve for three (3) years, and no longer than two terms. As a combined Board they will meet together annually as required by both governments, and, if possible, to schedule such meetings at the time of the meeting of synod. Each officer, and the combined Board, apart from meeting the requirements of the respective governments, would have no more, or no less, responsibility or power than is given to them by a vote of Synod.

Grounds:

1. The concept of incorporation fulfills our Biblical mandate to do all things decently and in good order. I Corinthians 14:40.

2. The concept of incorporation has been included in all the documents from the beginning stages of the federation, and was not deleted from the mandate given to the structure committee by our first Synod.

3. Properties, such as FAX machine, copy machine, computers and other office equipment cannot be owned by a non-existent entity, and are necessary for our on-going work.

4. Funds collected, or donations given, to tax-exempt churches can be forwarded to another tax-exempt corporation, but cannot be transferred to a non-existent (legal) entity. Such a transfer could be questioned by the Internal Revenue Service in the United States and Revenue Canada in Canada.

5. The corporate name "The United Reformed Churches in North America" may be trademarked for our exclusive use. At the present time any church group may use this name.

6. The concept of incorporation is a means to an end and does not presuppose the development of a bureaucracy, as many fear. The Board of Corporate officers will have no more power than what Synod, representing all the churches, designates.

7. The present method of collecting funds and using designated churches as a receiving and disbursing agent is not an acceptable method of collecting and

accounting of federation funds. Treasurers should be elected in both the United States and Canada so that an audited accounting can be given when synod meets.

8. Most of the mainline churches in the United States and Canada are, and have been, incorporated for many years. In the increasingly complex and regulatory society in which we exist the affairs of the federation must be conducted in a most scrupulous and legal way. This can be accomplished, in part by incorporation.

ADDENDUM

RESPONSIBILITY OF OFFICERS

President:

1. To act as an official representative of the corporation as required by each civil government.
2. To call an annual meeting of all directors along with additional meetings as required.
3. To represent the federation whenever requested or appointed by Synod to do so.

Vice-president:

1. To assist the President in his duties.
2. To fill the position of President whenever the President is unable to fulfill his duties.

Secretary:

1. To keep records and minutes of all meetings held by the board.
2. To submit all annual reports required by the civil government and maintain records of the reports.
3. May also hold position of the Stated Clerk and be responsible for those duties.
4. To assist the Stated Clerk whenever possible.
5. To make sure the minutes of all Classis and Synod meetings are mailed to each church.
6. Give a report at each Synod meeting.

Treasurer:

1. To receive funds from donating churches and individuals to be distributed for federation needs.
2. Establish a checking account and money market fund to manage the funds.
3. Establish an address for churches and individuals to send funds.
4. To give financial report at each Synod meeting.
- 5.

Keep accurate records of all funds received.

6. To send receipts to all churches or individuals who send funds.

Classis Midwest

Ralph A. Pontier, stated clerk

Overture 81: Give Consideration, Discussion and Response to Some of the Concerns of Dutton Independent Reformed Church About the Church Order

The council of the Grace Orthodox Reformed Church at Clinton, Ontario, overtures synod of the United Reformed Churches to give consideration, discussion and response to some of the concerns of the Dutton Independent Reformed Church as presented in their letter submitted to the churches (printed here below). We also request that the Dutton Independent Reformed Church be granted the privilege of the floor.

Grounds:

1. They seek clarification on a number of issues prior to federating.
 2. This will promote the unity of the churches.
- Done in Council: July 29, 1997
Elder Ralph Lubbers, Clerk

The Dutton request:

"1. [Art. 34](#) - regarding Classis approval for ecumenical relations by a church. As defined in the article, 'ecumenical relations may include pulpit exchange, table fellowship, membership transfer' . . . and . . . 'other means of manifesting their unity.' We would like clarification of this point. If this means that we cannot have a pulpit exchange with, for example, a PCA minister unless we get prior approval from classis, then we have strong opposition to the article. Does it mean that we must get classis approval before accepting a family into our congregation from anyone other than an URCNA church? We think that the current wording is subject to misinterpretation and/or abuse.

"2. [Art. 46](#) - We strongly object to the notion that the missionary task of the church is limited to the ordained preaching of the gospel. We understand and agree that ordained preaching is a part of the mission task, but it is far greater than this limited role. All members must be involved in the promotion of the gospel wherever the Lord has placed them.

"3. It appears that this church order 'micro-manages' without scriptural warrant (e.g., [Art. 45](#)) regarding the frequency of and format for celebrating the Lord's Supper.

"4. There are no means given for dealing with a situation of incompatibility of a pastor and his congregation.

"5. Last, but not least, we are of the understanding that at your last synod meeting there was a change in your [Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government](#) section. This change regarded the calling of the Church 'she.' We would like an explanation of the reason(s) that caused the change to 'it.' In Scripture there is overwhelming reason to call the Church 'She' or 'Her' and we are very concerned that grammatical 'correctness' would supercede scriptural teaching."

NOTE: This overture was submitted to Classis East but was not adopted.

Overture 82: Liturgical Forms

The consistory of the Providence Reformed Church of Winnipeg, having duly presented the following overture to Classis West, though it was defeated at that body, after reconsideration now overtures the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America that we adopt and use only the first form for each of the following liturgical forms in the back of the blue Psalter Hymnal now in use:

1. Baptism of Infants - Form Number 1
2. Public Profession of Faith - Form Number 1
3. Baptism of Adults - Form Number 1
4. Celebration of the Lord's Supper - Form Number 1

Grounds:

We, as a consistory, feel that we ought as United Reformed churches, use the above forms for the following reasons:

- 1 These first forms were developed out of a rich heritage, at a time when the church was extremely vibrant and alive. These liturgical forms were based on forms developed by John Calvin and adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-19.

2. The second and third forms for the Baptism of Infants, second form for the Profession of Faith and the second form for Adult baptism were added in 1976. The second and third forms for the Lord's Supper were added in 1958. These forms were not added for any Biblical need, whereas the original forms were created to fill a very specific need, to unify the Church's instruction and liturgical practise within congregational worship. I Corinthians 14:40.

3. From past experience, using these later forms has created disunity and friction in both consistory and congregation and we believe, will not promote greater unity within our new Federation.

4. The later forms, in varying degrees, show definite signs of weakness in Reformed theology, in Biblical content and language. Hence they give evidence of de-emphasis in doctrine and a de-emphasis in the need to hold sound doctrine. Note the following examples to support the above grounds:

1. Baptism of Infants Form #2 is entitled "Baptism of Children." It is not necessary to have a separate form for children as they are included in the form for the "Baptism of Infants."

2. Baptism of Infants - Form #3.

i. Along with the title, missing is Biblical language and content, teaching that we are "children of wrath; the impurity of our souls; that we are to loath ourselves before God, etc." The severity of our human depravity and need is much lacking.

ii. Also missing is the warning to the parents, to have their children baptized, not out of custom or superstition.

iii. The address to the congregation, "to care for and instruct the baptized child" is inappropriate, unnecessary and misses the point of the sacrament completely. Parents bring their children before the Lord and they make serious covenant promises, not the congregation.

3. Public Profession of Faith - Form #2

i. The theological content is watered down significantly. In the second question, the language of "abhorring and humbling yourself before God because of your sins" is missing. Further, the promise to lead a godly life for the most is absent in Question #3.

ii. Commitment to the doctrines of Scripture and our Reformed Confessions, as taught in this Christian church, is so much more clearly, richly spelled out in Form #1.

iii. The reference in question #4, to submitting to the government of the church and its admonition and discipline, in times of delinquency is very weak and ambiguous.

4. Baptism of Adults - Form #2

i. The content of the vows to be made are greatly reduced; missing are the following elements:

a. Confession of the Triune God,

b. Confession of Depravity,

c. Affirmation of the Doctrines in our Confessions,

d. Clear promise to live a godly life, and

e. Promise to partake of the Lord's Supper faithfully.

ii. Also, the person being baptized makes the promises before the instruction is given. This is placed in the form in reverse order.

5. Celebration of the Lord's Supper

i. Form #2 allows for the list of gross sins the option of being read or not at the discretion of the minister or consistory. This has been a cause for friction and disunity in the congregation.

ii. Form #3 The list of gross sins has been totally omitted. This form has been rearranged for no apparent reason.
5. The original forms have stood the test of time, having served the church well and we maintain that there are no Biblical/Confessional reasons warranting for the use of these additional forms.

Done in Consistory: July 8, 1997
Bernie Bakker, corresponding clerk

NOTE:

This overture was submitted to Classis West but was not adopted.

Ecumenical Observers' Presentations

Greetings to the URC from the PCA October 23, 1997

From Rev. Thomas C. Vanden
Heuvel, pastor of the PCA Holland, MI
and from Dr. Donald Mac Nair, Pastor,
Esteemed Fathers and Brethren:

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is a unique privilege for me to have been assigned by the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Presbyterian Church in America to give you greetings from your brothers and sisters in the PCA. It was not long ago that I was with in the CRC. I know most of you very well. We have worked side by side for reform and revival in the CRC but were unsuccessful. I was called by the Lord to be a church planter for the PCA in the Holland-Zeeland area of Western Michigan and you were led by the Lord to form a new denomination, the United Reformed Churches.

I have been asked by some of my friends how I could be sure that the PCA would not depart from sound Reformed theology like the CRC did. I answered in this way: First, we cannot be sure. We cannot see the future. We must always be vigilant. We must pray and work to remain faithful to our Savior and Lord, who is the head of the church. I am sure that no Reformed denomination intended to depart from the truth when it started. We live in a sinful world and the power of Satan is very real and sin is very strong. We must always be mindful of the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:10f: "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able stand against all the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities and powers of this dark age, so be strong that you may stand firm". The immediate application of these verses is to the individual Christian, but this call is intended for the church as well.

Second, there are two things that encourage me that the PCA will stand firm. One is the history of the PCA. She has gone through the conflict with liberalism and was born out of this conflict. At the 25th General Assembly last June, the history of the PCA was told by those who went through it. It was a gripping story of courage and conviction that refused to compromise the sacred doctrines of the inspiration, inerrancy, and absolute authority of scripture, the doctrine of creation out of nothing, the doctrine of the unity and the purity of the church, the doctrine of the uniqueness of Christ in His person as the virgin born Son of the Living God whose death on the cross and precious blood and bodily resurrection and literal ascension and visible bodily return is the only basis of our salvation and the absolute requirement of repentance and faith in Him as the only way of salvation. The abhorrence of liberalism and the absolute requirement of affirming and applying the inerrancy Scripture to church doctrine and life was seen in the decisive action taken at the 25th General Assembly in Colorado Springs to terminate immediately the fraternal relations with the Christian Reformed Church of North America, after the CRC had failed to heed the

warnings given by the PCA in 1995 and 1996 regarding the CRC's disobedience to God's word in opening the offices of elder and minister to women.

Furthermore, the second thing that encourages me about the PCA and the future deals with Church Polity and the way the General Assembly is constituted. The local churches are to send commissioners - their ministers and at least one elder from each church, with larger churches sending two elders - to the broadest assembly of the church. This keeps the broadest assembly of the church very close to the local congregations and enables all the churches to have a voice in guiding the spiritual and practical affairs of the entire denomination. We have all seen how the system of constituting the broadest assembly by just two ministers and two elders from each classis can so easily be abused by the politically motivated choice of delegates.

Having said this, we must realize the truth of Psalm 127:1: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it". Although the immediate context applies to the family, this truth applies to the family God as well. We gladly welcome the invitation to be present at your second Synod of the United Reformed Churches. We wish you God's richest blessings as you seek to do God's will in obedience to Christ who gave His church the great commission to preach the gospel to every creature, teaching them to observe everything He taught, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are here today because of Jesus' prayer in John 17:20-23: "My prayer is not for them only. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you..." And because of Paul's command in Ephesians 4:1-3: "Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace".

We stand with you confessionally. The great reformation confessions of the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession and Catechisms clearly and powerfully proclaim the Historic Christian faith. Together you and we preach it, teach it, propagate it, and work hard to defend it.

We stand together ecclesiastically. We believe the Bible teaches that elders must rule the church and that the local churches should be yoked together in faith and practice and should bind themselves together for the edification of the whole body, while maintaining the autonomy of the local congregation under the Headship of Jesus Christ.

We stand together in the support and encouragement of the Christian Day School.

We stand together in the conviction that we must live our Christian lives in obedience of Jesus Christ in all areas of life according to His Word.

We stand together in the conviction that the gospel must be preached to all the ends of the earth to call men to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The great principles of the Reformation, Sola Scriptura, Sola gratia, Solo Christo, Sola fide, and Sola Deo Gloria, are the bedrock of the PCA and the URC.

We live in a time in which these great truths are not only unknown, they are thought to be utterly irrelevant to life today. We are living in a post-christian day in which the very concept of truth is rejected as something to which everyone is searching and no one has found. People are going to Buddhism, Near Eastern Religions, Hinduism, and other false religions in search of meaning for their lives.

We who love the Reformed faith and who are committed to the inerrancy of the Word of God and to the absolute uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation have an awesome responsibility in our day.

We, as a partner with you on the North American Continent stand with you. I have gone through the Mission to North America of the PCA program at the Church Planting Center and I can tell you it is on the cutting edge of this culture with the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. My wife and I experienced one of the richest weeks of our lives at the Church Planting Center in which the great

truths of the Reformed Faith came face to face with the godless culture in which we live. We are called to spread this gospel of sovereign grace.

I am sure that the head of the Mission to North America, Rev. Cortez Cooper, who enthusiastically shares the same commitment to the Reformed faith would be very happy to be of any assistance in the whole area of church planting and evangelism.

It is a great privilege and honor for me to stand before you today.

We pray God's choicest blessings on you as a new Reformed denomination in North America, and thank God for your love for the Truth and for the purity of the Church of Jesus Christ.. Be assured of our prayers for you and for our cooperation in the great work to which the Lord Jesus Christ has called us. We invite you to send a representative of your federation to our 26th General Assembly to be held in St. Louis in the summer of 1998.

Thank you for this opportunity to come before you as your brother and co-league in the Reformed faith.

With cordial Christian greetings.

Thomas C. Vanden Heuvel

Donald J. Mac Nair

[The Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar](#)

(Representatives)

17627 Paxton Ave.

Lansing, IL 60438,

October 21, 1997

Mr. President and delegates of the Synod meeting of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ from the Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar. I on behalf of Myanmar Christian Reformed Church, would like to give you thanks for this opportunity to speak before God and you.

The Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar expresses its best wishes to the second synod meeting of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

On July 13, 1985, the Christian Reformed Church was formed with 72 members, maintaining the teaching of five points of Calvinism, ministering the Word of God and preaching the gospel to the unreached area, and keeping and guarding the infallible Word of God. The Lord blessed our ministry, within a period of 13 years the Reformed believers in Myanmar have grown to 6500 members, about 65 villages have started new churches. By the work of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel within the last 3 months, 48 families have newly converted from animism. Many people from many villages are asking for Church planters or evangelists to come preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ and the law of God.

In order to reach remote tribal areas and to send the Church planters or evangelists, the Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar, bought 55 acres of land to plant orange trees. Today we already planted 5000 orange trees and 1478 coffee trees; the future profit will be used to support home missions as well as foreign missions. Right now the Reformed Church in Myanmar supports 21 Church planters. The Lord willing before 2000 A.D.; the church will attempt to reach all the villages of the Matu tribe. We are planning to send about 50 church planters to the unreached areas.

Mr. President and delegates! The same time the Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar believes that we must teach and preach the Word of God, and defend the historic Reformed faith and to present Reformed testimony to the Burmese as well as to other Asian peoples. Therefore the Reformed Theological College was started in June, 1997 with 23 students; to train godly men for the ministry of the Word of God and sacraments, according to historic Reformed faith, and to prepare the students for effective service in mission vocations. We should not forget our reformed fathers, much blood has been shed in order to preserve our

historic Reformed faith in the past. We believe that the Church must train godly men for the ministry of the Word of God and sacraments, according to historic Reformed faith.

Respected Mr. President and delegates: The Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar is also interested in establishing a lasting bond with churches that seek to preserve, teach, and defend the historic reformed faith of our fathers. We correctly understand that only the United Reformed Churches in North America have remained faithful to preach and teach the historic reformed faith. We believe that the United Reformed Churches in North America are the best in the world by faithfully maintaining preaching and teaching the true Word of God. Therefore the Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar made a decision to establish a lasting bond with you and have a relationship with you and serve with you, to extend the kingdom of God with you. We believe that this is God's plan and purpose to unite reformed believers in the world to preach His Word faithfully, to teach His law correctly and to extend His kingdom widely all over the world. We pray that the Synod meeting may go well. We also pray that "the Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." Amen.

With brotherly greetings,

Chris Aunglai Matu

Representative of Christian Reformed Church in Myanmar.