

**Agenda for the Fourth Synod
of the United Reformed Churches in
North America – June, 2001**

AGENDA
for the Fourth Synod of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES in NORTH AMERICA
convening Tuesday, June 5, 2001, at 1:30 P.M., Pacific Daylight Time
at Escondido United Reformed Church, Escondido, California
Ending Thursday evening, June 7, 2001

Registration: 12:30 - 1:30 P.M. Meeting to begin at 1:30 P.M.

I. OPENING MATTERS

- A. Meeting called to order by the Calling Church, Escondido United Reformed Church, Escondido
- B. Presentation of the Credentials and roll call of delegates
- C. Credentials Committee reports
- D. Assent to the Form of Subscription by all the delegates
- E. Synod declared constituted

II. INITIAL BUSINESS

- A. Reception of new congregations and assent by their delegates to the Form of Subscription
- B. Welcome to delegates, visitors, and guests
- C. Adoption of a time schedule
(Suggested: Tuesday, 1:30 - 6:00, Evening inspirational meeting - 7:30 P.M.; Wednesday and 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.)
- D. Election of officers for the meeting of the Fourth Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America
- E. Setting times for special orders of the day; for Ecumenical Observers.

III. MATTERS BEFORE SYNOD

- A. Report of the Calling Church
- B. Stated Clerk's Report
- C. Treasurers' Reports (Trinity, St. Catharines and Pompton Plains) **p. 3**
- D. Overtures
 1. Overture I. Hold synodical meetings in each classis in turn. [Classis Southern Ontario] **p. 6**
 2. Overture II. Adopt the Canadian Reformed version of Belgic Confession, Article 4. [Classis Western Canada] **p. 6**
 3. Overture III. Church Order amendment to Appendices 2 - 4. [Classis Southern Ontario] **p. 7**
 4. Overture IV. Request for a quarterly report of news of the Federation. [Classis Michigan] **p. 7**
 5. Overture V. Add to the mandate for the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity [Classis Michigan] **p. 8**
 6. Overture VI. Statements regarding the interpretation of Scripture and more specifically, interpreting the creation account of Genesis. [Classis Michigan] **p. 8**
 7. Overture VII. Change Church Order Article 4. [Classis Southwest U.S.] **p. 9**
 8. Overture VIII. Give pastoral instruction to the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. [Classis Southwest U.S.] **p. 10**
 9. Overture IX. Stated Clerk to arrange for publication in bound volumes the minutes of the organization-al meeting and the subsequent synods of the United Reformed Churches. [Classis Central U. S.] **p. 18**

10. Overture X. Not adopt part of recommendation #4 of the <u>Statements of Agreements</u> from the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. [Classis Southern Ontario]	p. 19
11. Overture XI. The word “day” is to be understood according to common usage. [Covenant United Ref. Church, Pantego, NC]	p. 20
12. Overture XII. Twenty four hour days of Genesis One [Faith Ref. Church, Telkwa, B.C.]	p. 20
E. Classical Request for Advice	p.21
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2. URCNA-OPC Study Committee	p. 54
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9. Voluntary Health Care Plan	
10. Voluntary Retirement Pension Plan	
a. Canadian perspective	p. 104
b. United States perspective	p. 129

IV. ELECTIONS

- A. Stated Clerk
- B. Board of Directors
- C. Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Committee

V. CLOSING MATTERS

- A. Choosing the calling church, place, and date for the next meeting of Synod
- B. Reading of the Concept Minutes
- C. Acknowledgments and Adjournment
- D. Closing Devotions

TREASURER'S REPORTS

**Canadian Finance Committee
Report to Synod**

The following is a report of activity since the previous synod:

Beginning Balance (June 1, 1999): 4,861.64

Credits:

"Askings" Receipts	5,519.22	
Other Receipts	<u>96.85</u>	
Total Credits:	\$5,616.07	5,6416.07

Expenses:

Federation Expenses	2,962.98	
Office Expenses	11.02	
Bank charges	<u>19.50</u>	
Total Expenses	\$2,993.50	2,993.50

Ending Balance (Feb. 28, 2001): \$7,484.21

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

1999 End of Year Report 01/01/99 Through 12/31/99 (Audited)

BALANCE 12/31/1998
12,939.05

INCOME

Askings	4,529.73
Int Inc	142.58
Reimbursements	1,000.00
 TOTAL INCOME	 5,672.31

EXPENSES

Clerk	2,500.00
Dues	1,505.00
Office:	
Directory	55.00
 TOTAL Office	 55.00
Postage	946.68
Synod Secretary	2,677.38
Telephone	830.19
Travel	1,141.17
 TOTAL EXPENSES	 9,655.42

NET TOTAL **-3,983.11**

BALANCE 12/31/1999 8,955.94

United Reformed Churches in North America

Peter J. Moen, US URCNA Treasurer
15 Romondt Road, Pompton Plains, New Jersey, 07444-1840

2000 End of Year Report 01/01/00 Through 12/31/00 (not audited)

BALANCE 12/31/1999 8,955.94

INCOME

Askings ¹	8,632.37
Interest	167.67
Last Year's Askings ¹	4,431.00
Reimbursements ²	730.88
TOTAL INCOME	13,961.92

EXPENSES

Clerk	1,500.00
Directory	55.00
Incorporation	753.75
Postage	555.50
Supplies	103.03
Synod Materials	68.00
Synod-Missions	1,583.50
Telephone	445.17
Travel	2,296.28
TOTAL EXPENSES	7,360.23

NET TOTAL 6,601.69

BALANCE 12/31/2000 15,557.63

NOTE 1: Askings has been split into:

- a. 1999 Askings received in 2000 and
- b. 2000 Askings received in 2000.

NOTE 2: The Clerk's honorarium is paid by the US Treasurer and the Canadian Treasurer makes a good faith estimate, based on the currency exchange, to reimbursement their half of the honorarium.

NOTE 3: Synod-Missions refers to the cost associated with the Synodical Missions Committee.

NOTE 4: Travel refers to all other travel at the request of Synod, usually representation at ecclesiastical meetings.

OVERTURES

Overture I

Classis Southern Ontario hereby overtures the Synod of the URCNA that the federation adopt a policy of holding synodical meetings in each of the classes in turn. Each classis will designate a church within its bounds to serve as the convening church.

Grounds:

1. This may help us to avoid a sense of centralization.
2. As we have experienced in our first three synodical meetings in the Chicago area, in southern Ontario, and in West Michigan respectively, this will help both the local churches and the delegates to have an increased awareness of the federation, and their connection to their sister churches across North America.
3. Increased ease of travel makes this practice more feasible than it may have been in the past.

Classis Southern Ontario
Mr. A. Korvemaker, clerk

Overture II

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod 2001 to adopt the version of Belgic Confession Article 4 adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches, which reads as follows:

We believe that the Holy Scriptures consist of two parts, namely, the Old and the New Testament, which are canonical, against which nothing can be alleged. These books are listed in the Church of God as follows.

The books of the Old Testament: the five books of Moses, namely Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther; Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs; Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

The books of the New Testament: the four gospels, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles; the thirteen letters of the apostle Paul, namely Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon; the letter to the Hebrews; the seven other letters, namely, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and the Revelation to the apostle John.

Grounds:

1. The listing for the books in the Canadian Reformed version of this article has a smoother flow to it and is more in line with the commonly understood names of the books. For example, this version refers to 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Corinthians, etc., as opposed to our present version, which refers to “the two books of Samuel”, “two to the Corinthians,” etc.
2. Our present version states that the two books of the Chronicles are “commonly called Paralipomenon.” The term Paralipomenon is not commonly used anymore.
3. Our present version lists the book of Psalms as the Psalms of David. This could lead to the mistaken notion that David wrote all the Psalms.
4. Our present version refers to “the four great prophets,” and “the twelve lesser prophets.” This distinction between the prophets is unnecessary. Given the common present day understanding of these terms, they could lead to the mistaken notion that one portion of Scripture is being elevated over another.
5. Our present version does not list Lamentations.
6. Our present version lists Hebrews as one of the epistles of Paul. There are many biblical scholars, including conservative ones, who would call this assertion into question. For example, Philip E. Hughes in his Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews states, “The absence both of solid testimony, internal or external, and of any firm traditions means that, as things are, the riddle of the authorship of Hebrews is

incapable of solution.” We are not saying that Paul did not write Hebrews. But at the same time, we do not believe that the creeds should require us to confess the Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

7. Adopting the Canadian Reformed version would demonstrate that we view the confessions as living documents that are not set in stone but which can be changed if necessary. At the same time, we would not actually be changing this article, but merely adopting a different version that more accurately reflects our present understanding.

Classis Western Canada
Rev. William DeJong, clerk

Overture III

Classis Southern Ontario overtures the 2001 Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America to amend the Church Order by supplementing the requirements for ministerial examinations, listed in Appendices 2-4, with a separate section entitled "Reformed Apologetics."

Grounds:

1. The absence of apologetics as a separate section in the appendices cited has thus far caused the subject to receive negligible attention at best, and zero attention at worst during our examinations.
2. Apologetics forms an essential and separate component of the Reformed Theological Encyclopedia as do the other subjects currently listed in said appendices and therefore should be accorded separate and equal status.
3. Critical attacks upon historic Christianity both from within and without Christendom necessitate that our shepherds (including our missionaries) be sound Reformed apologists in tending Christ's flock. In an age of theological scepticism, overt syncretism, rampant secularism, doctrinal indifference, and religious pluralism, our pulpits and flocks would be left defenseless, and our Faith precariously menaced if Reformed Apologetics failed to rise to a standard commensurate with the tenacious and malicious attacks against Christianity. Consequently, the prospective Reformed pastor is obligated to demonstrate adequately and persuasively evidence of his ability to defend the Faith by refuting its enemies, using the Scriptures and the Confessions as primary and foundational weapons (See: Acts 17:22ff; 2 Cor.10: 4-5; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3ff).
4. Failure to accentuate apologetics at the entry level will leave the URCNA vulnerable, with no discernible means of assessing its readiness to combat, repel, and subdue both current and future opponents of historic Christianity; and may result in the eventual erosion and even collapse of the antithetical wall - during our watch! The absence of a disease does *not* necessarily imply inoculation; it may simply mean incubation.

Classis Southern Ontario
Elder B. Regnerus, clerk

Overture IV

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2001 that the clerk of the Federation or another qualified person shall give a quarterly report to each church with the news of the Federation. This quarterly report would include news about new churches that join the federation, pastors accepting calls, new building projects, changes of address of churches, retirement of pastors, pastors joining the URC from other denominations, men granted licensure, the results of candidacy and ordination exams, new missionaries called, federation financial update, special local congregational needs, etc. This information should be given to the clerk of each church.

Grounds:

1. This information would help accomplish one of the original intentions of the United Reformed Church of North America to encourage fellowship with other like-minded churches.
2. The growth of the Federation and the acceptance of Reformed pastors to serve in the Federation would be an encouragement to the families who, in some cases, left family and friends to join the Federation.
3. This knowledge would possibly encourage other churches who having apprehensions about joining the Federation.

4. The Bible encourages us to pray for churches who are struggling in various ways and to rejoice with those who are honored. I Cor. 12:26

Classis Michigan
Rev. W. H. Ord, clerk

Overture V

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2001 to add the following statement to the mandate for the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity:

“When the committee is asked to present the theological position of the URCNA on a topic on which the URCNA has not officially formulated a position, the committee shall report the request to the following Synod and proceed according to Synod’s instruction. The committee shall not present an “unofficial” position of the URCNA.”

Grounds:

1. An “unofficial” position may in fact NOT be the position of the URCNA, thereby providing a false impression of our federation to others.
2. An “unofficial” position has little meaning. It is, therefore, of little use to a denomination that might be considering ecumenical relations with the URCNA.
3. Articulating a theological position of our federation belongs to the churches federatively or an ad hoc committee appointed by them to do so. Such work does not belong to standing committees.

Classis Michigan
Rev. W. H. Oord, clerk

Overture VI

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2001 to adopt the following statements regarding the interpretation of Scripture and more specifically, interpreting the creation account Genesis:

1. Synod affirms and subscribes to the Bible as the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. [Confession of Faith, Arts. 3, 4, 5] We therefore believe that the Scriptures, and more specifically, Genesis, gives an authentic, although not exhaustive, history of creation.
2. Synod affirms that the sovereign God created all things out of nothing by the Word of His Power, in space of six days, and all very good. [Ps. 33:6. John 1:1-3, Hebrews 11:3, 2 Peter 3:5]
3. Synod affirms that the whole creation was accomplished in six ordinary days [Gen. 1:3-2:2; Ex. 20:11]. The creation days are clearly defined in Scripture as each being composed of a period of darkness and a period of light, and as each having evening and morning and are presented as following chronologically one after the other. [Gen. 1:5b, 8b, 13, 19, 23, 31b; Ex. 20:19]
4. Synod affirms that all plants and animals and all living things were created “after their own kind.” [Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, 25] The body of man, the crown of creation, was formed immediately by God from the dust of the earth [Gen. 2:7, Eccl. 12:7], and the woman of the rib of man, “after the image and the likeness of God.” [Gen. 1:26, 27; Belgic Confession Art. 14]
5. Synod affirms that the account of creation in the first chapter of Genesis is a straightforward, accurate and historical narrative showing the origin of all things including the human race, whereas the more specific focus of the account of creation in Chapter 2 of Genesis is the history of the first man and woman.
6. Synod rejects any method of Biblical interpretation that posits a contradiction between the account of creation in Genesis 1 and the account in Genesis 2.
7. Synod rejects any method of Biblical interpretation that views the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 as limited to being a literary figure of speech or a poetic device providing a pedagogical framework for affirming that God created all things.

8. Synod reject any method of Biblical interpretation that espouses either a non-chronological or a non-historical view of the days mentioned in Genesis 1.
9. Synod reject any readings of the creation account that reinterprets the meaning of words from the “ordinary, natural sense” without weighty exegetical warrant.

Grounds:

1. Genesis 1 is divinely inspired history. It is sufficiently clear and understandable, in the context of the book of Genesis and of the whole Scripture, to make the affirmations above.
2. Different methods of interpreting the creation account of Genesis challenge the view historically held by the churches. These differences among us imperil the peace and unity of the churches in the federation and therefore the matter must be addressed by the churches.
3. Any interpretation of Scripture that challenges or rejects the natural, ordinary meaning of the words of Scripture without weighty exegetical warrant minimizes our doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture.
4. Any exegetical principles applied to interpreting the creation account must do justice to the grammatical/historical hermeneutic historically held and applied among us.
5. Any interpretation of Genesis 1 must adequately address the many specific historical details clearly revealed in that part of Scripture, for example:
 - a) that the creation was accomplished supernaturally by a series of divine “fiats”, that is “by the word,” not by way of a process but immediately;
 - b) that each of the “six days” is clearly distinguished by “evening and morning” as well as by its numbering;
 - c) that each of the six days follow in the sequence of those numbers.
6. Any interpretation of Genesis must adequately address, and not contradict, the clear statement in Exodus 20 on the fourth commandment that God created the world in six days, and instituted the Sabbath day rest on the seventh.

Classis Michigan
Rev. W. H. Oord, clerk

Overture VII

Classis Southwest U. S. overtures Synod 2001 as follows:

Article 4 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches states that after a seminarian has completed his studies he must undergo an candidacy examination at a meeting of the classis of which his consistory is a participant. This article further requires that this candidacy exam, taking place at a meeting of classis, must be conducted “in the presence of his [the seminarian’s] Consistory.” **We overture Synod of 2001 to add the words "some members of" after the words "in the presence of", in the second and third sentences of Article 4 so that it now reads:**

At the conclusion of such training, a student must approach his Consistory to become a candidate for the ministry of the Word, which shall arrange for his examination at a meeting of the classis of which his Consistory is a participant. No one shall be declared a candidate for the ministry until he has sustained an examination at a meeting of this classis, in the presence of some members of his Consistory, of his Christian faith and experience, of his call to the ministry, of his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures both in the original languages and in English translations, of the Three Forms of Unity, of Christian doctrine, Christian ethics and church history; of the Church Order, and of his knowledge and aptitude with regard to the particular duties and responsibilities of the minister of the Word, especially the preparation and preaching of sermons. Upon sustaining this exam in the presence of some members of his Consistory and with the concurring advice or the delegates to this meeting of classis, his Consistory shall declare him a candidate for the office of minister of the Word.

Grounds:

1. The intent of this requirement, namely, to have the church’s consistory present at the examination the seminary graduate, is good. But it is unskillfully and impractical in many instances for a whole consistory to be present at candidacy exams. Take, for example, a situation which has occurred in our

classis, Classis Southwest U.S. A seminary graduate holds his membership in a church in the state of Washington. And say, for example, the upcoming classis meeting is to be held in southern California. According to the current Church Order, article 4, the candidacy exam for this seminary graduate requires all the elders of the Washington congregation to take off two days of work and fly to southern California, at a cost of hundreds of manhours and thousands of dollars (lost wages, airline tickets, and hotel lodging). In our opinion, this is not a stewardly use of time and financial resources.

2. Having the whole consistory present at a candidacy exam is assuming that elders actually are able to take time off from their daily work. Most employers today allow excused absences from work only due to sickness or a death in the immediate family. For any other reason, absences from work are not allowed. And many employers today do not allow the taking of vacation days whenever a worker wants. For most younger workers, only two weeks of vacation are given for the whole year. To expect a man to take two of his ten or fourteen days of vacation for a classis meeting is asking quite a bit. And in our classis, where nearly half of our churches are either relatively new churches and/or smaller churches, most of our elders are younger men. Almost all of our churches have fewer retired men or self-employed men serving as elders, compared to years ago, or compared to larger churches. With these younger elders, it is becoming more and more difficult even to find one elder and one alternate elder to be able to attend a classis meeting, much less expecting that the entire consistory be present.
3. With the current Church Order rule mandating the whole consistory to be present at a candidacy exam and with most churches in our classis unable to keep this rule, we are implying that Church Order rules are merely guidelines which can be ignored if they cannot be kept. How much better, in all of our Church Order, to establish definite rules that must be kept by all our churches. Let us not mandate things which are virtually impossible to carry out.

Classis Southwest U. S.
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk

Overture VIII

Classis Southwest U.S. overtures Synod 2001 of the United Reformed Churches:

- A. **To instruct pastorally the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and Church Union (CERCU), not to misrepresent the doctrinal positions of the URCNA and, especially where there are not established positions, to suggest we have such positions, nor to formulate such positions, officially or unofficially, without prior approval of Synod.**

Grounds:

1. The January 2000 CERCU report implies a rejection of the doctrine of the eternal covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son. The covenant of redemption is a standard part of classic Reformed federal theology (Canons of Dort 1.7; Belgic Confession Art. 26). It is an important aspect of our doctrines of God, Christ and Salvation. Its omission or rejection would cause significant harm to our system of doctrine.
2. The January, 2000 CERCU report implies a rejection of the historic Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works as an arrangement of strict justice, i.e., a manifestation of the Law principle, "Do this and live" (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 6, 9; Belgic Confession Art. 14; Canons of Dort 3/4.1) The Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works is essential to our doctrines of Man, Christ and Salvation. Its omission or rejection would cause significant harm to our understanding of the Gospel itself and our system of doctrine generally.
3. The January 2000 CERCU report implies a confusion of the covenant of grace with the covenant of works. In Reformed theology, the covenant of works stands for the Law and the covenant of Grace stands for Gospel. To confuse these two is to lose the gospel and our reason for existence as a Christian church (Heidelberg Catechism Q.62; Belgic Confession Art. 23).
4. The January 2000 CERCU report implies the addition of obedience to faith as an instrument of justification. Such an addition, by definition, destroys the doctrine of *sola fide* as well as *solo Christo*. Two instruments imply two objects of faith, Christ and my obedience. This is not the Gospel but a return to the errors repudiated by the book of Galatians. Such an addition is clearly contrary to our confessional standards (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 21, 31; Belgic Confession Art. 23, 24).

5. The January 2000 CERCU report implies a rejection of the doctrine of common grace. In fact, the URCNA has adopted no formal position on the matter of common grace. The grave theological and missiological implications of the CERCU responses, sent out to the churches January 2000, warrant serious investigation and consideration (Canons of Dort 2.5).

B. To receive the attached explanation in support of this overture.

**Explanation of the Overture
of Classis Southwest U.S. URCNA
March 13, 2001**

I. The Doctrine of the Covenant

There is an important distinction to be made between those issues in Christian doctrine which are extra-confessional and not essential to the Reformed system of doctrine and those issues which are essential. The concerns addressed below touch the essence of the Reformed faith.

Laced throughout the interaction between the URCNA and CanRC representatives were discussions and assertions as to the nature of Reformed Covenant (or Federal) theology and the nature of the relations between Law and Gospel. Classis holds that the CERCU responses to the CanRC position papers contain serious errors.

In the August 6, 1999 issue of the *Clarion* (the magazine of the CanRC), the Rev. Mr. Stienstra published an article, "Contours of God's Covenant: An Unofficial Exposition of the United Reformed Churches in North America." This article is contained in the CERCU Report and was mailed out to the churches in January 2000. In the same issue, the CanRC published their own statement, "The View of the Covenant," in sixteen numbered paragraphs. In these essays both Rev. Stienstra and the unofficial CanRC position paper contain several highly problematic and controversial positions.

Covenant of Redemption (*Pactum Salutis*)

The CERCU report rejects as unhelpful and unedifying the Biblical and classically Reformed doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption (*pactum salutis or consilium pacis*).¹ In "Contours of God's Covenant", (*Clarion* August 6, 1999, p. 375), Rev. Stienstra states, "to call God's counsel of peace the covenant of redemption and introduce the concept and word covenant into the sovereign God's 'internal' works, is not helpful nor clarifying," and "this bi-focused view [of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace] of God's relationship with his creature man is questionable."

This doctrine teaches that God the Father and God the Son made a covenant from all eternity whereby the Father promised to give a people to his Son and the Son promised to be the Redeemer of and Mediator for his people. It has been the historic Reformed understanding that the Covenant of Redemption is the basis for the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace and it is implicit in our confessional standards (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 31; Canons of Dort 1.7) and has been taught explicitly by orthodox Reformed theologians since the early 16th century.²

It has long been the majority position in the Reformed churches. It was held and taught by the primary authors of our Catechism, Caspar Olevian (1536-87) and Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), as well the Westminster Divines (WCF 8.1-2; WLC 31), J. H. Heidegger (1633-98), G. Voetius (1589-1676), J. Owen (1616-83), F. Turretin (1623-87), P. van Mastricht (1630-1706), C. Hodge (1797-1878), A. A. Hodge (1823-1886), and later Louis Berkhof (1873-1957). Rev. Stienstra may be correct in his opposition to the *pactum salutis*, but it is his own view, not the historic Reformed view nor is it the view of the URCNA.

The Covenant of Works

¹ The term "counsel of peace" comes from Zech 6:13. The older understanding is reflected in the A.V.

² E.g., Z. Ursinus, *Opera theologica*, 3 vol., ed. Quirinus Reuter (Heidelberg, 1612), 1, 98-9; C. Olevian, *De substantia foederis inter Deum et electos* (Geneva, 1585), 1.2.6, 1.6.1; 2.28; idem, *In Epistolam...ad Romanos* (Geneva, 1579), 372; 276; 425-26.

Classic Reformed federal theology holds that there are two covenants in human history, the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 6, 9; Belgic Confession Art. 14; Canons of Dort 3/4.1). The latter corresponds to the Gospel and the former corresponds to the Law. The traditional definition (e.g., that of Z. Ursinus) is that a covenant, considered generically, is a mutual agreement having two parts.³ In the first part God comes to his people with the stipulations of the covenant attached to promised blessings and curses.⁴

Yet in his account of Reformed federal theology, Rev. Stienstra, not only reformulates the historic definition of the word "covenant," but he also rejects the Reformed doctrine of the Covenant of Works.⁵ Indeed Rev. Stienstra's advocacy of the "friendship" (rather than forensic) model of the covenant owes more to the peculiar views of Herman Hoeksema and perhaps to the CanRC than it does to classic Reformed theology.⁶

Rev. Stienstra and the CanRC (Art. 1-4 as found in the "Unity Committee Report," and "The View of the Covenant," and the "Points of Agreement," p. 378-379;) also argue that there is no such thing as a Covenant of Works and that there is only one covenant. This view confuses the Covenant of Works with the Covenant of Grace, creating the potential for enormous confusion about the basic nature of the Reformed doctrine of justification.

According to classic Reformed theology, in the prelapsarian Covenant of Works, God constituted Adam the first federal head of humanity and that, as the Puritans had it, "in Adam's fall, sinned we all." As our representative, Adam was given a legal, probationary test which our Reformed fathers described variously as a "Covenant of Nature" (describing the situation in which the covenant was made), "Covenant of Works" (describing the condition of the covenant; Westminster Confession of Faith 7.2), and a "Covenant of Life" (describing the reward should Adam have kept the probation). These expressions all describe the same prelapsarian covenant. This probationary test was that he was not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, lest he die (Gen. 2.17).⁷

³ Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. George Willard (Phillipsburg: P&R [repr], 1985), 97. *Quod sit foedus Dei?* Foedus in genere est mutua pactio duarum partium, qua altera alteri se certis conditionibus obligat ad aliquid faciendum, dandum vel accipiendum, adhibitibus signis et symbolis externis ad solennem testificationem, confirmationis causa, ut promissio sit inviolabilis (Zacharias Ursinus, *Explicationes Catechesos Palatinae, sive corpus Theologiae in Opera*, 1, 99).

⁴ It is sometimes said that this view developed in the late 16th century. This claim is not correct. The elements of what we know as Reformed federal theology, including the Covenant of Works can be found in an inchoate state in the early church fathers. This has been well documented in J. L. Duncan, III, 'The Covenant Idea in Ante-Nicene Theology', PhD. Thesis (Edinburgh, 1995). The same is true of Martin Luther and the major Reformed theologians, e.g., Calvin and Zwingli. This has been documented in A. A., "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly". 2 vol. Ph.D. thesis, Glasgow University, 1988; L. D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus*. Grand Rapids, 1997 and in R. S. Clark, "Duplex Beneficium: Caspar Olevian's Trinitarian, Protestant, Calvinist, Federal Theology." D.Phil. Thesis (Oxford University, 1988). Indeed, Zacharias Ursinus, the primary author of our catechism, taught the Covenant of Works in his Larger and Smaller Catechisms (1561-62) which formed the basis for much of the Heidelberg Catechism. See R. S. Clark and Joel Beeke, "Ursinus, Oxford and the Westminster Divines," *The Westminster Confession into the 21st Century: Essays in Remembrance of the 350th Anniversary of the Publication of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, ed. J. Ligon Duncan and Duncan Rankin (Reformed Academic Press, forthcoming). For a brilliant and brief summary of the history of Reformed covenant theology see G. Vos, 'The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology'. *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*. trans. and ed. R. B. Gaffin. Phillipsburg, 1980.

⁵ His argument is that the word "covenant" is not used in Scripture to describe the prelapsarian arrangement. P. 375, 376 *Clarion*, August 6, 1999, "the use of the former [the Covenant of Works] in particular has limitations as to its usefulness since the Bible does not suggest nor employ the wording." On this model, we could not use the word Trinity since Scripture does not itself use it. This, of course, would be folly since the substance of the doctrines of the Covenant of Works and the Trinity are both clearly revealed in Scripture and are well-described by the historic terms.

⁶ Let the reader be aware that this is not a new debate. Many, and perhaps all of the criticisms made of classic Reformed federal theology made in the CanRC and Stienstra statements were made in the 17th century by the Remonstrants and later in the 20th century by Karl Barth (d.1968), the father of the so-called Neo-Orthodox theology or theology of crisis.

⁷ Ursinus, *Summa*, Question 10, *Opera*, 1, 10.

That Adam was in a Covenant of Works is not a mere theological construct, it is the teaching of the Word of God. Through his prophet Hosea, God prosecutes unfaithful Israel and compares them to Adam in the garden, "Like Adam, they have broken the covenant--they were unfaithful to me there." The clear implication is that Adam broke a legal covenant with God (Hosea 6:7).⁸

In his probation, the promised blessing for obedience was eternal and blessed fellowship with God. The threatened curse was death. Adam was created good, sinless, just, without defect and able to keep this covenant by the exercise of his free will (HC Q. 6, 9; BC 14; CD 3/4.1). It is clearly implied that had Adam kept this covenant, he would have entered into "eternal blessedness." For this reason, God placed cherubim and a flaming sword on the East side of the garden to prevent Adam from returning to the Garden (Gen. 3:21-4).

In the nature of the case, this was a covenant of strict justice. If Adam had fulfilled the conditions, it would have been by his own merit. We should not be squeamish about the language of merit. The Belgic Confession several times (e.g., Art. 22, 23, 24, 35) refers to the merit of Christ and his work. Most all Reformed theologians historically have seen the merit of Christ as the merit of the second Adam, parallel to the work required of Adam.⁹ For example, Ursinus in his lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism said,

By legal righteousness we mean the fulfilling of the law by one, who is thereby declared righteous; or it is such a fulfilling of the law as that which is accomplished by one's own obedience; or it is a conformity to the law which he has who is declared righteous. This legal righteousness was the righteousness of Adam before the fall, and is in the angels, and in Christ as far as he is man. Evangelical righteousness is the fulfilling of the law, performed, not by us, but by another in our stead, and imputed unto us of God by faith.¹⁰

Confessional Reformed theologians, including those who wrote the Heidelberg Catechism, have always understood that what we say about Adam has weighty implications for what we say about our Lord himself, chiefly because of the clear teaching of Romans 5:12-21 in which God's Word compares and contrasts the First Adam to and with the Second Adam, Christ. Just as Adam disobeyed and plunged his seed (humanity) into death, the Second Adam obeyed, fulfilled the conditions, and earned for his seed (the elect) eternal life.¹¹ To suggest that the Father was gracious to the Second Adam (1 Cor. 15:22), or gave to him more than he deserved, would be heresy and would impugn the meritorious nature of the active and passive obedience of our Lord as our Federal head.

This is so because the Covenant of Works is an outworking of the Law principle. It says, "Do this and live" (Luke 10:28) and "cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the Law" (Gal 3:10). Everyone is born under Adam and everyone who is outside of Christ remains only in Adam and under the curse entailed by the Covenant of Works.

The Covenant of Works was not, therefore, a gracious covenant, since saving grace, by definition (Rom. 11:6) is for sinners and Adam was no sinner until he fell. Further to inject saving grace into the Covenant of Works is to confuse Law and Gospel, for when we say "Covenant of Works" we mean nothing more than "the Law of God." Every sinner is born under the Law (Rom 3:19), i.e., under the Covenant of Works.

The Covenant of Grace

The good news is that there is a Covenant of Grace into which sinners are grafted by God's undeserved favor (Eph 2:14-18). For those in the Covenant of Grace, Christ has met the terms of the Covenant of Works, so that we might live (Gal 2:15-21). Thus when Reformed Christians say "Covenant of Grace" they mean nothing more than Gospel.¹²

The essence of the Covenant of Grace promise is this: "I will be your God, you will be my people" (Gen 17:7; Rev 21:3). This is a gracious promise to sinners fulfilled in the incarnation, obedience, suffering and death

⁸ See B. B. Warfield, "Hosea VI.7: Adam or Man?". *The Bible Student* 8 (1903), 1-10. repr. in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield*. 2 vol. ed. J. E. Meeter. Nutley, NJ, 1970.

⁹ E.g., Ursinus, *Summa*, Question 58: *Quare Iesus dicitur?* Quia merito & efficacia sua, salutis perfectae atque aeternae autor est omnibus in ipsum credentibus (*Opera*, 1, 15).

¹⁰ Ursinus, *Commentary*, 325.

¹¹ See S. M. Baugh, "Covenant Theology Illustrated: Romans 5 on the Federal Headship of Adam and Christ", *Modern Reformation* July/August (2000), 16-23; M. G. Kline, *Gospel Until the Law: Rom 5:13-14 and the Old Covenant*, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34 (1991): 433-446.

¹² Ursinus, *Explicationes*, *Opera*, 1, 99.

of Christ. In contrast with the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace was contracted by God, out of mercy, with elect sinners, in Christ. He promises redemption (Gen 3:14-16; 15; 17:1-17), arranges an entire history of salvation full of types and shadows of redemption (Col 2:17; Hebrews 10:1) from Noah to Moses to David which finds its final fulfillment in the incarnation, obedience, death and resurrection of his well-beloved Son, Jesus (Luke 3:22; Hebrews 9:14-28).

In the nature of things, there was and could be no saving grace before the fall. If we say that there was saving grace before the fall, then, given the parallelism established by Rom 5 and 1 Cor 15 we must also say that there was grace to Christ after the fall.¹³ Such a view would be disastrous for our Christology and Soteriology. We confess that Jesus our righteousness was not given anything, but that he *earned* our salvation with his righteous life and death. Only then can we say that God is "faithful and just" to forgive us our sins (1 John 1:9). The Covenant of Grace is gracious only for sinners to whom God grants saving faith.

The Covenant of Grace, though quite different in principle, is similar in administration to the Covenant of Works in that it also has a condition. Whereas the condition of the Covenant of Works was, "do this and live," the condition of the Covenant of Grace is faith alone, in Christ the Savior alone, by which instrument one receives Christ's imputed righteousness. Scripture teaches that even this condition of the covenant is graciously granted by God to his elect (Rom 3:19-5:21; Eph 2:8-10).

The Covenant of Grace is monergistic, i.e., it is initiated and fulfilled by God himself. It is gracious, i.e., it is marked not by, "Do this and live," but "since you have not done this, I will do it for you and you will live" (e.g., Jer 31; Rom 5:8). Saving grace denotes undeserved favor to sinners.

Thus the Covenant of Grace is nothing more than the Reformed synonym for Gospel, the story of what God has done for elect sinners in Christ. This is the historic Reformed covenant theology taught by Calvin, Olevian, Ursinus, Wollebius, Polanus, Bucanus, Cocceius, Witsius and more recently by Hodge and Berkhof. This is the view of the Westminster Confession Faith and the Three Forms of Unity.

The Doctrine of Justification

It is clear that what one says about the covenants affects how one formulates the doctrine of justification. Are sinners justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone or are they justified by grace, through faith and works? This latter view is entertained by more than a few Reformed teachers.¹⁴

Clearly this issue is at the heart of our faith, it was the material cause of the Reformation. If the Covenants of Works and Grace become confused in our theology, then we risk losing the Biblical gospel and our Protestant faith. If the prelapsarian covenant was gracious and the postlapsarian covenant was legal, then grace is law and law is grace. Then justification becomes sanctification and vice-versa. Of course such teaching is not only a repudiation of the entire Protestant Reformation, but an attack on the active obedience of Christ, the very Gospel itself. It is "another gospel" (Galatians 1:9).

The danger is not merely hypothetical, it is present in Art. 15 of the unofficial CanRC statement from their Unity Committee, with which the CERCU apparently agrees. "The View of the Covenant," Art. 15 says,

All obedience to the covenant that is required today is a human responsibility. Yet it is given solely of grace (Eph 2:8-10). We obey, not in our own power, but only in God's power. Yet God realizes His plan and counsel of election and reprobation only in the way of the believing and obedient response of his children.

To the student of the Reformation such a statement is genuinely frightening. There is not an element in this article which was not or could not have been affirmed by the Council of Trent. With the mainstream of medieval theology, Trent (session six, 1546) taught that justification is the result of sanctification. Like the unofficial CanRC statement, Trent taught that sanctification/justification is the product of divine grace. Like the unofficial CanRC statement Trent taught a predestinarian moralism.

The article does not state that the obedience required of sinners in the Covenant of Grace is saving faith in Jesus Christ. It does not refer to saving faith as that sole instrument instituted by God which looks away from

¹³ Which some Reformed theologians are teaching today.

¹⁴ This view has been advocated by Daniel Fuller, Norman Shepherd and John Armstrong, among others. See W. R. Godfrey, 'Back to Basics: A Response to the Robertson-Fuller Dialogue'. *Presbyterian* 9 (1983), 80-84; M. W. Karlberg, "The Original State of Adam: Tensions Within Reformed Theology", *Evangelical Quarterly* 59 (1987): 291-309; M. G. Kline, "Of Works and Grace" *Presbyterian* 9 (1983), 85-92; R. S. Clark, "The Danger of a Falling Church", *The Outlook* 22 (July/August 2000). For the two instrument position see N. Shepherd, *The Call of Grace* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2000). Some of the manifestations of this view among the Dutch Reformed are described in J. van Genderen, *Covenant and Election*, trans. C. Pronk (Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications, 1995).

one's self to Christ as the sole object of saving faith. Rather it refers only to "obedience." It is true that in NT terms, such faith is a sort of "obedience" but this sort of expression, in the context of the unofficial CanRC statement is most unclear and misleading. One is given little reason to take "obedience" here (with the possible exception of the citation of Eph. 2) as "faith."

The article continues to say that it is God who works this obedience in us. Since the article does not stipulate clearly that obedience is "faith," we surmise that the ambiguity is deliberate. In other words it appears to teach that there are two instruments of justification, faith and obedience. If this is the teaching of this article, it is false and to be rejected categorically as a denial of the Reformation doctrine *sola fide* and as contrary to Belgic Confession Art. 24 which says,

These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by his grace. Yet they do not count toward our justification-- for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works. Otherwise they could not be good, any more than the fruit of a tree could be good if the tree is not good in the first place.

God has ordained only one instrument by which sinners apprehend Christ's justice: faith. Obedience flows from faith, but it is a consequence of faith, not a co-instrument with faith.

Much of the unofficial CanRC statement on the covenant is for these reasons also unacceptable. It is not our place to correct the CanRC, however, but the URCNA should be clear that we do not accept several propositions in their exposition of Reformed covenant theology.

Therefore, on these same grounds, we ought to reject in the alleged "Statements of Agreement" (p. 1, point 2) proposed by the CanRC Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity and the CERCU, the proposition that God established the covenant with Adam to show him his "favour" and the characterization of the Covenant of Works as a "covenant of favour."

We are not arguing that either the unofficial views of the CanRC or Rev. Stienstra are heretical, only that the logical implications of their views have terrible consequences for our religion and therefore ought to be rejected vigorously, clearly, publicly and thoroughly by our federation.

II. The Doctrine of Common Grace

Like the earlier sections of the CERCU report, this section is also replete with errors in doctrine and historical fact. The very sub-title "God's Grace: Common or Covenantal" is misleading and question begging. Such a dichotomy is wholly unnecessary and unwarranted. We believe that saving grace is administered through the Covenant of Grace but that does not mean that God does not provide benefits in common to those within and without the covenant community.

Second, though the response claims to be a constructive dialogue, it appears to us that this first unofficial CERCU response to the PRC criticisms of the doctrine of common grace and the free or well-meant offer of the gospel concedes far too much to the PRC.¹⁵

To facilitate discussion, here are the Three Points of 1924 on Common Grace.

The Three Points of 1924

¹⁵ Some of our Protestant Reformed brothers have made much of a recent essay in which R. Blacketer has argued that the first point, in teaching the universal well-meant offer of the gospel, "misinterpreted the confessions and prominent Reformed theologians." See *idem*, "The Three Points in Most Parts Reformed: A Reexamination of the So-Called Well-Meant Offer of Salvation." *Calvin Theological Journal* 35 (2000), 37-65. To make his case he argues, among other things, that among the Reformed orthodox theologians, *oblato* did not really mean offer but rather "to present." He seems to be implying that the Reformed had no idea that there was any divine intention behind the general presentation of the Gospel. This is a very strained argument since the word *oblato* was used to mean "to offer" with intention. Caspar Olevian used this term and its cognates frequently to mean precise "to offer with intention". See *De substantia foederis gratuiti inter Deum et electos* (Geneva, 1585), 2.29; 2.30-31; 2.48. His usage was not unique. Blacketer errs, in part, by using a modern dictionary of Classical Latin to determine the meaning of the word. The meaning of *oblato* must be determined by its immediate context and its actual use in Reformed theology. Blacketer's essay also suffers from the fact that he fails anywhere to make the Reformed distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology which is fundamental to this entire discussion. We know that, relative to the divine decree, that God has elected and reprobated some from all eternity. Whom God has elected or reprobated, however, is strictly a matter of archetypal theology. The fact of the decree does not preclude God from revealing himself as sincerely desiring the salvation of all. His self-revelation is ectypal theology and it is with this that we have to do.

I. The First Point:

Relative to the first point which concerns the favorable attitude of God towards humanity in general and not only towards the elect, Synod declares it to be established according to Scripture and the Confessions that, apart from the saving grace of God shown only to those that are elect unto eternal life, there is also a certain favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. This is evident from the Scriptural passages quoted and from the Canons of Dordrecht [II:5](#) and [III-IV:8,9](#), which deal with the general offer of the Gospel, while it also appears from the citations made from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology that our Reformed writers from the past favored this view.

Scriptural proof: Psalm 145:9; Matt. 5:44, 45; Luke 6:35-36; Acts 14:16-17; I Tim. 4:10; Rom. 2:4; Ezekiel 33:11; Ezekiel 18:23.

We concede that the expression "common grace" is problematic. It has some of the same problems as the inclusion of grace in the Covenant of Works. Most of the Biblical language about grace refers to God's undeserved, saving favor toward elect sinners.

Nevertheless the mainstream of Reformed theology has since the Reformation taught the substance of the Three Points. Creation, considered as such, is good. If the term grace is not well suited to this discussion, we can say at least that God is benevolent to all creatures, even the reprobate.¹⁶ At least this much is clear, from the words of our Lord in Matthew 5:44-45. God does make the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.

More specifically, the Canons of Dort 2:5 teach,

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

In the mainstream of classic Reformed theology, there has been no doubt that God's revealed will is that the preaching of the Gospel is the instrument by which God saves his people (HC Q. 65). This twofold distinction in God's will is implied in Deuteronomy 29:29:

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

The implication of this passage as it has been understood in our theology is that there is a distinction between theology as God knows it (*theologia archetypa*) and theology as he reveals it to us (*theologia ectypa*). These distinctions, form the basis for distinguishing God's secret decree from his revealed will.¹⁷

The assumption behind this view is that all of God's Word is an accommodated revelation, sometimes more and sometimes less anthropomorphic and anthropopathic. As Calvin said, in Scripture God "speaks childishly" (*balbutire*), he stoops over, as it were, like a nurse speaking to children.¹⁸ The accommodated character of Scripture is most obvious in those places where God is said to travel, to have bodily parts and passions. Yet we know from categorical declarations in Scripture that God does not have such. So we interpret the former in the light of the latter.

In this view Christians are morally obligated to discharge God's will as he has revealed it. We are, therefore, forbidden to inquire into the eternal decree since it is beyond what has been revealed. We are, therefore, bound to express God's revealed attitude toward sinners. We are not permitted to attempt to guess who might or might not be elect. Hence, when God's Word says,

Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?' (Ez 33:11; see also 18:23)

¹⁶ Peter Van Mastricht represents the tradition on this point. See his *Theoretico-Practica Theologia, editio nova* (Utrecht, 1699) 2.17.3, 22.

¹⁷ See the extensive discussion by the various Reformed theologians in H. Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. G. T. Thomson (Grand Rapids, Baker [repr.], 1950), 84-92.

¹⁸ *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.1

we understand that God has revealed himself as a preacher. This is a classic example of the sort of intensification of God's accommodated revelation. This language is anthropopathic. God is said to have human feelings and desire. It is not, however, as if he who knows the end from the beginning does not know his elect. Yet he reveals himself as willing that which he has not decreed. This is the clear teaching of the Canons of Dort 3/4:8

As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is acceptable to Him, namely, that those who are called should come unto Him. He also seriously promises rest of soul and eternal life to all who come to Him and believe.

The external call is genuine, unfeigned and earnest because it is through this means of grace that God executes his secret eternal decree in history (CD 3/4:9).

On this point, we commend to the Synod the excellent work done by John Murray and Ned Stonehouse for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1948.¹⁹

II. The Second Point:

Relative to the second point, which is concerned with the restraint of sin in the life of the individual man and in the community, the Synod declares that there is such a restraint of sin according to Scripture and the Confession. This is evident from the citations from Scripture and from the Netherlands Confession, Arts. 13 and 36, which teach that God by the general operations of His Spirit, without renewing the heart of man, restrains the unimpeded breaking out of sin, by which human life in society remains possible; while it is also evident from the quotations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology, that from ancient times our Reformed fathers were of the same opinion.

Scriptural proof: Ps. 81:11-12; Gen. 6:3; Acts 7:42; Rom. 1:24; Rom. 1:26, 28; II Thess. 2:6-7.

Our doctrine of total depravity does not teach that men are always as evil as they can be. This is the force of the second point. God withholds final judgment and restrains the depraved inclinations and actions of the reprobate and thus actively preserves a stage for the outworking of redemptive history.

Further, God's providential goodness toward rebellious sinners—indeed to those whom he alone knows to be reprobate—can only be regarded as divine favor that is exercised not only in view of a lack of merit, but the presence of demerit and utter hostility towards God. The following syllogism might help:

1. Grace is demerited favor;
2. The rain that God causes to fall on the just and the unjust is according to demerited favor;
3. Therefore the unjust are objects of God's grace.

Of course, as the Second Point affirms immediately, this grace restrains "without renewing," so it must be distinguished from God's electing, redeeming and effectual grace. This distinction is intended by the use of the term, "common grace."

III. The Third Point:

Relative to the third point, which is concerned with the question of civil righteousness as performed by the unregenerate, Synod declares that according to Scripture and the Confessions the unregenerate, though incapable of doing any saving good, can do civil good. This is evident from the quotations from Scripture and from the Canons of Dordrecht, III-IV:4, and from the Netherlands Confession, Art. 36, which teach that God, without renewing the heart, so influences man that he is able to perform civil good; while it also appears from the citations from Reformed writers of the most flourishing period of Reformed Theology that our Reformed fathers from ancient times were of the same opinion.

Scriptural proof: II Kings 10:29-30; II Kings 12:2; 14:3; Luke 6:33; Rom. 2:14.

It can hardly be denied that, in the providence of God, reprobate engineers build bridges, legislators pass laws and physicians practice surgery to the benefit of the elect and the reprobate alike. The only question is how we ought to account for these good acts.

¹⁹ Murray's work is available at <http://public.csusm.edu/public/guests/rsclark/>.

It is not as if only the CRC has defended these three points. The CERCU Report virtually ignores the vigorous defense of the Three Points of 1924 published by the late C. Van Til (1895-1987).²⁰ The CERCU report also ignores the work of H. Kuiper showing that Calvin taught the substance of what became known as the doctrine of common grace, as well as the dogmatic work of L. Berkhof.²¹

We urge Synod to reject the CERCU report when it suggests that we ought to reconsider the so-called Three Points of 1924 ("God's Grace: Covenantal or Common?" p.5). Nothing in the criticisms made by the PRC or the CERCU respondent is new or warrants re-opening that discussion or overturning the substance of the Three Points.

Second, under this heading, we again reject, for the reasons already stated, the repeated claim, that the Covenant of Works was a gracious covenant, as it appears in the document, "God's Grace: Common or Covenantal?" (pp.2-4) .

Third , when the CERCU document, "God's Grace: Common or Covenantal?" says that we "raise the question of the natural light in unbelievers" and that "God's grace or undeserved favour is no longer reflected by nature" and that the "United Reformed Churches teach that God's undeserved favor is revealed only in Christ" (p.5), they have quite overstepped their mandate.

Fourth, when the so-called "Unofficial Response of the United Reformed Churches to the PRC Clarifications on the 'Three Points of Common Grace'" says, "we deeply regret the 1924 CRC decision on 'common grace' because it is poor theology not well grounded in the Scriptures or confessions and it was, and continues to be destructive of the unity of the church" (p.1) they have conceded far too much, namely that the doctrine of common grace is poor theology, unscriptural, unconfessional, unreformed and contradictory.

The question whether or how to teach the doctrine of common grace may be an extra-confessional question, but we believe the CERCU has erred in virtually creating a *de facto* URCNA position against it.

Classis Southwest U. S.

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, clerk

Overture IX

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod Escondido 2001 to instruct the stated clerk of the federation to arrange for the publication in a bound volume or volumes, of uniform size and format, with table of contents and indexes, for ease of reference and historical preservation, the agenda and minutes of Synod Lynwood 1996, Synod St. Catharines 1997 and Synod Hudsonville 1999, together with the agenda and minutes of The Meeting of Independent Churches Held November 15-16, 1995 at the Christian Reformed Church (Independent), Lynwood, Illinois. Further, that this also be done for all future synod meetings and that the number of copies printed be based on the number of copies ordered in advance by churches, institutions and others with the cost to be paid by those who order the books.

Grounds:

1. The purpose of keeping minutes is to provide a readily accessible historical record to which reference can be made as the need arises. Currently the minutes and agenda are not published in a bound volume for permanence and ease of access nor are they published with an index for ease of study and referencing decisions.
2. Publishing the agenda with the minutes after synod meetings allows for references to be made to agenda items in the minutes without reprinting them in the minutes.
3. The agenda published in advance of synod meetings need not be in a bound form since it is often incomplete due to late items and addendum to committee reports not available when the agenda is first sent out.
4. Publishing the agenda and minutes in a bound volume will help preserve them for future generations and make them more readily accessible to all the members of the churches.

²⁰ See C. Van Til, *Common Grace* (Philipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947); idem, *Particularism and Common Grace* (Philipsburg:1951); idem, *Common Grace and the Gospel* (Philipsburg, 1977). For Berkhof's views see, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1939), 432-46.

²¹ Kuiper, H. *Calvin on Common Grace* (Goes/Grand Rapids, 1928).

5. In anticipation of each synod meeting, churches should solicit orders for the published minutes through bulletin notices urging especially all officers to obtain a copy with each church possibly underwriting the cost for its officers. Notices could also be placed by the stated clerk in various periodicals soliciting orders from institutions and other federations.
6. The stated clerk, though responsible for the correct text of the agenda and minutes, should not do the work of publishing but should be authorized, in consultation with his supervising consistory, to accept a bid or bids for the completion of the work in a satisfactory manner.
7. This type of arrangement for publishing and distributing needed items has worked well for the annual directory of churches distributed by Reformed Believers United and the republication of the Psalter Hymnal.

Classis Central U.S.
Rev. Ralph A. Pontier, clerk

Overture X

Classis Ontario South overtures Synod 2001 of the United Reformed Churches in North America to not adopt that part of the recommendation #4, (as listed below) of the Statements of Agreements from the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity.

Recommendation #4 from the report currently reads as follows:

NOTE: The Committee for Ecclesiastical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches has agreed to recommend to Synod 2001 that the last sentence of Art. 34 of the URC Church Order be suspended during the period of *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Canadian Reformed Church, should both synods agree to enter such a relationship. The sentence in question reads, *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.* The committee will also recommend to synod that all churches are urged to maintain this provision.

Grounds:

1. There is not need to “suspend” a portion of our Church Order during a possible period of Ecclesiastical Fellowship.
2. The unity committees have not provided us with any grounds supporting their recommendation.
3. The unity committees have agreed to recommend to the respective synods that joint committees be set up to work together to produce a suitable and agreeable adaptation of the Church Order of Dort. This would be the proper time to discuss differences in Church Orders – such as URCNA C. O. Article 34.
4. The URCNA churches adopted the URCNA Church Order. It is designed to serve the needs of our churches only and functions well in that capacity. Our federation had good reason for including this last sentence in Article 34. Articles 14 and 21 of the Church Order clearly indicate that the Consistory (elders) are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments and that the Consistory (elders) is the only assembly whose decisions possess direct authority within the congregation and is accountable directly to Christ.

Classis Southern Ontario

Ralph De Boer, clerk

Overture XI

The council of the Covenant United Reformed Church of Pantego, North Carolina, overtures the meeting of Synod, June 2001, in Escondido California, to clarify for the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches our position regarding the six days of creation, namely that according to scripture God created the world in six days, the word day understood according to common usage.

Grounds:

1. The OCRC have asked us to clarify our position, and brotherly relations requires that we do so.¹
2. There are solid exegetical reasons for understanding the word 'day' as meaning what we commonly understand as day.²
3. Although our confessions do not specifically deal with the issue of six day creation, the Heidelberg's treatment of the fourth commandment (Q&A 92, 103) would require that the days of creation be understood in the normal sense. This is supported by Ursinus' commentary on it (see pp. 558, 561 145). Belgic Confession Article 12 also suggests a literal interpretation of Genesis 1. This Interpretation is consistent with the understanding of the Reformed church in history (see, e.g., Westminster Confession Chapter IV 1).³
4. It is our duty to discover what the Biblical author has said and what he intended to mean, and to communicate this to the church and world at large.

This overture was before Classis Eastern U. S. on October 18, 2000, and was defeated.

Overture XII

The consistory of the Faith Reformed Church of Telkwa overtures the Synod of United Reformed Churches in North America, to declare that with respect to the days of Genesis 1, understanding them to be normal 24 hour periods of time, is the position most consistent with our confessions.

Grounds:

1. While our confessions are not as specific as they could be on this subject, nevertheless it can be argued that to understand the days of Genesis 1 as anything other than 24 hour days in the normal sense of the word would be inconsistent with what the confessions say about God creating all things out of nothing (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 9, Belgic Confession Article 12)
2. While it is true that the Hebrew term for day does not always refer to a specific 24 hour period of time (ex. Hosea 2:15), nevertheless, given how Genesis 1 speaks of evening and morning in the context of the days of the creation week, and given how Exodus 20:11 refers to the days of the creation week to support the establishment of the Sabbath day, understanding the days of the creation week to be normal, 24 hour periods of time is the most exegetically responsible conclusion. Therefore, other positions, such as the framework hypothesis, are not fully consistent with the confession of Belgic Confession Article 5 that we believe without a doubt all

¹They adopted the following motion: "We wholeheartedly express the unity we have already in Christ, and regard the members of the United Reformed Churches as our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. We also sincerely desire and pray that our spiritual unity be expressed in federational unity. In pursuing this goal, however, we request that your local and broader assemblies respond to our deep concern regarding the issue of the Doctrine of Creation. We are concerned that some of your officebearers hold to a framework hypothesis as compared with a literal six day reading of Genesis 1, as expressed in our Position Paper on Creation."

²See article by Dr. B. Grossman, 'The Light He Called Day,' MJT 3/1 (1987). See also article by Dr Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., 'From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2:3,' Chapter 8, pp153ff, Did God Create In Six Days?, Southern Presb. Press, 1999

³Westminster Confession of Faith, IV.1 reads: "It pleased God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world and all things therein whether visible or invisible, **in the space of six days**; and all very good" [emphasis ours].

things contained in the books of Scripture.

3. The Westminster Confessions refer to how God created all things in the space of six days (The Confessions of Faith, Chapter IV, paragraph 1; The Larger Catechism, Q. & A. 15; The Shorter Catechism, Q. & A. 9). A straightforward reading of these statements would certainly suggest 24 hour days in the usual sense of the word. While we do not officially subscribe to the Westminster Standards, many of us do find them to be consistent with our own Reformed confessions.
4. While it would be unwise to begin adopting official position papers that in effect become extra confessional statements, nevertheless we do need to express a common understanding of how our confessions speak to crucial contemporary issues such as the one addressed in this overture.
5. A divisive battle over this issue would be detrimental to our unity as a federation. Making a simple declaration, with the understanding that each consistory will be responsible for how it responds to such a declaration, might help avoid such a battle by allowing for local autonomy while at the same time making clear the common understanding of the churches.
6. Making a simple declaration based on our confessions would be consistent with our past practice at Classis. For example, at our 1999 classis meeting we made a simple declaration regarding what our confessions say about the connection between profession of faith and full participation in the Lord's Supper.
7. Making such a declaration at the level of classis and synod would help foster unity with those Orthodox Christian Reformed churches that are concerned about our stand on this issue.

Done in consistory on Nov. 21, 2000

Don Tuininga, clerk

This overture was before Classis Western Canada of the United Reformed Churches in North America held on March 8 & 9, 2001 and was defeated by a vote of 14 to 11.

CLASSICAL REQUEST FOR ADVICE

Classis Michigan respectfully asks Synod for advice and if / how to proceed with an examination for the ordination of a man who does not have a formal seminary education.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

REPORT 1: COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS AND CHURCH UNITY

Esteemed brothers,

During the two years since Synod Hudsonville 1999 met, the committee has sought to carry out its assignments in harmony with the mandate and guidelines synod provided. We report that the Lord of the church has blessed our efforts on synod's behalf and are able to report progress in the pursuit of ecumenical relations with a number of federations synod assigned to us. In all synod selected ten federations, each with a different history, and frequently with a variant approach to ecumenicity.

It is clear from the report that the committee did not pursue all assigned federations with equal intensity. Our strategy and approach in general has been that we have held back with Presbyterian federations until synod's study committee on Presbyterian standards and church polity reports. We have also dialogued more seriously with churches that historically and confessionally were the closest to the United Reformed Churches. The committee, furthermore, held the Quebec Reformed Churches (ERQ) in abeyance for a year or so because they were in serious dialogue with the Canadian Reformed Churches, and we wished to be sensitive to that developing relationship. At this time, however, we are in correspondence with all ten selected churches.

This report seeks to convey as fully as possible the interactions we have had up to this point, as well as where the committee is in the pursuit of ecumenicity with each federation, always keeping in mind synod's Scripturally and confessionally sensitive mandate that the pursuit must be, "***With a view toward complete church unity...***" The committee met in Grandville MI in April 1999 and in September 2000. These meetings were productive for the work, although the use of e-mail, fax, and telephone prove to function very well. The committee members have labored with joy and satisfaction on synod's standing committee of ecumenical relations, knowing that our labors in the Lord and for His church, the Bride of the Lord Jesus, are not in vain.

Synod St.Catharines 1997 (Minutes, p.9) selected ten federations and assigned them to the committee for the pursuit of ecumenical relations. Synod Hudsonville 1999 (Minutes, p.17) adopted the committee's Mandate and Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. For the sake of clarity and accountability we include the churches and the mandate below. Since three of the churches are currently in **Corresponding Relations** with the United Reformed Churches while the remaining churches are not in Phase One, the committee refers to these seven as **Churches in Ecumenical Correspondence**.

A. Churches in Phase One - Corresponding Relations

1. Canadian and American Reformed Churches
2. Free Reformed Churches
3. Orthodox Presbyterian Church

B. Churches in Ecumenical Correspondence

1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
2. Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches
3. Presbyterian Church in America
4. Protestant Reformed Churches in America
5. Reformed Church in the United States
6. Reformed Church of Quebec / L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec
7. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

COMMITTEE MANDATE

With a view toward complete church unity, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity shall pursue and make recommendations regarding the establishment of ecumenical relations with those Reformed and Presbyterian federations selected by synod and in keeping with Article 36 of the Church Order.

The Committee shall execute its task and carry out its mandate by following synod's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. The committee shall keep the churches regularly informed of its work and the progress made, and shall publish its reports to synod in the agenda.

GUIDELINES FOR ECUMENICITY AND CHURCH UNITY

Phase One - Corresponding Relations

The first phase of ecumenicity is one of exploration, with the intent that by correspondence and dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation may develop in the following areas of the two churches' lives:

- a. view and place of the Holy Scriptures
- b. creeds and confessions
- c. formula of subscription to the confessions
- d. significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology
- e. church order and polity
- f. liturgy and liturgical forms
- g. preaching, sacraments, and discipline
- h. theological education for ministers

Ecumenical observers are to be invited to all broader assemblies with a regular exchange of the minutes of these assemblies and of other publications that may facilitate ecumenical relations.

Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship

The second phase of ecumenicity is one of recognition and is entered into only when the broadest assemblies of both federations agree this is desirable. The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, and in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity, by establishing ecclesiastical fellowship entailing the following:

- a. the churches shall assist each other as much as possible in the maintenance, defense, and promotion of Reformed doctrine, liturgy, church polity, and discipline
- b. the churches shall consult each other when entering into ecumenical relations with other federations
- c. the churches shall accept each other's certificates of membership, admitting such members to the Lord's Table
- d. the churches shall open the pulpits to each other's ministers, observing the rules of the respective churches
- e. the churches shall consult each other before major changes to the confessions, church government, or liturgy are adopted
- f. the churches shall invite and receive each other's ecclesiastical delegates who shall participate in the broader assemblies as much as regulations permit

Entering this phase requires ratification by a majority of the consistories as required in Church Order, Art.36.

Phase Three - Church Union

The third phase of ecumenicity is one of integration with the intent that the two federations, being *united in true faith*, and where contiguous geography permits, shall proceed to complete church unity, that is, ecclesiastical union. This final phase shall only be embarked upon when the broadest assemblies of both federations give their endorsement and approval to a plan of union which shall outline the timing, coordination, and/or integration of the following:

- a. the broader assemblies
- b. the liturgies and liturgical forms
- c. the translations of the Bible and the confessions

- d. the song books for worship
- e. the church polity and order
- f. the missions abroad

In our considerations the matter of the wording of item **f**) under Phase Two also came up. The committee recommends that synod alters this provision to read ***“The churches shall invite and receive each other’s ecclesiastical delegates who shall participate in the broader assemblies with an advisory voice.”*** We believe that the current articulation is not helpful nor precise in its wording. It reads, *“The churches shall invite and receive each other’s ecclesiastical delegates who shall participate in the broader assemblies as much as regulations permit.”*

I. COMMITTEE COMPOSITION

Synod appointed eight members, each to serve a term of three years and then to be eligible for the reelection of one more term of service, after which they retire. The stated clerk, Rev. J. Julien, serves on the committee as an *ex officio* member. Synod has arranged the terms in a way that in most years two members retire. In 2001 Rev. J. Bouwers and Rev. H. Zekveld retire. Both are eligible for reelection to another term. Three members are scheduled to retire in 2002, elder C. Dykstra, Rev. R. Pontier, and Rev. R. Stienstra. Only elder Dykstra will be eligible for reelection. The committee alerts synod that this matter needs attention.

Rev. Zekveld moved from Iowa to Ontario, causing a logistical difficulty for the committee in terms of face to face dialogue with federations which are concentrated in the Midwest of the United States. It is helpful for the committee’s work if at least two members are located in that region. In order to facilitate our activities in particular with the RCUS, the committee has asked Rev. L. Johnson from Doon Iowa to serve as temporary assistant until synod meets when the delegates need to consider the matter. The committee recommends that at least one additional member be elected from that region and synod may wish to consider Rev. Johnson. We list the current members, their function, and their year of retiring. Synod may wish to designate a date on which newly elected members assume responsibility. July 1 is a possible day to consider.

Rev. P. Vellenga, chairman (Clinton ON)	2003
Rev. R. Pontier, recording secr. (Orange City IA)	2002
Rev. R. Stienstra, secretary (Dunnville ON)	2002
Rev. J. Bouwers (Jordan ON)	2001
Elder R. Clausing, (Lynwood IL)	2003
Elder C. Dykstra (St. Catharines ON)	2002
Rev. H. Zekveld (Strathroy ON)	2001
Rev. J. Julien (Lynwood IL)	---

II. COMMITTEE PROCEDURE

There are two matters the committee reports with respect to the procedure of its work. We do so for the sake of accountability and also we wish to discharge our mandate as effectively as possible, realizing that the committee is a servant of synod and the churches. Thus, we seek to pursue our task in humility, always being ready to defend the truth of God’s Word and the confessions, submitting the committee’s recommendations to synod as our mandate requires.

The first subject in this section is the manner in which the committee engages another federation’s committee in dialogue on doctrinal or theological matters concerning which synod has not officially taken a position. The second is the measure or degree of understanding and appreciation our consistories, councils, and congregations wish to have before agreeing to proceed in ecumenical relations with another federation from Phase One to Phase Two, as well as the committee’s responsibility to produce and ensure such understanding. We raise the matter since it could in certain instances involve the timing of the committee’s recommendation to proceed to another phase of ecumenical relations with a particular federation.

A. Doctrinal Dialogue

The committee is engaged in dialogue with a number of federations following synod's guidelines. When item **d)** of Phase One is reached in the dialogue our practice has been to compose a discussion paper that reflects our churches' understanding of the subject at hand, one selected area of discussion at a time. The other federation's committee does likewise. On our part we have sought to convey an accurate and true interpretation of our church history, and of our general position on the doctrine of the covenant and of the church. These papers and dialogue have the function, following synod's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, to develop "*mutual understanding and appreciation*" for a) the view and place of the Holy Scriptures, and b) the creeds and confessions.

It is the committee's understanding of synod's mandate and of the nature of Scriptural and confessional ecumenicity and church unity that the Three Forms of Unity, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort form the **basis and foundation** for such unity and eventual union, should the Lord grant this. Thus the papers and the Statements of Agreement of the committees serve to demonstrate to the churches of both federations how each lives and functions within the confessions and the Church Order. At the conclusion of the process and as an interim step to eventual integrated federative church unity, official mutual recognition as true churches of the Lord Jesus, being found faithful in doctrine and life, would be considered by each synod as recommended by their ecumenical committees. Such mutual recognition moves the federations to the next phase in the pursuit of Scriptural unity, **Ecclesiastical Fellowship**, and is in accord with synod's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.

We have designated the papers as *an unofficial exposition* of the URC, the *discussion papers* of the Committee, and *unofficial 'response'* of the URC, suggesting that they are not and should not become officially adopted positions of the churches, since these papers are part of the ongoing dialogue. Synod's mandate leaves no doubt that the churches wish to be obedient to God's directives in John 17 and Ephesians 4, and faithful to the summary of Scripture in LD 21 and in Art. 27-29 of the Belgic Confession. We have attempted to reflect in these papers and in the ensuing discussions the theology and writings that have been formative in the life of our churches. All of the papers, also from the other federations, have been sent to our church councils to keep the office-bearers informed as our mandate requires. The committee's three discussion papers of Phase One item d) were placed on the Internet and are readily accessible to all.

- a. Church History: <http://www.SpindleWorks.com/library/precedent/ppMain/u01.html>
- b. Doctrine of the Covenant: <http://www.spindleworks.com/library/precedent/ppMain/u05.htm>
- c. Doctrine of the Church: <http://www.SpindleWorks.com/library/precedent/ppMain/u03.htm>

In carrying out our task of ecumenical dialogue and making recommendations to synod, the committee has consistently followed synod's Mandate and the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity as we understand them. This is also true in the discussion papers on God's covenant, to chose one illustration out of a number the committee produced. This paper, as do the others, indicates the committee's earnest desire to reflect the Scripture's teaching and the confessions' summary. We have articulated in our writings and discussions with the federations involved as clearly as possible that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit at the Counsel of Peace (*pactum salutis* or covenant of redemption) decreed all things concerning creation and redemption. We understand that God established His covenant (covenant of works, covenant of creation, or covenant of favor) with His creature man, and that Adam the head of the human race broke that covenant by disobeying His command.

It was then, in the Garden of Eden, that the LORD imposed His covenant curse and judgement on man and all his descendants, but also announced and promised that the Seed of the Woman would crush Satan's head and bring redemption. God's covenant at that point in time became the Covenant of Grace. Scripture clearly teaches, the committee believes, that Christ fully and completely paid the ransom for and accomplished the redemption of the elect so that justification is by faith in Him alone, and not by faith and good works.

The committee has included these covenantal factors in some detail under this heading to be fully accountable in our reporting concerning the ecumenical task we do on synod's behalf. We follow the practice of the previous synod and recommend that synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation of the discussion papers, or of the statements of agreement.

B. Process for Entering Phase Two

One federation and one committee have requested to enter into "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" with the URC. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church requested synod to do so, while the Reformed Church in the United States asked our committee to recommend this to synod. In both instances the committee is planning to work through all the categories of Phase One before recommending to proceed to the next relationship, since this is in keeping with synod's mandate for us. Only with the Canadian Reformed Churches has the committee completed all the categories synod outlined in the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity in Phase One.

These Guidelines describe *Corresponding Relations* or Phase One as the first phase of ecumenicity being "*one of exploration, with the intent that by correspondence and dialogue mutual understanding and appreciation may develop.*" It is our interpretation that the two ecumenical committees work at developing "*mutual understanding and appreciation*" for each other's federation by means of their dialogue. Over an extended period of time the committee explores all the essential and significant ingredients of the subjects itemized in Phase One and keeps the local churches informed of their progress, according to the mandate.

The local consistories and councils receiving the committee's work and recommendations have the responsibility of ensuring that the congregations share such understanding and appreciation as much as is possible and desirable in the local situation. In fact, Art. 34 of the Church Order encourages the local churches "*to pursue ecumenical relations with Reformed congregations outside the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and demonstrate faithful allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity.*"

In a letter to all councils dated January 2000 the committee wrote, "*We send this material to ensure that unity between federations is not merely a formal and synodical matter, but also involves the local churches. It is the committee's hope and expectation that the consistories and councils will use these papers to forge greater church unity at the local and regional levels.*" We included all the papers produced by us and all other churches we were in contact with, adding the first five Statements of Agreement reached with the Canadian Reformed committee. We concluded our comments to the churches in the context of the Agreements, "*If all can be agreed on in this phase the two committees will be recommending to their 2001 synods that the two federations enter into Phase Two, **Ecclesiastical Fellowship**. Such a development involves all the local churches. Thus, we keep you informed.*"

Some councils may have construed our January 2000 mailing as a report. It was not intended as such, for then it would have been organized in an efficient manner rather than merely sending a number of papers. The intent was to give the councils ample time to prepare to enter into Phase Two with the Canadian Reformed Churches, to keep the churches informed and to encourage them to contact us in case of lack of understanding or agreement. The letter said, "*The committee welcomes the responses and input from the churches.*" However, no requests were received.

III. CHURCHES IN CORRESPONDING RELATIONS

The committee reports on its pursuit of ecumenical relations with these three churches first, since they have been designated by synod as having sufficient affinity with the United Reformed Churches in confessions and church polity to be in *Corresponding Relations*.

A. Canadian and American Reformed Churches

Reasons for the Recommendation to Proceed to 'Ecclesiastical Fellowship'

For the last five years the Canadian Reformed Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity and the United

Reformed Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity have been in dialogue together. After a period of correspondence the committees met face to face in order to pursue the mandates given to them. The last three years in particular were spent in intensive dialogue. Major hurdles were overcome as the atmosphere was always fraternal and as the committees sincerely and persistently pursued ecumenicity.

Last summer all the subjects listed under Phase One were brought to an agreeable conclusion. The result was that both committees agreed to recommend to their respective synods to recognize each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus. The committee also reports that a representative was invited to speak in Smithers BC, Neerlandia AB, Hamilton ON and in St. Catharines ON at unity meetings between the Canadian and United Reformed churches. A representative of the committee also attended a Dunnville ON council meeting. In addition there is an ongoing exchange of observers at the respective classes of the two federations on a regular basis.

The ten Statements of Agreement were mailed to the churches in June 2000. We noted above that the Three Forms of Unity are the **basis and foundation** of true church unity. The Statements of Agreement indicate that the committees have found that both federations show in their doctrine and life a conformity to the Confessions. We make clear that the Statements do not add to the Confessions but function within and in harmony with them. Thus the committee recommends that synod enter into ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship*** with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The details of that relationship are outlined in the committee's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity as Phase Two. We include the Statements of Agreement below.

The committee reminds synod of the fact that this Phase is entered only "*when the broadest assemblies of both federations agree this is desirable.*" The intent of this limitation is in our view that the recognition of each other and the commitment to "*eventual integrated federative church unity,*" must be **mutual**. The committee underscores this fact. One synod of the two cannot by itself effect Phase Two in our understanding. In making the recommendation to proceed in ecumenical relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches the committee understands that we have completed the work assigned to us with this federation up to this point, and expect synod to stipulate the involvement of the committee in ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship***.

The committee also notes that the time element or the extent of time required for the two federations to be in ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship*** is not predetermined. Should synod proceed to enter into that relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the committee recommends that the next synod consider the progress made in Phase Two, particularly the work of the committees synod 2001 may have appointed to work out the details of a joint church order, a future song book, and theological education for ministers. We recommend that synod at that time decide how to proceed toward "*eventual integrated federative church unity,*" the objective being Phase Three, ***Church Union***. May the King of the church give the wisdom required to accomplish His purposes, and answer the prayers of all His children in these matters.

It is the committee's view that the integration of the two federations cannot be forced, but needs adequate time. It is also our understanding of current situations that true progress will not really be made between many local United Reformed and Canadian Reformed congregations until mutual recognition takes place at the synodical levels. Many Canadian Reformed consistories and all of their classes are waiting for the recognition of each other "*as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus.*" The committee urges synod to consider all of these factors in deciding what the Lord's will is. We further mention that in the fall of 2000 after the consistories had reviewed the committee's recommendations, we published an article explaining the Statements of Agreement with the Canadian Reformed Churches in *Christian Renewal*, which published in the same issue a summary of the Statements and a copy of the Committee Mandate and of the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. The committee did this to produce greater awareness of and discussion on the relationship between the two federations.

STATEMENTS OF AGREEMENT

1. Church History

We acknowledge from both sides that with sin and shortcoming, both of the most recent secessions in our history,

the liberation of 1944 and the 1990s secessions, were acts of obedience required and obligated in keeping with the will of God (as confessed in Art.28 and 29 BC).

2. The Covenant

The covenant is a relationship between God and man established by God at the time of His creation of Adam and Eve. It is one sided in origin and two sided in existence. God established it to live in fellowship with man and show him His love and favour, and to receive from man love, obedience, trust, and honour. When man broke this covenant of favour by his rebellion and fall into sin, God in His grace maintained this relationship and promised to redeem man by the sacrifice of His Son, the Seed of the woman in its deepest sense. The Lord makes this covenant of grace with the believers and their offspring.

The promises of the covenant together with the demand to repent from sin and believe the promises must be proclaimed throughout all the world. All who repent and believe and receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour are grafted into the covenant and share in its promises and blessings. The death of Christ on the cross represents the fulfilment of the terms of the old covenant. Therefore in the new dispensation of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ, believers and their seed are called by the power of God to live in true thankfulness and live according to all the commandments of God.

In an obedient response to the covenant obligations the believers are called to gather together in unity with Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, and in unity of faith with the church of all ages. These gatherings are found where the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed in purity, where the sacraments are administered in purity, and where church discipline is exercised for the correcting and punishing of sins. All people belonging to God's covenant of grace are called and obliged to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church. The fullness of this covenant takes place at the consummation of all things when the one triune God will live with His chosen people in perfect love and fellowship through all eternity.

3. The Church

We acknowledge that due to the many limitations and shortcomings of human understanding there is a brokenness of the church both in local situations and in broader federations. This implies that there can be more than one true church in a particular places at any given time. We need to reject a broad denominationalism on the one hand, as well as a narrow sectarianism on the other. Churches of various backgrounds but one confession have the duty to pursue the highest forms of ecclesiastical fellowship possible in their context, in order to promote the unity of the church locally as well as in the federation of churches.

4. The Church Order

The unity committees express their gratitude that both federations have maintained the principles, structure, and essential provisions of the Church Order of Dort in their respective adaptations for Reformed church life. The committees discussed the specific differences between the orders of the Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches. The agreement was reached that a recommendation be sent to the next synods that each synod appoint a church order committee, and that the two committees work together to produce a suitable and agreeable adaptation of the Church Order of Dort. The differences between the current orders of the federations would be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and Confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Church Order of Dort.

NOTE: The Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches has agreed to recommend to synod 2001 that the last sentence of Art.34 of the URC Church Order be suspended during the period of *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the Canadian Reformed Churches, should both synods agree to enter such a relationship. The sentence in question reads, "*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.*" The committee will also recommend to synod that all churches are urged to maintain this provision.

Committee Comments on the Church Order Agreement

The **Church Order** agreement contains two recommendations. The first one recommends the formation of a Church Order committee for the purpose of working together with a Canadian Reformed committee in order to produce a joint Church Order based on the Scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of that of Dort. The intent is that preparations begin now so that the two federations will have a proposed joint Church Order available should full integration become a reality in due time. Up until that point each federation would continue to use its current Order. It is the committee's understanding of Phase Two that the recognition and acceptance of each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus by the two federations also includes the "*preparation for and commitment to integrated federative church unity.*" The recommendation for the appointment of a Church Order committee is in keeping with our understanding.

The second part of this agreement recommends that one sentence in our present Church Order Art.34 should be suspended during the period of ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship***. Such a practice of suspension was used at the synod of Lynwood 1996 of articles 32 and 65 (Minutes p.9) without considering that the Order was changed thereby. The sentence at issue is, "*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.*" The committee recommends to synod that the churches are urged to maintain the suspension, should it be passed.

The broader wording of the first part of Art.34 provides adequate stimulation to pursue ecumenical relations and practices, the committee believes. It states, "*Churches are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with Reformed congregations outside 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 church is to give an account of its ecumenical activities to classis.*" In view of the vital role the pulpit occupies in the life of our churches, we recommend that the consistories limit the selection of a guest preacher to the directives in the remaining part of the Art. 34 during ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship*** with the Canadian Reformed Churches, and until agreement is reached for a joint Church Order.

We understand that to mean that during this period each consistory will seek the concurrence of classis in allowing a minister of a non- ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship*** church to preach. Thus, while suspending the sentence does not limit the freedom of the churches to pursue ecumenical relations described in the first part of the article, it does prove to be a helpful asset in pursuing ecumenical relations with Canadian Reformed Churches.

5. The Song Book

The unity committees gratefully observe that both federations have maintained the principle that while preaching is the central ingredient in the church's worship, congregational singing suitably accompanied forms a significant part of a Reformed worship service. The committees discussed the differences between the Canadian Reformed *Book of Praise* and the United Reformed *Psalter Hymnal*. The agreement was reached to recommend to the 2001 synods that when the two federations agree to enter into ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship*** each synod appoint a song book committee, and that the two committees work together to produce a song book that contains the Anglo-Genevan psalter and other suitable metrical versions, while including hymns that also meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions. The committees recommend that the churches continue to use their accustomed song books, also after the Union should the Lord grant this, until the new song book is ready and adopted.

Committee Comments on the Song Book Agreement

Synod Hudsonville 1999 appointed a committee "*to begin the work of producing for publication a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal*" (Minutes p.20). We recommend that should synod decide to enter into ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship*** with the Canadian Reformed Churches, our present song book committee should work together with their committee to produce "*a song book that contains the Anglo-Genevan*

psalter and other suitable metrical versions, while including hymns that also meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions.” This recommendation does not suggest that the Canadian Reformed **Book of Praise** (which contains both psalms and hymns) or the United Reformed **Psalter Hymnal** psalm versions and selections should be incorporated in their totality.

Instead, the committee envisions a song book that includes: **1)** the 150 Psalms in metrical settings (one note for each syllable) from an English translation of the Genevan Psalter, **2)** other settings of the Psalms - not Genevan, such as those found in the Psalter Hymnal, and **3)** a variety of hymns that are faithful to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity. The committee alerts synod to Art.39 of the Church Order, *“The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. Hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity may be sung, provided they are approved by the Consistory.”*

6. Agreement on Creeds, Confessions, Liturgical Forms, and Prayers for Inclusion in the Proposed Song Book

The unity committees also note with thankfulness that both federations have translations of the Three Forms of Unity in their song books which adhere to and reflect the original languages as adopted by the Synod of Dort. The committees are also grateful that the liturgical forms and the prayers for special and designated purposes appear in each federation’s song book since they form a direct link with the history of the early Reformed churches in Europe where they originated. The unity committees recommend that the first Synod of the new combined federation, should the Lord grant the Union to take place, appoint a committee or committees to coordinate and harmonize the present translations of the Ecumenical Creeds, the Three Forms of Unity, the liturgical forms, and the special prayers, consulting where possible the original languages, for eventual inclusion in the new song book.

7. Agreement on Theological Education for Ministers

With thanks to God the unity committees concur that both federations have maintained the traditional Reformed practice of requiring and providing a thoroughly confessional and scholarly theological education and training for their students aspiring to be ministers of the Word. The Canadian Reformed Churches own and support their Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario, and the professors are Canadian Reformed. Graduates normally become candidates and ministers in their churches. The United Reformed Churches have no federational seminary, and the candidates for their ministry are trained by a number of Reformed seminaries, especially by the independently owned and operated Mid America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana, but also by the similarly independent Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, California.

The committees discussed the potential and actual differences in the confessional requirements, the church membership of the professors and teaching staff of these three theological schools, the appointment procedures, as well as the institutions’ curricular diversities. Agreement was reached to recommend to the synods of 2001 that when the two federations agree to enter into ***Ecclesiastical Fellowship*** each synod appoint a theological education study committee. The unity committees recommend that each synod’s committee also have serving on it one or two professors from its own theological school or schools, and that the two committees work together to draft proposals for their synods in preparation for the eventual Plan of Union in accordance with their mandates.

The unity committees recommend to the synods of 2001 that the mandates for the proposed theological study committee of both federations contain provisions for the commitment that should the Lord of the Church grant eventual Union, the resulting United Churches will retain at least one federational theological school and that the synod recommend the school’s professors and teaching staff for appointment. A further recommendation to be included in the study committees’ mandates is that the synod of the United Churches select those non-federational seminaries for the preparation of its future candidates for the ministry whose professors and all teaching staff sign the Form of Subscription indicating agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. Another recommendation for inclusion in the study committees’ mandates is concerning an aspiring candidate’s failure to have adequate instruction in significant courses such as Reformed Church Polity or Reformed Church History. He will be required to supplement his education in those courses to conform to the standards of the churches’ theological school(s) before being able to be declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word in the United Churches.

Committee Comments on the Theological Education for Ministers Agreement

The committee recommends that should synod decide to enter into Phase Two with the Canadian Reformed Churches, synod appoints a theological education study committee to work together with a similarly appointed Canadian Reformed committee *“to draft proposals for their synods in preparation for the eventual Plan of Union in accordance with their mandates.”* The intent of this recommendation is that should the Lord of the church grant an eventual coming together of the two federations, there should be ample time to seek agreement on where and how the churches’ ministers should be educated. We also include three recommendations for provisions synod may wish to consider as part of such a committee’s mandate. These recommended provisions are clearly spelled out in the Agreement.

8. Preaching

Grateful to the King of the Church, the unity committees report their agreement that both federations seek to maintain a high standard of preaching as required by Scripture. Fully trained and ordained ministers are called to preach the whole counsel of God. This includes the regular preaching of the Reformed Confessions focusing especially on the Heidelberg Catechism during one of the worship services on each Lord’s Day. The committees agree that preaching the full counsel of God requires the proclamation of the promises of God, together with command to repent and believe the gospel, thus calling all to flee from the wrath to come. With suitable exhortations and admonitions all the hearers are encouraged to appropriate the promises of the gospel with a living faith. In this way, the committees agree, every effort is expended in the churches of the two federations to promote the proper explication and application of the Scriptures for the building up of the congregations.

9. Agreement on the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper

Noting that the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them is a mark of the true Church, the unity committees agree that in both federations the sacraments are maintained and administered according to the ordinance of God. The elders exercise supervision with regard to the administration of both sacraments, and only confessing members in good standing are allowed to present their children for baptism. After making public profession of faith members are admitted to fellowship at the Lord’s Table. It is in this way that the sacraments are celebrated to the glory of God and for the edification of His people.

The committees discussed the different practices of supervising the participation of guests at the Lord’s Supper. The Canadian Reformed practice is to require of guests an acceptable certificate or attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct issued by the elders of their “sister churches.” The United Reformed Churches generally accept upon an interview with the guest, his or her signed personal attestation concerning doctrine and conduct thereby assuring the consistory of their church membership by profession of faith and of their godly walk.

Agreement was reached that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is entrusted to the congregation in each location, and that its elders are charged by Christ with the pure administration of this sacrament. In receiving guests from elsewhere, the committees have agreed that a travel attestation from a guest’s home consistory is a time honored and effective practice in supervising guests at the Lord’s Table. A personal attestation prepared and administered by the consistory of the church celebrating the Lord’s Supper is also an acceptable and Reformed way of supervising attendance at the Lord’s Table, when as much as possible the elders have attempted to secure confirmation of the guest’s godly life from appropriate sources. In the attestation the signatories state that they are communicant members not under discipline of a faithful church which fully confesses the doctrines of the Scriptures. The consistory would send the personal statement to the person’s home church.

10. Ecclesiastical Discipline

Since both federations seek to govern themselves according to the pure Word of God, all of the churches exercise church discipline for correcting and punishing of sin, the unity committees agree that the implementation of Scripture, the Confession, and the Church Order are duly practiced in the churches. The Canadian Reformed and the United Reformed Churches consider Christian discipline to be spiritual in nature, and for the purpose that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church and his neighbor, and that all offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

END OF STATEMENTS OF AGREEMENT

B. Free Reformed Churches

Progress with the Free Reformed Churches has not proceeded at the pace hoped for, perhaps especially due to scheduling difficulties. The Ontario members of the committee met with the External Relations Committee three times since the synod of Hudsonville 1999. Our committee presented its three prepared papers on church history, the covenant, and the church. Their committee responded by producing papers drafted on the same topics. The meetings have been devoted to a discussion of the contents of these papers, and statements of agreement on Church History, the Doctrine of the Church, the Covenant have been reached.

Several additional meetings were scheduled but needed to be canceled due various conflicting ministerial activities, but at the most recent meeting in March 2001 a beginning was made in the dialogue on the appropriation of salvation, a major issue for the Free Reformed Churches. Several articles written by Rev. A. Baars from the Netherlands on the topic, "The 'Appropriation of Salvation' in the Creeds: An Overview" served as the catalyst for the discussion. General agreement was reached, but a paper will be prepared by each committee on several specific subjects in these articles. Another area of discussion was the content of the "Conclusions of Utrecht" of 1905 in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN). The Free Reformed Churches are very interested in how the view in the United Reformed Churches is with respect to that historical event that was adopted and later (in 1968) rescinded by the Christian Reformed Church, especially with respect to the doctrine of presumed or presumptive regeneration as the reason for baptizing infants.

The committee was invited to attend the synod of the Free Reformed Churches, held in Hamilton ON in June 2000. One of our members brought greetings on behalf of our federation. He explained the functioning of **Corresponding Relations** which our synod established with the Free Reformed Churches, itemizing its components. He also stressed the similarity in church history and the unity we share in the Three Forms of Unity, while suggesting that we are very interested in learning and discussing the differences among us. Our spokesman indicated that the committee is seeking to comprehend more fully why the mother church of the Free Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was not able to join the Union of 1892.

The committee spokesman said, *"Our committee was grateful to read that you share with us as federation an adamant rejection of the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. This unscriptural teaching, we believe, is related to connecting God's decree of election and reprobation too closely to the doctrine of His covenant, conceivably leading to preaching that tends to belittle the pervasive presence of sin and the essential need for regeneration and repentance in the lives of God's people."* We append the address to the Free Reformed synod to our report.

The Free Reformed synod adopted its committee's recommendation to structure their synod's relationship with other churches in three categories. They call them **"Levels of Ecclesiastical Fellowship,"** consisting of **A. Limited Contact**, **B. Limited Correspondence**, and **C. Complete Correspondence**. Their synod resolved to enter into the first level of **'Limited Contact'** with the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregations, the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the United Reformed Churches. In a follow-up letter the Free Reformed committee secretary explained the decision in this way, *"Synod's understanding is that establishing level 'A' of ecclesiastical fellowship with another federation in no way 'makes binding' or 'expected' or 'necessary' moving towards the other two levels...while it does open the door for such development under God's blessing. Synod sees level 'A' primarily as a communicatory level in an official and brotherly manner. We trust that your churches will accept our offer thereby establishing an official, albeit limited, ecclesiastical relationship between our denominations."* In order to avoid any confusion we mention also here that Synod Hudsonville 1999 decided to enter into **Phase One - Corresponding Relations** with the Free Reformed Churches.

We commit our continuing dialogue to the blessing of the King of the church, trusting that faithful pursuit of the mandates of Scripture will reap the reward of closer fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches.

C. Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The committee is waiting for synod's response to the report of its 1997 study committee on the differences in confessions and church polity between the United Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

before proceeding to serious dialogue with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations. However, we did meet with the OPC committee in September 2000 to establish an initial contact with them, and to become acquainted with that federation's policy on church unity. The meeting accomplished our goals and both sides were appreciative of what was achieved.

The committee received a copy of the OPC 1996 paper entitled, "*Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church.*" Its main divisions are "The Nature of the Church," "The Unity of the Church," "Ecclesiastical Union," and "Toward Perfecting Biblical Unity." We presented them with a copy of the committee mandate and guidelines, and explained them somewhat. The OPC committee expressed concern about the progress reportedly made in ecumenicity with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Their federation has some unfinished difficulties with them at this time. It was generally agreed that the matter of church polity and church order may present significant hurdles in future dialogue.

The issue of supervising the Lord's Table received some attention in the conversation, as did the matter of extra-creedal binding statements. The Orthodox Presbyterian committee informed us that their churches initiated what is called Ministers Theological Institute, designed to supplement seminary education and prepare men for serving specifically in the OPC. On the matter of possible obstacles to unity their committee mentioned that while the practice of contemporary worship in some of their congregations could be considered obstacles, such worship has diminished in frequency recently.

The committee requested Rev. W. Renkema from Salem OR to represent the United Reformed Churches at the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church held in Tacoma WA during July 2000. He had the opportunity to address the Assembly and convey synod's greetings as well as engage in some fellowship with the delegates. Among other things, he said, "*I have especially been impressed by how you handle discipline cases, protests and appeals. There are so many areas in which we can mutually benefit from each other and strengthen each other to remain faithful to our Lord and King of the church.*" We append his entire address to the committee report.

The committee looks forward to pursuing ecumenical relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in a more structured fashion and at a regular and sustained rate. Meanwhile, our committee members attend their Presbytery of the Dakotas when invited and it is possible to do so. May God bless our efforts.

IV. CHURCHES IN ECUMENICAL CORRESPONDENCE

A. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

The committee initiated contact with the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church in 1999 as part of synod's assignment to the committee. Our initial mailing included a copy of "An Abstract of the History of the United Reformed Churches." In a follow-up communication we encouraged a pursuit of ecumenical relations, if possible in the pattern of synod's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity, of which we sent them a copy. The committee proposed arranging a meeting conceivably in Grandville MI where we were meeting with a number of federations in September 2000. Due to other responsibilities the Inter-Church Relations Committee of the ARPC could not honor our request. They invited us to send an observer to their General Synod, scheduled to meet in June 2000.

The committee requested Rev. C. Tuininga from Pantego NC to represent the United Reformed Churches at the ARPC General Synod in Flat Rock NC. We are grateful that he was able to do so. He reports that "*this was the first time the URCNA was represented at a Synod of the ARP and thus I tried to explain our history and some distinctives about us.*" Some delegates displayed considerable interest in how our churches guard the Table of the Lord. Rev. Tuininga had opportunity to speak with the Inter-Church Relations Committee and conveyed our interest in pursuing ecumenical relations with their federation. He provided the clerk with a copy of our Church Order. We will append his complete address to the General Synod to our report.

B. Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches

Synod Hudsonville 1999 extended an invitation to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches to join the United Reformed Churches. The invitation stated, *“To invite the OCRC churches officially by way of the URCNA Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity Committee to unite with the URCNA in federative union on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order. As part of this invitation we humbly but forthrightly ask them to unite with us on the basis of the URCNA church order. Should the churches of the OCRC federation decide to accept this invitation, they will be received immediately in the federation without conducting a colloquium doctum for their ministers.”*

The committee sent this invitation and its grounds to the convening church in time for their synod which was held in October 1999. Three members of the committee were able to attend the OCRC synod and listen to the discussion on the invitation. A committee spokesman brought greetings from synod and gave appropriate background and explanation of the invitation. All of their churches had considered the invitation at their consistories, and many of them convened congregational meetings to discuss the subject, some conducting a vote on the matter. Each church delegation was requested to explain their position. All twelve responded.

During the discussion the committee spokesman was given opportunity to speak directly to the issue of the doctrine of creation as held to in the United Reformed Churches. He noted that the URC does not have any binding extra Scriptural or confessional declarations. He cited LD 9 of the Heidelberg Catechism and read suitable sections of Articles 12 and 14 of the Belgic Confession to show the adequacy of the Reformed confessions in the matter of God’s creation. Our spokesman also addressed the dangers of binding the churches with declarations which more narrowly circumscribe the interpretation of Scripture than the Reformed confessions do. In the end the following answer was formulated and sent to the United Reformed Churches.

“We wholeheartedly express the unity which we have already in Christ, and regard the members of the United Reformed Churches as our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. We also sincerely desire and pray that our spiritual unity be expressed in federational unity. In pursuing this goal, however, we request that your local and broader assemblies respond to our deep concern regarding the issue of the Doctrine of Creation. We are concerned that some of your office bearers hold to a framework hypothesis as compared with a literal six-day reading of Genesis 1, as expressed in our Position Paper on Creation.”

The Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches do not have committees, and therefore the committee could not and cannot pursue ecumenical relations with them in terms of correspondence and dialogue as our mandate prescribes. The committee can serve as synod’s servant in passing on any decision to their federation, and to discuss and explain it at the OCRC synod of 2001, but cannot do more at this time. We did not consider it to be part of the committee’s mandate to carry on a dialogue with each of their consistories concerning the matter of the doctrine of creation, and have not done so. What the committee has done is to send to all of our churches the OCRC letter of response as well as their position paper on creation in a mailing dated January 2000. We believe that the early date should have enabled the consistories to make adequate preparation for Synod Escondido 2001.

The committee considered the propriety of making a recommendation on how to respond to the OCRC in this report to synod. The mandate instructs us that we *“shall pursue and make recommendations regarding the establishment of ecumenical relations with those...federations selected by synod and in keeping with Article 36 of the Church Order.”* Having reported how the committee communicated at the 1999 synod of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, we concluded that no further action on our part is needed at this time. It is the wish of the committee that the King of the church will lead the present ecumenical pursuit in paths and results that please Him and build up His church for His glory and honor.

C. Presbyterian Church in America

The committee has sent a letter to the Presbyterian Church in America seeking to initiate correspondence and dialogue for the purpose of pursuing ecumenical relations with this federation. We acquainted them somewhat

with our federation, and wrote them, *“We are committed to pursue ecumenical relations with churches that profess the Bible to be the Word of God and have confessions that reflect a defense of that Word.”* The committee enclosed a copy of our mandate and the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.

Rev. Allen Vander Pol from Cape Coral FL attended the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America in Tampa FL on June 20-23, 2000 and has sent the committee his report. He writes that all ruling and teaching elders in the PCA are invited to attend the General Assembly which functions more like a conference than the synod procedures our churches are used to. Each church has two votes, but churches with over one thousand members have three votes.

Rev. Vander Pol reports that the PCA study committee on the creation days of Genesis 1 presented its report to the General Assembly. Their report in considerable detail outlines the common view held by the committee on Genesis 1-3, namely that *“is true history, not myth, that ...[it] is God’s inerrant Word, that...[it] teaches creation ex nihilo, that Adam and Eve were real historical human beings created to be the parents of all humanity and were not the products of evolution, and that Gen. 1-3 requires us to believe in a historical fall.”* The study committee also reported agreement on the relationship of the Bible to science. Our observers writes, *“They agreed: that the Bible does speak authoritatively to matters studied by historians and scientists; that acceptance of non-geocentric astronomy is consistent with full submission to Biblical authority, and that a naturalistic world view and the supernaturalism of true Christian faith cannot be reconciled with each other so that Christians may hold only to supernaturalism.”*

The study committee could not find consensus concerning the length of the days of Genesis 1, nor what the Westminster Confession means when it states that God created *“in the space of six days,”* but presented a variety of interpretations. The General Assembly concluded *“that it is permissible to hold any of the views represented by the members of the study committee and that it is necessary to hold to the consensus positions also expressed in the Report. Within these parameters one can remain in good standing in the PCA.”*

Our observer concludes his report, *“I was impressed by the love for the Gospel which the delegates expressed and by their determination to follow the scriptures though they differed on specific issues and though some issues before them were difficult to resolve...May the Lord of the church bless the PCA and add His Holy Spirit to the ministry of its churches.”* Rev. Vander Pol’s report is on file.

We also conveyed to the PCA the fact that Synod Escondido 2001 meets on June 5-7, and that the Stated Clerk Rev. J. Julien will send them an invitation to have an ecumenical observer at synod. He will include an agenda of the assembly’s activities. The committee hopes that this ecumenical initiative will prosper with the Lord’s blessing.

D. Protestant Reformed Churches in America

The pursuit of ecumenical pursuit with the Protestant Reformed Churches has continued in what by now appears to be at the rate of one all day meeting per year. The agenda for the committee meeting with the PRC was comprised of written papers by both sides on the covenant and on the confessional status of the doctrines of common grace and of the covenant, to be followed by discussion. On September 19, 2000 the committee met with the Committee for Contact with Other Churches in Grandville MI. The committee read its paper, *“Contours of God’s Covenant,”* while the PRC committee read its paper, *“God’s Dealing With His People in Covenant Fellowship.”* The discussion revealed a difference in the understanding of Scriptural revelation concerning **when** God established the covenant, and **with whom** He made it.

The PRC committee defended the view that God established the covenant in eternity at the counsel of peace with the ‘pre-incarnate’ Christ and therefore with the elect only. The committee explained that we understand the Scripture to reveal that the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit engaged in the counsel of peace in eternity (also called covenant of redemption by some or the *“pactum salutis”*), and decreed at that counsel all things

concerning creation and redemption referring to Eph.1:11, *In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him Who works all things according to the counsel of His will.*"

We set forth our understanding that the LORD established His covenant **in time** with believers and their seed, though Scripture also refers to His "*eternal covenant.*" The words of Col.1:17 were focused on in the dialogue, "*And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.*" Also, the more expanded formulation of Eph.1:10 was considered. We referred to the initiation of the covenant in the Garden of Eden (sometimes called the covenant of works, the covenant of nature, or the covenant of favor, when the very act of creating by the Word that became flesh is viewed as a deed of favor) and how after disobeying God's command, the LORD changed His covenant in the Garden into the Covenant of Grace by announcing the 'Seed of the woman' and imposing His covenant curse on man and on the world. The discussion proved to be worthwhile.

In the afternoon the PRC committee read their paper. Using especially quotations from the Canons of Dort the paper defends the PRC position that the covenant is only with the elect is confessionally grounded. Defining the covenant as "*a living, organic relationship of friendship through Christ without any conditions, not an agreement between God and man with conditions which must be fulfilled for the covenant to be either established or maintained,*" the paper posits some fifteen assertions each of which is said to be connected to a quotation from the Canons, the Catechism, and the Form for Baptism. These statements basically reflect the PRC 1950 **Declaration of Principles**. All office bearers must concur with this declaration.

The committee read its paper entitled the same as that of the PRC committee, "The Confessional Status of the Doctrines of the Covenant and of Common Grace." Dividing it in three parts, "Common Grace" "Covenant" and "Concluding Remarks," our spokesman clearly set forth the tenet that the doctrinal decisions of the Christian Reformed Church have no binding force on the United Reformed Churches. That includes the 1924 declaration on common grace. The paper concludes, "*... it is clear that our confessions neither teach, nor bind its subscribers to confess, the understanding as set forth by the CRC synod of 1924.*"

Moving on to a consideration of the binding character of the **Declaration of Principles**, the paper sets forth the committee's view in considerable detail and notes, "*... our problem with the **Declaration** is that it appears to set forth an **interpretation** of the Confessions as though it were nothing more than a **summary**.*" The concluding remarks read, "*Since our confessions themselves do not present us with an elaborate or fully developed doctrine of the covenant, it is our conviction that for the churches to bind the consciences of her ministers and members beyond what the confessions demand is both unwarranted and unwise. In this connection we also conclude that the **Declaration of Principles** has become problematic in the way it appears to us to have attained confessional or confession-like status in the midst of the Protestant Reformed Churches.*"

The PRC committee also raised the matter of obstacles to further church unity. They expressed their concern about postmillennialism, divorce and remarriage, the framework hypothesis (some call it "framework interpretation"), and the developing and potential relations between the URC and the Canadian Reformed Churches. Later it was agreed that the committees would meet again in September 2001 to discuss the topics of the matter of creation and evolution and also to continue the discussion on the covenant, in particular its scope, essence, and relationship to election. It is the committee's hope that our eternal Lord and King will continue to provide a blessing on these labors in the pursuit of the unity of His Church.

E. Reformed Church in the United States

The committee members in Iowa have had four meetings with the Inter-church Relations Committee of the Reformed Church in the United States beginning in 1999. Several papers were presented and all the subjects in Phase One of the committee's Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity were treated in this fashion, although not all areas of discussion received the full involvement of the entire committee. The progress was noteworthy, and the committee representatives involved considered that conceivably the United Reformed Churches were prepared to proceed to Phase Two, **Ecclesiastical Fellowship** with this federation. The RCUS has a category of

ecumenicity entitled "*Fraternal Relationship*" which is a combination of the URC First and Second Phase of ecumenicity, and does not have a category that coincides with our "*Corresponding Relations*."

The committee met with the Inter-church Relations Committee of the RCUS in Hudsonville MI on September 20, 2000. After a fraternal and profitable meeting, it was decided that since a formal and official relationship had not yet been established by synod, it was premature to recommend to proceed to Phase Two of ecumenical relations. The RCUS committee has since informed us that they have decided to recommend to their synod to adopt a similar first phase of ecumenical relations as the URC and other Reformed federations use in their pursuit of ecumenical relations.

The committee decided to recommend to synod that it approve entering into **Corresponding Relations** with the Reformed Church in the United States on the basis of its confessions, the Three Forms of Unity, and their firm defense of the Bible as the infallible and inerrant Word of God. We give thanks to God that these churches strive to maintain purity of doctrine and life, seeking to live by faith. May God bless the efforts expended in the pursuit of being a true and faithful Reformed church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent their committee the discussion papers on church history, the covenant, and the church, and encouraged them also to produce papers on these topics in preparation for continuing our interaction. It is the committee's expectation that the next years will see a developing relationship between the two federations.

In 1999 the RCUS synod met in Bakersfield CA, and the committee requested Rev. J. Gangar from Walnut Creek CA to represent the URC as an ecumenical observer. He did so and his report is on file. Their synod delegates showed an interest in our relations with a number of federations, particularly as it involved a discussion on common grace with the Protestant Reformed Churches and the progress with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

In 2000 the RCUS synod convened in Hamburg Minnesota, and two committee members were able to serve as ecumenical observers. The delegates noted that the RCUS has 38 churches with a membership of 4236. The synod decided to discontinue having Westminster Theological Seminary in California on the list of approved seminaries. Our members reported the adoption of a somewhat vague statement. "*That recommendations of the position papers adopted by a judicatory of the RCUS are authoritative advice to the members under the authority of that judicatory and serve as its witness to the world of its understanding of Holy Scripture and our subordinate ordinances.*"

Our observers also state their concern about the synod's adoption of Principle V on Church Unity, and organic union in particular. The wording is, "*organic union is desirable if the denominations are separated by unessential differences, **and** when unity may be accomplished without surrendering biblical and creedal convictions.*" They express their discomfort, "*We are left to wonder: are there two sets of essentials that may separate the RCUS from the URCNA, a set of extra-confessional distinctives in addition to biblical and creedal convictions? We do not want the RCUS to distance itself from us or from other reformed federations by setting up multiple distinctives or position papers as essentials for unity.*" The committee will append their report. We trust our gracious heavenly Father will bless the work over the next few years as ecumenical relations with the RCUS are pursued.

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

For over a year the committee has not written to these French-speaking churches out of respect for the special involvement they were developing with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Now that some time has lapsed, the committee feels free to continue our previous contact. We have sent them a communication recently, and have been in telephone contact with them also. A number of URC churches support the ERQ financially, due to their small and needy situation. The Reformed churches in Quebec maintain a training school for pastors, the Institut Farel.

Their history is colorful and quite different from the typical Canadian and Reformed federations. They are almost

unique in their confessional stance, it appears. They accept beside the ecumenical creeds, the Confession de la Rochelle, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. However, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Confession “constitute the official expression of our beliefs which all office bearers must adhere to.” The “Ecclesiastical Order and Discipline of the Reformed Churches of Quebec” resembles the Church Order of Dort somewhat and has a multitude of Scriptural references.

May God grant His indispensable blessing to this federation of churches, and to the pursuit of further relations with them.

G. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

An effort to establish further relations with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America was pursued by sending them a letter expressing our commitment to pursue ecumenical relations with their churches if possible. The committee explained the background of the United Reformed Churches, and acquainted them with our adherence to the Three Forms of Unity. We wrote, “*In order to facilitate the dialogue, should you be prepared to do so, I enclose a copy of our synod’s Mandate and Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.*”

We also alerted them to the Escondido Synod 2001 to held on June 5-7, the Lord willing. We wrote them that they were invited to send an ecumenical observer and would receive a copy of the Agenda beforehand. It is the committee’s wish that these churches will receive our God’s wonderful blessing as we seek to become mutually better acquainted.

Rev. Julien was delegated to represent us at their Synod in July 1999. He sent this report. “*In July of 1999, I attended the One Hundred Sixty-Ninth Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, held at Taylor University, Upland, Indiana. I could not be present for the whole synod, but the meetings I attended were not the normal type, I was told. They had a time of reports regarding their churches (an interesting time) and then they participated in a seminar entitled ‘Managing Conflict in Your Church.’ Before the reports of the churches I was given permission to bring greetings from the URCNA. According to the Report of the Interchurch Committee, ‘The Committee has approached the newly formed United Reformed Churches and invited them to send an observer to this Synod. We hope and indeed anticipate that this will develop soon into full fraternal relations between us.’ Again, we were treated with great Christian care and it was enjoyable to fellowship with men in this very old North American group of churches.*”

V. NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL

The committee delegated the secretary and Rev. C. Tuininga to represent the United Reformed Churches at the 1999 annual meeting of the North American and Reformed Council. The agenda was noticeably light, and perhaps the main accomplishment was the decision to have each member church assess itself in terms of its distinctives. The intent was to report the following year with the hope that such an exercise might lead to greater appreciation and unity among the churches, the main purpose as originally envisioned by NAPARC. Our secretary was asked to present greetings and some remarks. He noted, “*With genuine regret and deep sorrow and pain our churches, by now about 70, left the CRC because they wished to retain the marks of the true Church: pure preaching, pure celebration of the sacraments, and the faithful implementation of church discipline. Thus, we are gratified that you, mainly Presbyterian Churches, have dissociated NAPARC from the Christian Reformed Church by suspending its membership.*” The committee has the report and the address on file.

The 2000 meeting of NAPARC convened in Los Angeles CA on November 15, and the committee requested Rev. R. Scheuers from Chino CA to represent the United Reformed Churches. He related a brief history of the URC and some of its challenges and blessings. He also challenged the churches of NAPARC to “*be deeply committed to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions, as well as to the Biblical principles regarding true unity in Christ, the King of His Church.*” With interest he reports the assessments of each member church. A compilation and distillation will be made which will be sent to the churches for greater unity among them. The report of our delegate concludes with this observation, “*Next year’s anticipated decision regarding the CRC membership in*

NAPARC will no doubt test its resolve to remain faithful to its Biblical and Confessional basis.” Our delegate encourages the URC to continue to send observers to the next meeting in Philadelphia PA. The report is on file.

VI. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That synod approve the proposed change in Phase Two f) to read *“The churches shall invite and receive each other’s ecclesiastical delegates who shall participate in the broader assemblies with an advisory voice.”*
2. That synod establish **Corresponding Relations** with the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS).
3. That synod take note of the request of the OCRC to respond *“to our deep concern regarding the issue of the Doctrine of the Creation.”*
4. That synod establish Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.
5. That synod, should recommendation 4 be adopted, appoint the three committees recommended in the **“Statements...”** and provide mandates for them.
 - a. Church Order committee
 - b. Song Book committee
 - c. Theological Education for Ministers committee
 - d. Provide mandates for all three committees
6. That synod, should recommendation 4 be adopted, suspend the last sentence of Art.34 of the Church Order, and urge the churches to maintain the suspension.
7. That synod mandate the CERCU relationship to the three committees should synod appoint them.
8. That synod take note of and act on the completion of the terms of several committee members.
9. That synod add one member to the committee and that synod consider Rev. L. Johnson of Doon IA.
10. That synod consider the committee’s request to give its secretary the privilege of the floor when committee matters are before the assembly.
11. That synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.

Humbly submitted,

P. Vellenga, chairman
R. Stienstra, secretary

NOTE: The committee intends to send all discussion papers developed by us or the churches we are dealing with to the councils in due time. Should any delegation wish to receive during synod any copy of existing papers, feel free to contact the secretary.

VII. APPENDIX

1. Address to the Free Reformed Synod in Hamilton, Ontario June 23 - 25, 2000

Esteemed Brethren,

The United Reformed Churches in North America are thankful that the time has come that we may again be represented at your Synod, and that several other federations have been invited as well. In our view the development in the North American Reformed churches is such that faithful orthodox churches, seeking to be true to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions, should seek to pursue church unity to the measure and degree that this is possible and desirable. Thus our congregations are grateful to the King of the Church for this opportunity to become better acquainted with churches of the same precious faith, and to learn from you what the pathway to closer fellowship may entail.

As spokesman of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URC, I bring you greetings from our federation in the name of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. During these rather long and demanding days of Synod, as you make many decisions and also examine a candidate for the ministry of the Word, all of us wish you brethren

God's blessing with these words: *"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, "* Ephesians 1: 17,18.

At the last Synod of the URC, in 1999, the churches decided to enter formally into Corresponding Relations with the Free Reformed Churches. This is Phase One of what the URC Synod calls "Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity." The other two levels or phases are Ecclesiastical Fellowship and Church Union. Each of the three levels serves a distinct purpose, and the first phase does not automatically nor necessarily lead to the second phase, but entering the latter is done *"... in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity."* It is well to draw to your attention that "Corresponding Relations" for the URC is a relationship where the primary focus is on *"exploration with the intent that by correspondence and dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation may develop in the following areas of the churches' lives."* The suggested topics for discussion are these:

- a. View and place of the Holy Scriptures
- b. Creeds and Confessions
- c. Formula of Subscription to the Confessions
- d. Significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology
- e. Church Order and polity
- f. Liturgy and liturgical forms
- g. Preaching, sacraments, and discipline
- h. Theological education for ministers

Observers from the churches in Corresponding Relations are invited to all broader assemblies with a regular exchange of Minutes, Acts or other publications that may facilitate ecumenical relations.

We are very pleased that your External Relations Committee is recommending that the United Reformed Churches be considered for inclusion in the Limited Contact level of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Reformed Churches. In our understanding of this level it is somewhat similar to and analogous with the intent of Phase One of the URC called Corresponding Relations. It is our sincere hope that you will approve your committee's recommendation, since this well structured format will assist the dialogue between the two committees to proceed in an orderly manner, and should the Lord grant it, such a development may in due time lead to a more intense and closer relationship between our two federations.

For the United Reformed Churches the pursuit of ecumenicity is not merely a good and desirable practice among churches who have the same high view of the Holy Scriptures as inspired as infallible and inerrant, and who have the very same Reformed Confessions, but it is for us a mandate from the Head of the Church. The burden to pursue such a relationship as far as is feasible and possible, we hold, comes from the Word of the Lord and from the very nature of being the Bride of the Lord, there being only one Bride. Because our two federations are spiritually, historically, and confessionally one, we trust and pray that Christ will continue to bless the pursuit of our interaction, at the present time still near ground level.

In this connection it may be desirable to mention that the URC committee has sought to learn and understand the reasons why the CGK were not able to join the Union of 1892, reasons which may be reflected in the need for the formation of the Free Reformed Churches in the 1950s in North America. Our committee has read the book edited by Theodore Plantinga, **Secession, Doleantie, and Union: 1834 -1892**, and especially his appendix, "The Dissenters of 1892." The presentation in the appendix represents fairly the more extensive rationale by H. Henstra in **Tot Een Teken en Een Wonder**, published in 1963, which those of us who are able have also read.

With interest we continue to focus on your federation's pamphlet, "Introducing the Free Reformed Churches of North America." In particular our interest is piqued in the last section under "A Brief History of the Free Reformed Churches." Our committee was gratified to read there that you share with us as federation an adamant rejection of the doctrine of presumptive regeneration. This unscriptural teaching, we believe, is related to connecting God's decree of election and reprobation too closely to the doctrine of His covenant, conceivably leading to preaching that tends to belittle the pervasive presence of sin and the essential need for regeneration and repentance in the lives of God's people.

In this connection our committee with appreciation noted the Free Reformed booklet's explanation of the search for Scriptural balance. We read, *"Nevertheless, our founding members did not wish to have an unbalanced emphasis in the preaching on the need for regeneration and the marks of regeneration, for fear that the preaching would focus attention of the congregation on the born again person. Thus these experiences would become focal points in the preaching, rather than leading the congregation to look evermore 'unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith'"*, Hebrews 12:2 (pp.28,29).

The Free Reformed and the URC committees have written papers on God's covenant of grace seeking to establish the unity "in true faith" as confessed in Lord's Day 21. There remain some distinctives in emphasis in particular, but our federation would have no difficulty with the formulation your committee presented and with which the URC committee concurred. They wrote, God's covenant is "that gracious arrangement which God establishes with believers and their children in which He promises salvation through faith in Christ, and requires of them a life of faith and obedience." The Free Reformed committee added, *"Our preaching stands in line with this definition and calls people to faith and obedience. In doing so it describes the need for Christ, the availability of Christ, and the life out of Christ. We believe this approach can be recognized as being at the heart of mainline and historic Reformed doctrine."* The URC committee's difficulty with this formulation is the rather ambiguous wording 'the availability of Christ.' But since the committees have not yet had the opportunity to focus on preaching in the two federations, the occasion to come to clarity on this wording should take place in September 2000, when another meeting is scheduled.

Meanwhile, we mention that we have also read with appreciation the Free Reformed view of the congregation in the booklet mentioned. We refer to, *"In the preaching we must regard the congregation as it is in reality, namely, as covenant congregation of the Lord ... The Lord has brought about this relationship through His Word, and He claims the congregation with His promises and demands. The preaching addresses the congregation in this relationship but makes clear that being a member of the covenant of grace is not yet being a believer,"* p.11. In the scheduled discussion on the article by Rev. A. Baars, "The Appropriation of Salvation in the Creeds," there should be ample opportunity to discuss 'experiential' and 'subjective' preaching, subjects close to the heart of some potential differences between our two federations.

As your deliberations continue, may God's gracious Spirit endow each of you with a love for the truth. We conclude with these words from Ephesians 4, *"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all."* To Him be all the glory and praise!

For the Committee of Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity,
The United Reformed Churches in North America

Rev. Richard Stienstra, secretary

2. Address to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church General Assembly, 2000

Dear Brothers in Christ Jesus our Lord:

It is a special privilege for me to bring greetings to you from the Federation of United Reformed Churches. Although the birth of our federation is very recent, the ties which many of us in the URC have had with your church span over many years. Especially during those difficult years in the denomination from which the URC seceded we were blessed by your example and encouraged by your firm stand in the defense of the truth as revealed in God's Word. More recently our congregation in Salem has enjoyed and benefitted from some of your retired ministers who led our worship services during my absence.

Our consistory also borrowed the practice (common among you but new to most of us) of electing elders for life rather than for a three-year term. This practice serves us well. Personally, I am learning more and more about you from my son Marc who serves the OPC church in Bothel. I have especially been impressed by how you handle discipline cases, protests and appeals. There are so many areas in which we can mutually benefit from each other and strengthen each other to remain faithful to our Lord and King of the Church. As our society increasingly forsakes God and His Word and the issues facing our churches become more complex, we need each other!

Browsing through your agenda, I read with great interest that you report an increase in the number of congregations, growth in membership, as well as in financial giving. What especially caught my attention was the improvement in worship attendance. We join you in giving thanks to God who alone creates in His people the desire and need for worship! Your Foreign Mission Report and the Report dealing with Home Mission and Church extension also impressed me. Among other things, the report stated that one of every five congregations is mission work. In the URC we could greatly benefit from your approach to church planting. May the Lord continue to use you in carrying out His great commission to His Church.

The Lord has also greatly blessed us in our five-year history. At our birth in 1995 there were 36 congregations and today there are 73 churches with a total of 17,416 members. Much time and effort have been spent in the past on getting

organized, putting up new buildings, elders re-examined worship practices, and committees and synods worked hard on a church order that places the authority in the hands of the local church rather than in the larger assemblies. In my opinion we have now reached a point in the history of our federation where we must concentrate on reaching out to the world. As a church whose roots are firmly planted in the Reformation, we have a timely message because so many people today are hungry for a deeper and richer understanding of God's Word! May God use you in the OPC and us in the URC to boldly and unashamedly preach, teach, and defend the Reformed faith!

At the very first URC synod meeting on October 1996 an Inter-church Relations Committee was appointed. The following year you invited our federation and our synod accepted to enter into a "corresponding relations" with you. At that same synod in 1997 a committee was appointed with the mandate *"to study the Confessional Standards, Form of Government, Book of Discipline and the Directory of Worship of the OPC with regard to 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."* At our Third Synodical meeting in 1999, this committee submitted a very brief report stating that they are still in the process of reviewing all the relevant material and preparing a report for the churches. Hopefully they will have their report ready when our synod meets in Escondido CA in June 2001.

The report in your agenda from the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch relations seems to indicate that there has been very little contact with our standing Committee on Ecumenical relations and Church unity. This is unfortunate and hopefully this will change once our study committee completes its work.

In conclusion, as the representative of the URC, I wish you God's richest blessing on the decisions that you are making at this Assembly and may He continue to use you individually and as a denomination to proclaim the good news of salvation in Christ! Remember us in your prayers as we will remember you in ours! Let us together cooperate in the great work to which Christ has called us! To God be the glory and honor! Thank you for giving me the privilege to address you!

In His service, William Renkema

3. Report of the Reformed Church in the United States 254th Synod 2000

The 254th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) was held May 9-11, 2000 at the St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church of Hamburg, Minnesota, which with 336 members is the largest congregation of the RCUS. Rev. Zekveld and I were warmly received and generously hosted. We were present from Tuesday morning, May 9 through Wednesday supper, May 10. Since we were not present for the whole synod, this report contains material found in other printed reports, specifically the report of Rev. William W. Haddock the editor of the RCUS magazine *The Reformed Herald*, found in the May 2000 issue of that magazine.

The RCUS finds its roots in the German Reformed Church in the United States (later called Reformed Church in the United States) that merged with the Evangelical Synod of North America in 1934, in what was known as the Evangelical and Reformed merger. One classis, the Eureka Classis, declined to participate in the merger with its confessional compromise, and continues to this day as the Reformed Church in the United States. Her doctrinal standards are the Three Forms of Unity. The RCUS counted 4,236 members in 38 congregations this year.

The Synod began with a worship service on Monday evening and also included a worship service on Wednesday evening. Business began on Tuesday morning with the election of officers: President - Rev. Vernon Pollema; Vice-President - Rev. Robert Grossmann; Stated Clerk - Rev. Frank Walker; Treasurer - Mr. Clayton Greiman. The Synod welcomed Rev. Cliff Loucks and Rev. Hans Kalkman as new ministers, and received the Redeemer Reformed Church of Minneapolis MN as a new congregation.

Many visitors to the Synod were acknowledged. Among them was included Rev. David King as the fraternal delegate of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Visitors and observers were also welcomed from the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Canadian Reformed Churches, the United Reformed Churches, Hope Haven, Dordt College, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Greenville Theological Seminary, Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia and California) and New Geneva Seminary.

Missions: The RCUS supports home mission works in: Yuba City, CA- Watertown, SD, Minneapolis, MN, Chico, CA, Los Angeles, CA; Greeley, CO; and Vermillion, SD. A congregation in Modesto, CA came off the roll of mission

churches at this Synod, Their foreign mission efforts include support for the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo and the Free Reformed Church of Kenya. They also support the Reformed Radio Administration which seeks to reach Africa with the gospel.

Interchurch Relations: According to the Report of the Permanent Interchurch Relations Committee to the 254th Synod, the RCUS is presently in fraternal relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPCM), the Reformed Confessing Church of the Congo, and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). In 1999 the RCUS suspended relations with the IPCM due in part to a lack of communication from them. Synod decided this year to terminate fraternal relations eight months after sending them a final letter, if no response to that letter is received. The RCUS is conducting extensive talks with the Canadian Reformed Churches with a view to establishing fraternal relations. It is also corresponding extensively with the GKN-Lib. about what appear to be troublesome issues arising in that federation.

Publications and Christian Education: The RCUS is in the midst of an ambitious project to produce Sunday School material for use in their churches. Rev. Howard Hart and Elder Harvey De Groot are currently producing material that should (if all goes as planned) see its first printing next year. It is based on, and to be used in conjunction with *Promise and Detiverance* by S.G.De Graaf Another option for publications that the Synod is investigating is the production of e--books--materials stored on a compact disc and accessed from a computer. The cost is much less than that of printing conventional books.

A new classis was formed which will consist of deaf congregations. The resolution to form a new classis came from an overture from the Covenant East Classis. The Deaf Reformed Church of Bowie, Maryland has been active in reaching out to deaf churches. They struggled with being a deaf church in a hearing Synod. Through the collective wisdom given to the brothers in the Covenant East Classis, a plan was made to create a new classis which would consist of deaf congregations from various places in the United States. It was pointed out to the members of Synod that the Eureka Classis was formed as a German-speaking classis, rather than for geographical reasons.

The most debate was generated by a standing committee recommendation to drop Westminster Theological Seminary in California from the list of approved seminaries of the RCUS. The debate focused on teaching regarding Genesis 1. Those favoring the removal of the seminary were dissatisfied with the influence of the so-called "framework hypothesis theory" upon the students they have sent to the seminary. Those who were opposed to the removal of the seminary wanted to continue to discuss this issue with the seminary, arguing that the seminary has never changed its position on Genesis 1, has served the RCUS well in the past and had recently made significant and promising changes in its faculty. The debate was followed by a roll call vote. The results of the vote were 43 in favor of removing the seminary, 27 opposed, and one abstaining. The effect of this means that future students who attend this seminary are ineligible for student aid from the RCUS. The permanent committee on Christian education was given the charge to investigate Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia and bring a recommendation concerning its continuing support to the next Synod. The committee was also charged with investigating Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary for inclusion on the list of approved seminaries.

The president of Dordt College was graciously received as he addressed the assembly. He thanked the RCUS for their denominational support and told them that only one other denomination, like them, specifies financial support for Dordt College, the Christian Reformed Church.

Position Papers: The RCUS has struggled in the past few years to come up with a statement which best defines how they view the authority of position papers. It is generally agreed by the members of the Synod that recommendations which come out of a position paper presented at the Synod should not have the same authority as the Three Forms of Unity, but such positions adopted by the Synod are not to be viewed as optional. It has been difficult to define that in a way that is satisfactory to the members of Synod. After three years of special committee work in this area, here is the statement which the Synod adopted. "That recommendations of the position papers adopted by a judicatory of the RCUS are authoritative advice to the members under the authority of that judicatory and serve as its witness to the world of its understanding of Holy Scripture and our subordinate ordinances." Your observers are thankful that position papers were not elevated to the status of the confessions, however, the implications of the statement adopted remain somewhat vague and have yet to be worked out in the life of the churches.

The 254th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States was dedicated to the memory of the Rev. John Philip Boehm, a man who worked faithfully to establish the Reformed Church in the United States in its infancy. This year is the 275th Anniversary of the founding of the first congregations of the RCUS by Rev. Boehm.

Your observers rejoice that the RCUS is seeking to be faithful to the Three Forms of Unity and diligent to enforce biblical standards. We are also thankful that they are eager to recognize and be recognized as sister churches with other faithful Reformed bodies. However, we remain concerned with how the RCUS has expressed itself on the subject of organic union (in 1999, Biblical Principles of Church Unity, Principle V), namely, that "organic union is desirable if the denominations are separated by unessential differences, **and** when unity may be accomplished without surrendering biblical and creedal convictions" [emphasis added].

We are left to wonder: are there two sets of essentials that may separate the RCUS from the URCNA, a set of extra-confessional distinctives in addition to biblical and creedal convictions? We hope that this means that our ecumenical relations may continue on the biblical and creedal basis of the Three Forms of Unity. We do not want the RCUS to distance itself from us or from other reformed federations by setting up multiple distinctives or position papers as essentials for unity. We hope that where there are distinctives, whether it be our Church Order requirement to hold two worship services every Lord's Day, or the RCUS constitutional requirement that only male members are eligible to vote at congregational meetings, that these will not preclude an *a priori* commitment to organic union. We believe that this must not be accomplished recklessly, but requires "honest and sincere consultations between denominations on the issues that divide."

By Rev. R. A. Pontier with Rev. H. Zekveld

4. Address to the 196th Annual Meeting of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, June 5-7, 2000

Dear Friends, brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

I am thankful that I am able to be here and bring you greetings on behalf of the United Reformed Churches in North America. We were privileged to be addressed at our last Synod in Hudsonville Michigan by one of your ministers, the Rev. Ray Laning, whom I have known for many years. Again, thank you for the invitation from you. We hope that we may be able to continue to have contact with you, as we are interested in closer ties with all churches which seek to proclaim and live by the Word of God as the all sufficient guide for faith and life, and to bring glory to our God in all things.

The United Reformed Churches in North America federated in 1996. We have grown from the original 36 churches to 73 churches, over 17,000 members. I pastor the Covenant United Reformed Church of Pantego, North Carolina, one of two churches south of the Mason Dixon Line. The majority of our churches are in Southern Ontario, Michigan, the Chicago area, and California, although we have churches throughout the United States and Canada. Most of our churches seceded from the Christian Reformed Church within the last decade. We did so in the desire to remain faithful to scripture and our confessions. The primary issue, but definitely not the only issue, in most churches was women in office, but that issue was, we believe, symptomatic of the far deeper problem, the erosion of the authority of the Word for all of life.

Our confessional statements are the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Belgic Confession. Our church order, a copy of which I will leave with your clerk, is an adaptation of the Church Order of Dort. Our form of church government is Presbyterian - that is, we believe in elder rule in the churches. We organize as a federation into six classes which meet twice a year, and our synod at least once every three years.

Our first years of existence as a federation have been, as you can understand, organizational and developmental. We have much to do as a federation as we grow together. Our churches are diverse, and there are many issues which we shall have to resolve as time goes on. One area of concern is that we do not as churches become withdrawn, focusing in on ourselves. Our Lord has called us to be faithful witnesses in this world going forth with the gospel of Jesus to all people. Thus there has been right from our inception a concern for developing missions. Our Mission work is congregationally organized and run although supported by other URCs. Some of the mission fields are in Toronto Canada among the Sikhs, in the Honduras, among the Spanish-speaking people based primarily in Florida, as well as in India. We also sponsor and support mission work in Kiev, Mexico, Costa Rica, Myanmar, Haiti and other places. The giving for missions among our churches is high.

We do not have our own Seminary. Most of the students now entering the ministry in our federation come from either Westminster West or Mid-America Reformed Seminary, although I believe we have a student studying at Greenville Presbyterian Seminary also. We are a small group, and struggling to organize ourselves for effective service. As a help toward faithful service we believe it is important that we unite with other Christian Churches of the same doctrinal positions, albeit of different backgrounds. Our name indicates a desire most of us have - that we may eventually see all

Reformed Churches United, at least in service and mutually edifying activities. To this end we have, already at our first Synod, joined the International Conference of Reformed Churches of which your federation is also a member. We have now twice sent observers to the meeting of NAPARC, and will have to consider eventually whether or not to join that body. Our hesitation at this point involves what NAPARC will do regarding the suspension of membership of the CRC.

We have also extended an invitation to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches to unite with us. They have a common background. They have at this time declined waiting to see what decision, if any, our churches will make regarding the days of creation. We are having ongoing conversations with the American/Canadian Reformed Churches, and our Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity is proposing progressing from Corresponding Relations into Ecclesiastical Fellowship. This issue will be before our next Synod meeting in Escondido CA in June of 2001. We also have entered into Corresponding Relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches and the Free Reformed Churches. The Committee has also had an ongoing exchange of position papers with the Protestant Reformed Churches on such things as Common Grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel. We have also had some initial contacts with the RCUS. Our Synod has identified a number of other federations for contact, including the RPCNA and the PCA. We pray that God may be glorified in our various contacts.

Mr. Chairman, I have attempted to introduce to you the United Reformed Churches. Thank you for the invitation to be present here. I regret that I must leave already this afternoon to attend a meeting of Classis in New Jersey. I hope my early departure is not taken to mean indifference on our part. We are decidedly interested in further contact and discussion with you. Thank you, and God bless you in your deliberations here, and in your ministry wherever your churches are found.

Respectfully, Rev. Calvin J. Tuininga

Supplementary Report

COMMITTEE FOR ECUMENICAL RELATIONS AND CHURCH UNITY

Esteemed brothers,

It has lately come to our attention that concerns are being raised about some of our work as Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. The committee would have preferred that such concerns would have been raised earlier and in a different context rather than to be brought to the floor of the synodical assembly. We do nevertheless heartily believe that the discussions these concerns have produced can only be helpful and edifying when conducted in the proper manner.

We appreciate that the concerns have been raised in love for Christ's Church, and that it has been no one's intention to malign the reputation of the members of our committee. We regret that it appears these concerns owe their existence largely to certain failures of communication and understanding on the committee's part. We humbly acknowledge that we as a committee bear responsibility for some of the inadequate communication. We especially appreciate that in God's gracious providence these concerns also afford the committee an opportunity to seek to bring clarification.

The concerns that are being raised can be divided into two categories. First, there are concerns and questions regarding the procedure the committee has followed, and second, there are concerns regarding some of the theological points the committee has discussed with representatives of other federations. In what follows we seek to respond to these concerns in turn.

1. Committee Procedure

Questions have been raised in two classes concerning the manner in which the committee has sought to fulfill its mandate. The concerns of Classis Michigan and those of Classis Southwest U.S. are essentially the same with respect to the committee's procedure

Classis Michigan overtures Synod Escondido to instruct the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church

Unity in this way, “*When the committee is asked to present the theological position of the URCNA on a topic on which the URCNA has not officially formulated a position, the committee shall report the request to the following Synod and proceed according to Synod’s instruction. The committee shall not present an unofficial position of the URCNA.*”

In a similar way Classis Southwest U.S. overtures this synod, “*to instruct pastorally the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and Church Union (CERCU), not to misrepresent the doctrinal positions of the URCNA and, especially where there are not established positions, to suggest we have such positions, nor to formulate such positions, officially or unofficially, without prior approval of Synod*”.

In keeping with the mandate of the committee to keep the churches informed of its work, in January 2000 we sent to all the churches all the dialogue papers to date, both those produced by the committee and those produced by the federations with whom dialogues were held. In the cover letter accompanying the papers we wrote that the committee, “*welcomes the responses and input from the churches.*”

No responses have ever been received by the committee. This is regrettable, for much of the criticism leveled by the overture Classis Southwest U.S. against the content of committee position papers could have been cleared away by seeking clarification from the committee.

Nevertheless, insofar as the concern of both these overtures is that we as federation of churches should not be backed into extra-confessional positions and interpretations by default, we begin by asserting unreservedly and unequivocally that as a committee we share such convictions wholeheartedly. Already a product of this discussion has been that we as a committee have been helped in articulating that particular long held conviction more clearly, and that together we may also as churches thereby come to appreciate our unity in the Reformed Confessions more profoundly. To that end we may say that the overtures of concern have achieved their goal, and we may be thankful to our heavenly Father for the good that has already come from these discussions.

Therefore, while the committee is certainly willing to be pastorally instructed and is willing to submit cheerfully to the Word and yoke of our Saviour, we are nevertheless compelled to speak strongly against the adoption of either or both of the above overtures for the following four reasons.

A. The overtures do not account for the fact that such theological dialogue has been carried out according to the mandate given to the committee by the churches.

Synod Hudsonville 1999 (Minutes, Art. XXXVI, B. 1. b, p.17, cf. p. 50) approved and adopted for the committee its Mandate and Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. Of significance is that the committee has thereby been mandated by synod to “*correspond and dialogue on significant factors in the two federations’ history, theology and ecclesiology.*”

B. The overtures do not sufficiently appreciate the careful manner by which past synodical interpretations of the status of the publications of the committee carefully have sought to guard the exegetical and confessional freedom of both Christian believers and the churches of Christ as together we seek to honor Christ's command for ecclesiastical unity.

Synod Hudsonville 1999 made a decision that has important ramifications regarding the status of the committee dialogues with other federations. The minutes of Synod Hudsonville, Art. XXXVI, B. 7 (p. 18) read, “*The advisory committee recommends that synod approve the work of the committee for ecumenical relations without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.*” This motion was adopted.

This decision established two important principles. First, synod recognized that the committee has been mandated to conduct theological dialogues with other federations. Synod acknowledged the existence of such dialogues and approved the work of the committee in holding such dialogues. Second, synod effectively distanced itself from

those dialogues in such a way as to prevent views expressed from inadvertently becoming the official views of the federation.

The phrase “*without adopting every formulation in its dialogue*” had a particular context at Synod Hudsonville. Behind that phrase was the fact that the committee had two months earlier (on April 27, 1999) had a dialogue with the Committee for Contact with Other Churches of the Protestant Reformed Churches on the subject of common grace. That dialogue consisted of reading and discussing papers by each committee. Although our committee’s papers were not widely distributed to the churches in the two months before Synod Hudsonville (they were available upon request), their content was extensively and accurately reported in *Christian Renewal* by way of a joint committee news release that appeared prior to synod. The news release sparked some criticism on the floor of synod regarding the committee’s discussions with the Protestant Reformed Churches on common grace.

It is not the committee’s intention that the PRC views on common grace should become in any way the official view of the URCNA. Synod Hudsonville wisely decided to approve the work of the committee “*without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.*” We are happy that Synod Hudsonville did not adopt every formulation of our dialogue and intend to make such a provision part of every recommendation to approve the committee’s work in future dialogue. It is already part of its recommendation to this synod.

The committee fully appreciates the way synod distanced itself from our dialogue since it is not the committee’s desire to establish extra-confessional positions for or on behalf of the federation. Synod has mandated that the committee discuss theological topics with other federations. The discussions have taken place primarily on paper so the whole federation can listen in, yet approval of the committee’s work by synod no more binds the federation to the committee’s dialogue than approval of a candidate at classis means that classis is adopting as its official position all the answers given in the exam. We consider the criticism at last synod providential in helping to establish that fact.

C. The overtures do not sufficiently appreciate the *nature* of our *colloquium doctum* or doctrinal conversation as a committee, nor do they seem to take into account the *necessity* of such for the good progress of confessional ecumenicity.

The nature of these dialogues is that of a classical exam with one major difference. In the committee dialogues with corresponding committees from other federations **both** sides ask questions and both give answers that are to be judged. In a classical exam we attempt to learn if and how an individual lives within or in harmony with the confessions. The examiner does more than merely ask the examinee if he agrees with the Three Forms of Unity. Rather he asks questions that will reveal how the examinee does theology within the bounds of the confessions, or whether his views fall outside the bounds of the confessions. The examiner may and should ask questions on a wide range of theological subjects not dealt with explicitly in the Three Forms of Unity.

If the committee was restricted in its dialogue to a simple restatement of the Three Forms of Unity, and had to wait possibly three years between synods to get its answer on any theological subject before the committee could speak, the work of establishing ecumenical relations with other federations would barely proceed, if at all. The challenge placed by our churches before the committee should not be, "Did you say **more** than the confessions in your discussions (or more than we gave prior approval to say)?" but "In your discussions were you **faithful** to the confessions?"

Given the status of the committee papers, namely, that they are a written discussion similar to a *colloquium doctum*, and are certainly not the positions of the federation, official or otherwise, the churches should not be afraid to allow the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity to engage in a broad range of theological reflections with other federation committees.

As a committee we acknowledge that on a couple of occasions in our discussion papers words such as “*the position of the URC is*” or “*the URC teaches*” were used regarding matters not specifically set forth in the Three

Forms of Unity. In hindsight we regard such choices of words to have been infelicitous and unhelpful. Whenever the committee papers were presented and discussed, however, it was always emphasized that where there is no synodically approved position, but that there is freedom and diversity within the boundaries of the confession.

When the committee calls its expressed theological views “*unofficial*” it is precisely for the sake of giving explicit expression to the fact that the United Reformed Churches have no synodically approved position of any kind, official or otherwise, on the subject. The purpose of our doctrinal conversations with representatives of other federations has not at all been to **add** to our confessional constitution as a federation. The committee pursues the dialogue in order that we may seek to demonstrate how together with that federation we may live unitedly **within** those same confessions.

D. The adoption of either of these overtures could in itself potentially lead the federation into the inadvertent adoption of extra-confessional positions.

The adoption of these overtures would threaten to slow ecumenical progress to the point of a stand-still. More crucial, however, is the issue that should these overtures be adopted the potential would then be created that each successive synod could be asked to make pronouncements about various doctrinal issues. The result would be that the federation backs its way into a whole series of quasi-confessional positions by default. The real danger exists that in the end the adoption of overtures such as these will produce the very problems they are seeking to prevent. The protection these overtures rightly seek already exists and is now providentially clarified in the synodical mandates, decisions, and precedents discussed above.

II. Committee Dialogue

In this respect the overture of Classis Southwest U.S. is more specific than that of Classis Michigan, both in its expressions of concern with specific points in our committee’s discussions, and in terms of what is now being requested of synod. Because we have grave concerns about the implications the adoption of this approach would have for the federation, we are compelled to interact in what follows with the contentions that have been made.

As a committee we stand by what we have written and all of it is a matter of public record, has been distributed to the churches, and can be made available upon request. We do not wish to go into a further elaboration or defense of these matters here. We remind the brethren, as we have been seeking to make clear above, that we have no interest in establishing or entrenching our own theological positions as if they were now those of the federation. Therefore, as a committee we are not at all interested in engaging in a theological debate in the context of these clarifications. Such theologizing would not be in the best interest of the churches.

Nevertheless, in the overture of Classis Southwest U.S. and its appended explanation, regrettable, uncharitable, and unfounded claims are made tantamount to having found theological heresy in our work and affecting the good name of one of our own ministers of the Word as well as that of the federation of Canadian and American Reformed Churches as a whole. Therefore it is plain that a certain amount of response and clarification is required.

Such a response is complicated by the confusing manner in which the overture is presented. The desire of the overture pastorally to instruct our committee to exercise care in our proceedings is certainly commendable, and as we have shown, even meets with our fundamental agreement. The grounds that are used to undergird this overture seem inconsistent with the stated pastoral goal, however. The overture is presented to synod based on five inferences called implications that are neither straightforward nor convincing. An overture ought to be motivating and convincing in its grounds. Classis uses the same language in each of its five grounds, and “*implies*” certain rejections, confusion, or addition. The grounds for this reason alone are unworthy. Condemnation by implication is neither convincing nor commendable.

Compounding the confusion is the fact that in a second overture Classis Southwest asks the synod “*to receive the attached explanation in support of this overture.*” This approach is highly unusual and unprecedented as well as hazardous for our federation. This becomes especially clear when it is realized that the detailed explanation itself proceeds almost completely on the basis of implications and inferences. It must also be noticed that whereas the initial overture seeks to be pastoral and irenic, the appended explanation is more aggressively polemic.

Dealing with implications is tricky business. There are, for example, Bible texts which taken out of context, can imply all kinds of theological errors. One of the reasons the United Reformed Churches are a confessional federation is because the confessions keep biblical teaching within the context of the rest of Scripture and so exclude erroneous implications. When dealing with possible implications, one must always seek to ascertain the full context.

The appended explanation of Classis Southwest fails seriously in this respect. Rather than dealing thoroughly and carefully with what actually was said in our discussions, the detailed explanation alarms the churches on the basis of uncharitable assumptions and inferences. We note that the Catechism, in dealing with the ninth commandment warns us not to join in condemning anyone without a hearing. People may make charges, cast aspersions, or defame, but we may not join in – not until we have heard the whole story.

No attempt was made by the original consistory or Classis Southwest U.S. to clarify the possible implications of the committee papers to see if such implications with which we are charged are indeed legitimate implications and the views of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity.

But now comes the question, has false doctrine been taught by the committee position papers? The overture alleges,

a. The January 2000 CERCU report implies a rejection of the doctrine of the eternal covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son. The covenant of redemption is a standard part of classic Reformed federal theology (Canons of Dort 1.7; Belgic Confession Art. 26). It is an important aspect of our doctrines of God, Christ and Salvation. Its omission or rejection would cause significant harm to our system of doctrine.

Many URC officers (perhaps the majority) would be surprised to learn that their subscription to the Three Forms of Unity has committed them to the “*doctrine of the eternal covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son.*” It would be surprising if most had ever even heard of such a covenant. It is extremely significant, we believe, that as office bearers in the churches we are bound concretely by subscription to the Three Forms of Unity and not to the more nebulous concept of “classic Reformed federal theology.” Which of the theologians are we supposed to listen to in order to be able to know with certainty what “classic Reformed theology” entails?

This “covenant of redemption” or *pactum salutis* is certainly not mentioned in the two references adduced from the confessions. We wish the brothers to know that we affirm wholeheartedly that from all eternity in the Trinitarian counsel the Father has appointed the Son to be the “*Mediator and Head of the elect*” (Canons I.7) and “*Mediator between Him and us*” (Belgic Art. 26). Our only hesitation with (not outright rejection of) the terminology of *pactum salutis* or the “covenant of redemption” has to do with the fact that for theologians confidently to employ the term “covenant” for this reality tends toward the danger of extra-scriptural speculation. Our hesitation relates to the excesses of some of the extreme forms of Reformed scholasticism that not only speak of a covenant but go on to reason backwards and speculate in terms of the precise details of the eternal “agreement” between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We wish to draw the synod’s attention to other renowned Reformed theologians who have expressed the same hesitation as we have. John Murray in an essay entitled *The Plan of Salvation (Collected Writings, Vol II, p. 130)* has said,

But it may not be remiss to observe that the term ‘covenant’ in Scripture refers to temporal administration, and it is not strictly proper to use a biblical term to designate something to which it is

not applied in the Scripture itself. For this reason it is not well and is liable to be confusing, to speak of this economy in terms of covenant. I prefer some such designation as the inter-trinitarian economy of salvation.

Another contemporary representative of confessional Reformed and Presbyterian thinking would be O. Palmer Robertson. Robertson in his book length treatment of the subject entitled *The Christ of the Covenants* (P&R, 1980) follows in the same line as Murray. He focuses exclusively on the temporal administration of the covenant, effectively making no mention of the eternal covenant of redemption. In fact, in his treatment of the subject he uses the terminology “covenant of redemption” to refer to what has traditionally been designated the covenant of grace. This is perhaps confusing, but it serves well to make the point that whereas theologians in their definitions may differ, and indeed ought to debate their points vigorously, in the end as churches we are thankfully not bound to the work of theologians but to our beloved confessions, the Three Forms of Unity.

Classis Southwest continues,

b. The January, 2000 CERCU report implies a rejection of the historic Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works as an arrangement of strict justice, i.e., a manifestation of the Law principle, "Do this and live" (Heidelberg Catechism QQ. 6, 9; Belgic Confession Art. 14; Canons of Dort 3/4.1) The Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works is essential to our doctrines of Man, Christ and Salvation. Its omission or rejection would cause significant harm to our understanding of the Gospel itself and our system of doctrine generally.

Once again, a careful examination of the confessional references adduced in support of Classis’ contention reveal no reference to the language of “covenant of works” or even to the word “covenant” alone for that matter. Once more the committee wishes to state for the record that we believe, affirm wholeheartedly, and teach that “*God created man good and in His own image, that is in true righteousness and holiness, so that he might truly know God his creator, love Him with all his heart, and live with Him in eternal happiness for his praise and glory*” (Catechism A6). Subsequent to Adam’s fall God does man no injustice “*by requiring in His law what man is unable to do*” (Catechism QA9). In like manner we affirm unequivocally all that is said about Adam’s creation and fall in Belgic Confession Article 14 and Canons of Dort III/IV.1.

As a committee we certainly affirm that at creation God made a covenant with Adam wherein he was promised life in the way of obedience. We believe that when Adam spurned his covenantal obligations, the threatened result came to pass in terms of strict and precise covenantal ramifications. We also affirm that after Adam’s fall God, according to His eternal good pleasure, comes to Adam and Eve again in a new and altered way, in what we call the covenant of grace.

We have difficulties, however with the bald assertion of the classis that “the historic reformed doctrine of the covenant of works” is “an arrangement of strict justice.” We appeal here to the language of the Westminster Confession, Chapter VII, Section I, which states: “*The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.*”

We wish to make reference to a representative sampling of respected Reformed theologians who also include such an emphasis. John Murray in his essay *Covenant Theology (Collected Writings, Vol. IV, p. 222)* has written about the covenant of works, which he would prefer to designate “the Adamic Administration.”

The obligation which God assumed in this promise was wholly gratuitous; God had no debt, strictly speaking, from which a right could belong to man. The only debt was that of His own faithfulness to the promise. And as for man, he could not, strictly and properly, obtain merit from his obedience, and could not seek the reward as a right. The worthiness of works could bear no proportion to the reward of eternal life.

In these features we can see that the conception entertained moved away from that of a legal covenant, and the gracious character of what was still called the Covenant of Works came to be recognized and accented. This is the emphasis which appears in the Westminster documents when covenant is construed as ‘voluntary condescension’ and ‘special act of providence.’ And the designation ‘covenant of life’ in both [Westminster] Catechisms is much more in accord with the grace which conditions the administration than is the term ‘covenant of works.’

Roberston speaks similarly.

*The nomenclature chosen to designate these two epochs suffers from a lack of preciseness. To speak of a covenant of “works” in contrast with a covenant of “grace” appears to suggest that grace was not operative in the covenant of works. As a matter of fact the totality of God’s relationship with man is a matter of grace. Although “grace” may not have been operative in the sense of a merciful relationship despite sin, the creational bond between God and man was indeed gracious (**The Christ of the Covenants**, p. 56).*

From the side of our continental Reformed heritage we have the same thing being expressed by S.G. De Graaf in his **Promise and Deliverance** (published in translation by Paideia Press in 1977). On page 37 of the first volume De Graaf puts it this way.

We are accustomed to speaking of this covenant as the covenant of works. However, we should not take this name to mean that man was expected to earn eternal life as a reward for doing good works, as though eternal life was man’s payment for services rendered. Because man owes everything he is and has to God, we may never speak of man earning wages paid out by God. Therefore it might be wiser to speak of the covenant of God’s favor. Grace, in general, also means favor, but in the Scriptures grace always has the special meaning of favor that forgives guilt.

We could express the difference by saying that God made a covenant of favor with Adam and a covenant of grace with Christ. The only demand made of Adam was that he choose consciously for the favor given him by God if he and his posterity were to abide forever in that favor. In this way, too, the contrast with Christ is clear: Christ had to continue to choose for God’s favor even when that favor had completely forsaken Him. In this way Christ had to reconcile and redeem what Adam had ruined.

God’s specific test command [*A term frequently met with is probationary command, TRANS] was intended to bring man to conscious obedience, that is, to conscious acceptance of the covenant. Before that, man did what was good because his heart suggested nothing else to him. Only by facing the possibility of a conflict could he learn to choose consciously.*

We see, in fact, that this line of thinking is of strong pedigree in Reformed theology as can be seen by considering the words of Francis Turretin (1623-1687), a highly respected Reformed theologian representative of another era. Turretin is also careful to maintain that Adam had no proper merit before God, so that there could be no talk of God being in man’s debt apart from the covenant. In his **Institutes of Elenctic Theology** (P&R, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 578) we read,

XVI. ...But with respect to God it was gratuitous, as depending upon a pact or gratuitous promise (by which God was bound not to man, but to Himself and to His own goodness, fidelity and truth, Rom 3:3; 2 Timothy 2:13). Therefore there was no debt (properly so called) from which man could derive a right, but only a debt of fidelity, arising out of the promise by which God demonstrated His infallible and immutable constancy and truth. If the apostle seems to acknowledge this right or debt (Romans 4:4), it must be understood in no other than a respective sense; not as to the proportion and condignity of the duty rendered to God by man (Romans 8:18, Luke 17:10) but to the pact of God and justice (i.e., to the fidelity of Him making it).

XVII. If therefore upright man in that state had obtained this merit, it must not be understood properly and rigorously. Since man has all things from and owes all to God, he can seek from Him nothing as

his own by right, nor can God be a debtor to him – not by condignity of work and from its intrinsic value (because whatever that may be, it can bear no proportion to the infinite reward of life), but from the pact and the liberal promise of God (according to which man had the right of demanding the reward to which God had of His own accord bound Himself) and in comparison with the covenant of grace (which rests upon the sole merit of Christ, by which He acquired for us the right to life)...
T8;Q3;S16,17

Of course, we may be free to disagree with certain formulations of the above quoted theologians as well, our point here is simply to show that the overture's assertions about "the historic Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works" are themselves based on a **selective** reading of theologians and of history. Again we may point out thankfully, that as churches, we are bound not to the positions of theologians, but to the confessions.

The overture goes on,

c. The January 2000 CERCU report implies a confusion of the covenant of grace with the covenant of works. In Reformed theology, the covenant of works stands for the Law and the covenant of Grace stands for Gospel. To confuse these two is to lose the gospel and our reason for existence as a Christian church (Heidelberg Catechism Q.62; Belgic Confession Art. 23).

Once again as committee we wish to state that we can in good conscience before the Lord declare that we heartily believe and are persuaded of the truths expressed in Heidelberg Catechism QA62 and Belgic Art. 23. Certainly the good we as Christians do "cannot make us right with God or even help to make us right with Him." Neither could we ever "presume to trust in any thing in ourselves, or in any merit of ours," instead with the original petitioners of the Belgic Confession we rely and rest "upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in Him."

Again we see, therefore, that the confessional references do not support the point the classis seeks to make. Besides which, the simple identification of covenant of works with law and covenant of grace with gospel is neither universally taught in Reformed circles, nor is such a formulation at all required by our confessions. O. Palmer Roberston has written,

The terminology [covenant of works/covenant of grace] further suggests that works have no place in the covenant of grace. But from the Biblical perspective, works play a most essential role in the covenant of grace. Christ works for the salvation of His people. His accomplishment of righteousness for sinful men represents an essential aspect of redemption. Still further, those redeemed in Christ certainly must work. They are "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Scripture consistently indicates that the final judgment of man shall be according to works. While salvation is by faith, judgment is by works (Christ of the Covenants, p. 56).

Classis Southwest further alleges,

d. The January 2000 CERCU report implies the addition of obedience to faith as an instrument of justification. Such an addition, by definition, destroys the doctrine of sola fide as well as solo Christo. Two instruments imply two objects of faith, Christ and my obedience. This is not the Gospel but a return to the errors repudiated by the book of Galatians. Such an addition is clearly contrary to our confessional standards (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 21, 31; Belgic Confession Art. 23, 24).

Once more, for the record, the committee affirms heart and soul (*ex animo*) the precious and foundational teachings of our confessions in Heidelberg QA 21 and Belgic Confession Art. 23, 24 concerning faith, faith alone, and faith resting in Christ alone. Though we also affirm the practical and comforting teaching of Heidelberg QA 31 concerning the anointing of Christ to His threefold office, we have difficulty discerning exactly in what respect this has relevance for the discussion at hand. The teaching of justification by faith alone is indeed, as we confess with Belgic article 23, the foundation to which we must always hold fast. To be sure, we also freely confess that the good works of the believer taken up in the Belgic Confession Art. 24 are of "no account towards our

justification, for it is by faith in Christ that we are justified, even before we do good works; otherwise they could not be good works, any more than the fruit of a tree can be good before the tree itself is good.”

It is wholly inappropriate and completely uncharitable for Classis Southwest to infer and imply the addition of obedience to faith as a second instrument of justification. A charitable reading of the things we and the Canadian Reformed representatives have written, along with a careful comparison with what is being alleged by the classis, in this ground and in their detailed explanation, will reveal that the inferences made are completely unwarranted ones. The overture makes an emotive connection to the Roman Catholic teachings of the Council of Trent and makes broad sweeping claims about “*much of the unofficial CanRC statement on the covenant being for these reasons unacceptable,*” without at all clearly or definitively demonstrating the validity of such claims.

All that we have sought to emphasize at this point in our discussions is that “*this faith which alone justifies*” is at the same time “*not alone in the person justified*” (cf. Westminster Confession Chapter XI, Section ii). Our own Belgic Confession article 24 says it most clearly. “*Therefore it is impossible that this holy faith can be unfruitful in man; for we do not speak of a vain faith, but of such a faith which is called in Scripture a faith working through love, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word.*”

Thus, in the light of Galatians 5:6 and James 2:14,17, article 24 of the Belgic Confession makes clear that it is also true that true faith is living, obedient, and persevering faith.

Finally, Classis Southwest also asserts,

e. The January 2000 CERCU report implies a rejection of the doctrine of common grace. In fact, the URCNA has adopted no formal position on the matter of common grace. The grave theological and missiological implications of the CERCU responses, sent out to the churches January 2000, warrant serious investigation and consideration (Canons of Dort 2.5).

The committee firmly believes, and as we trust all office bearers in the United Reformed Churches do, that “*the promise of the gospel is that **whosoever** believes in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have eternal life. And that this promise, together with the command to repent and believe ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons **promiscuously** and **without distinction**, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel*” (Canons II.5, emphases ours).

Unfortunately the overture’s pattern of implication continues here as well. In the section of the detailed explanation that relates to this proposed ground, rather than dealing specifically with any of the particular statements our committee has made on the subject of common grace in order actually to demonstrate that there are “*grave theological and missiological implications*” involved, the classis chose instead to present a rehash of the position and presentation the CRC adopted in 1924. It is interesting that the explanation this Classis sets forth in support of their concerns ends by asserting, “*The question of whether or how to teach the doctrine of common grace may be an extra-confessional question, but we believe the CERCU has erred in virtually creating a de facto URC position against it.*”

From our explanations and arguments concerning the committee’s understanding of our *mandate* and of the unassuming *status* of our discussions, it ought to be clear that we are under no delusions of ever by these discussions establishing any kind of URC position, *de facto*, or otherwise. We draw the attention of the brethren therefore to what each of the churches received from the committee in our January 2000 mailing, and what was *not* quoted in any of Classis Southwest’s materials. At the very conclusion of the committee’s “Unofficial Response” to the Protestant Reformed on the three points we said,

We believe that the Three Forms of Unity do not set forth a positive teaching regarding the so-called doctrine of common grace. We believe the CRC synod of 1924 was grasping at straws when they attempted to find such a doctrine in the confessions. It was therefore wrong for the CRC to attempt to

bind anyone regarding such teaching. It would be equally wrong today to attempt to bind one another to any precise [formulation] on the subject.

Contrary to the fears and assertions of the overture, therefore, the intention of the committee has never been to establish a *de facto* position on this extra-confessional matter. Rather, it has been to ascertain within the bounds of the Reformed confessions the point of intersection with respect to particular teachings found in our respective federations. It should also be noted that our committee has to this point not made any recommendations with respect to proceeding in our phases of ecumenicity with the Protestant Reformed.

The irony here is that whereas the committee is taken to task in the overture for allegedly creating a *de facto* URC position *against* the doctrine of common grace, this overture obviously argues from the standpoint that presumes a *de facto* URC position *for* the doctrine. Whatever anyone of us might like to think about the CRC decision of 1924, it ought to be obvious that it has no *confessional* standing among us.

III. Committee Recommendations

We have sought to bring Scriptural and confessional clarity to bear upon the overtures directed against the committee's mandated work. It is clear to us that the overtures should not be adopted. Thus, the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity makes the following recommendations.

1. That synod not accede to the overture from Classis Michigan, since its adoption would be contrary to the committee's mandate and to the manner of approval of the committee work by a previous synod.
2. That synod not accede to the overture and its explanation from Classis Southwest US, since its assertions and allegations are not proven, and adoption would jeopardize the committee's mandated work and the relations with other federations.

Humbly submitted,

P. Vellenga, chairman

R. Stienstra, secretary

REPORT 2: URCNA-OPC STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT

Esteemed brothers,

With gratitude to God we present to Synod Escondido 2001 this study of documents that form the official ecclesiastical identity of the United Reformed Churches in North America and of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Our study was conducted under the mandate issued by Synod St. Catharines 1997, namely,

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. . . (*Minutes of Synod 1997*, pp. 10-11).

Our report contains, then, three sections. Section I (pages 55-62) analyzes the confessional standards, and Section II (pages 62-77) compares the polities. Section III (page 77) presents recommendations for your consideration.

The confessional standards and polities of both the URCNA and the OPC are comprehensive statements of the church's Reformed faith and practice. Because the churches belonging to both of these communions are the blessed heirs of the doctrine and life recovered at the Reformation, their respective standards and polities overlap extensively. At the outset of our study, we acknowledge the full commitment to the Scriptures on the part of both groups of churches, a commitment expressed in their confessions and polities.

Unfortunately, due to limitations of space our report cannot reflect this pervasive agreement. We assume that our readers have a general acquaintance with the Westminster Standards, so that we need not rehearse in detail this agreement in confessional commitment and ecclesiastical practice. Consequently the structure and content of our report may give some readers the mistaken impression—an impression we wish fervently to avoid—that the perceived difficulties or incompatibilities between confessional standards and polities are so severe and so intractable that any ecumenical conversation is doomed from the start to be fruitless. Such an impression is wrong. We in the URCNA have so much in common with our full brothers and sisters in the OPC!

In earlier decades and in various parts of the world, others have traveled the path we are walking. This report makes grateful use of their studies and conversations, their experience and testimony. One of these studies is the 1963 CRC synod report of the Committee on Closer Relationships with the OPC. Furthermore, a draft of this report was submitted to a number of individuals within both the URCNA and the OPC whose experience or training enabled them to provide helpful advice.

Finally, we should mention that Mr. Dave Perron, who was appointed to serve with us on this committee, is not a member of a church in our federation, and therefore did not serve on this committee.

SECTION I. A COMPARISON OF THE CONFSSIONAL STANDARDS

1. MATERIALS

The creeds used for this study are the following:

- BC* *The Belgic Confession* (also called *Confession of Faith*) as printed in the *Psalter Hymnal*, 1976 edition
- CD* *The Canons of Dort* as printed in the *Psalter Hymnal*, 1976 edition
- HC* *The Heidelberg Catechism* as printed in the *Psalter Hymnal*, 1976 edition
- WCF* *The Westminster Confession of Faith* as published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- WLC* *The Larger Catechism* as published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church
- WSC* *The Shorter Catechism* as published by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

2. PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES IN THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

2.1 COVENANT OF WORKS (*WCF* 7.2 and 19.1 / *WLC* 30 and 97)

The difficulty: The *WCF* speaks in these articles about a “covenant of works” which God made with Adam. Some argue that it is unwise to include in a Confession language and terminology that are more philosophical/theological than scriptural.

The resolution: First, it must be acknowledged that the phrase “covenant of works” could be abused; but at the same time it must be argued that historically the phrase has not been abused.

Second, as regards terminology, everyone recognizes that the word “covenant” is not used of the relationship between God and Adam in the narrative of Genesis 1-3 or elsewhere, unless Hosea 6:7 is an exception.

Third, assuming nevertheless that the relationship between God and Adam is covenantal, some variety in preferred phraseology exists. The favored initial phrase from about 1580 seems to have been “covenant of *nature*,” while the 1615 *Irish Articles* expresses an embryonic federalism in its phrase “covenant of *the law*” (Art. 21). The *WCF* uses “covenant of *works*,” while both the *WLC* (Q./A. 20) and the *WSC* (Q./A. 12) speak of a “covenant of *life*.” More recent writers suggest “covenant of *creation*.” The real question is not the precise words, but whether the ideas behind them are biblical.

The Genesis narrative certainly shows the elements of a covenant even if the word is not used, for it describes a sovereign disposition by God involving promises, requiring response, and threatening a penalty. However, while some statements (e.g., the *Irish Articles*) give the distinct impression that the covenant was to be kept by man’s own strength so that he might merit eternal life, the *WCF* (7.1) is very careful in the balance of its statement. The *WCF* emphasizes that there was divine kindness, in the sense of condescension, in the making of the covenant, and also implies that the reward of obedience would not be of debt but of God’s free favor. Man was never in a merely legal relationship with his Maker, a position where God owed him something. The relationship was covenantal—one of personal communion in righteousness. In this connection, note the compound name which speaks of creative power with that which is the personal name of God. Further, Adam’s original righteousness was God’s gift and he was dependent upon God that he might fulfill the covenant demands. If he had stood the test, Adam could not have praised himself but only glorified God.

In summary, the Westminster Standards themselves provide every safeguard against the unwarranted fear that the phrase “covenant of works” could be misinterpreted to mean a covenant of meritorious works.

2.2 **REGENERATED INFANTS** (*WCF* 10.3)

The difficulty: The *WCF* reads: “Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated, and saved by Christ, through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how he pleaseth: so also are all other elect persons who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word.”

Two difficulties have arisen. First, some would argue that while this statement is scriptural, it does not provide the abundant comfort by which godly parents are to be encouraged concerning their children dying in infancy as stated, for example, in the *CD* 1.17: “Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with the parents are comprehended, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom it pleases God to call out of this life in their infancy (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; 1 Cor. 7:14).”

Second, some assume that this section of the *WCF* implies that there are other infants belonging to true believers, who, dying in infancy, are not elect and therefore not regenerated and saved.

The resolution: First, to argue that the statement of the *WCF* is scriptural should be sufficient to lead us to accept it.

Second, the *WCF* does not contradict the *CD*, but rather says something the latter omits, namely, its positive affirmation that elect infants who die in infancy are undoubtedly regenerated and saved by the sovereign Holy Spirit.

Third, the second difficulty identified above is answered by recalling that this section of the *WCF* is dealing with effectual calling. The whole purpose of this section is to show that persons who are “incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word” are not thereby excluded from salvation.

This section of the *WCF* does not attempt to decide whether or not all infants dying in infancy (whether children of believers or not) are saved.

2.3 *ASSURANCE AND FAITH* (WCF 14.3, 18.1-4 / WLC 80-81 / HC LD 7)

The difficulty: Both the *WCF* and the *WLC* teach that the “infallible assurance” of salvation in Christ Jesus “does not so belong to the essence of faith,” but should be understood as the product of saving faith. By way of contrast, the *HC*, LD 7, Q./A. 21, defines true faith as a “firm confidence” that “everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given by God. . . .”

The resolution: In evaluating the definitions of saving faith given by the Westminster standards and the *HC*, particularly with respect to the personal assurance of salvation, some would assert that the *HC* follows the teaching of John Calvin, who insisted that faith includes a firm conviction and confidence (*Institutes* II.2.xvi). This view of saving faith must be understood, however, in light of the official position taught by the Roman Catholic Church and defended at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which argued that no one can know with a certainty of faith that he has obtained divine grace, and which anathematized anyone holding to the possibility of personal assurance of divine election.

We should understand that the language of the *HC*, LD 7, Q./A. 21, emphasizes the believer’s *standing in Christ* before the judgment seat of God, reminding us that the basis of Christian assurance lies not with the believer himself, but with the power and sufficiency of Christ’s mediatorial work, which is imputed to us by grace.

By the same token, we can readily admit that Christians may at times lack this assurance. Certainty tinged with doubt, assurance assailed by anxiety—these phrases describe the believer who lives in perpetual conflict with unbelief. This spiritual conflict is clearly identified in the *CD* 1.16:

Those in whom a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul, peace of conscience, and earnest endeavor after filial obedience, a glorying in God through Christ, is not as yet strongly felt, and who nevertheless make use of the means which God has appointed for working these graces in us, ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to rank themselves among the reprobate, but diligently to persevere in the use of means, and with ardent desires devoutly and humbly to wait for a season of richer grace. . . .

With others who have studied this matter, we may observe that the apparent tension between the *WCF* and the *HC* is no greater than that between the *HC* and the *CD*.

For our purposes it may prove useful to view the differences between the *WCF* and the *HC* in terms of their *respective historical settings and concerns*. The *HC* was composed to address the doctrines espoused by the church of Rome, which may explain why it emphasizes the Christian’s standing as that relates to his assurance of salvation. The *WCF*, on the other hand, addresses specific pastoral concerns related to Christian assurance, and therefore emphasizes saving faith in terms of Christian experience.

An appreciation of these respective historical contexts helps us affirm a fundamental continuity between the first generation of reformers and subsequent generations of Reformed believers.

2.4 *THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT* (WCF 21.7-8 / WLC 117 / HC LD 38)

The difficulty: We read in the *WLC* (Q./A. 117): “The sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and

moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.”

The *HC*, LD 38, explains the requirements of the Fourth Commandment this way: “First, that the gospel ministry and education for it be maintained, and that, especially on the festive day of rest, I regularly attend the assembly of God’s people to learn what God’s Word teaches, to participate in the sacraments, to pray to God publicly, and to bring Christian offerings for the poor. Second, that every day of my life, I rest from my evil ways, let the Lord work in me through his Spirit, and so begin already in this life the eternal Sabbath.”

The *WLC* focuses on resting from our daily work, even as the text of the Fourth Commandment does. The *HC* is silent concerning this physical resting, but rather focuses attention on something that must occur each day: the “spiritual” resting, namely, from our evil works. What lies at the center of the *HC* is not resting from ordinary labor (even though that rest is covered by the phrase “the day of rest,” which explains the word “sabbath”), but going to church.

The difference could be summarized this way: the *WLC* devotes attention to both rest and exercises of worship, while the *HC* directs its attention to Sunday church attendance and our “spiritual” rest.

The resolution: Throughout European, British and American Protestantism, rather sharp polemics have been waged about the sabbath question, so sharp that at times a church split appeared inevitable. Many followed the English Puritan stream (for example, the Dutch theologians Walaeus and Voetius). They believed sabbath rest continued in Sunday rest. Others (like Gomarus and later Cocceius, with even more vehemence) emphasized the Jewish and provisional character of the sabbath, whereby sabbath rest came to be viewed differently than Sunday rest.

Nevertheless, ecclesiastical divisions were avoided, in large part because the various viewpoints approached one another more closely than would appear from the discussions, especially when it came to the practice of Sunday observance. Arranging Sunday church services was difficult apart from resting on Sunday, no matter which theological view one adopted. Even those who did not agree that both rest and worship were principled extensions of the Fourth Commandment nevertheless found rest and worship united in practice. Where people set aside a day for worship (in church and at home), ordinary labor had to be interrupted.

Church divisions in the Netherlands were avoided because the Synod of Dort made a moderating decision about this issue. The English theologians at this synod had complained about the neglect of the Sunday, even as they could witness with their own eyes in the city of Dordrecht. Still, the synod did not come up with a strict Puritan pronouncement. Actually, it made no pronouncement, but agreed to a compromise statement forged with the help of professors attending the synod from churches in the province of Zeeland who were arguing the matter at the time. The six points of this statement read as follows:

1. In the fourth commandment of God’s law there is a ceremonial and a moral element.
2. The rest on the seventh day after the creation, and the strict observance of this day with which the Jewish people were charged particularly, was ceremonial.
3. That a definite and appointed day has been set aside to the service of God, and that for this purpose as much rest is required as is necessary for the service of God and for hallowed contemplation, this element is moral.
4. The Sabbath of the Jews having been set aside, Christians are in duty bound to hallow the Day of the Lord solemnly.
5. This day has always been kept in the Early Church since the time of the apostles.
6. This day must be so consecrated unto the service of God that upon it men rest from all servile labors, except those required by charity and present necessities, and likewise from all such recreations as prevent the service of God.

These six points were adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), and later by the Christian Reformed synod of 1881. The Christian Reformed synod of 1926 insisted that they must be considered doctrinal in nature, and hence binding and fully compatible with LD 38. (For this information, consult *The Revised Church Order Commentary*, by Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967], p. 199.)

An ecclesiastical division at the Synod of Dort was thwarted even more by the wording of *HC* LD 38. For both parties could properly appeal to it! Those who, in the spirit of the Puritans, fought for Sunday rest could point to the reference to Sunday as sabbath and day of rest; those defending strongly the ceremonial character of the rest required by the Fourth Commandment could with similar justification quote the passage about the New Testament “resting” from our evil works.

Educated by the past, we must be careful today to avoid exaggerating the differences involving sabbath and Sunday. One might hold the view that the *HC* evidences a certain gap at this point, because its formulation echoes the Fourth Commandment too weakly. In this particular Lord’s Day the “ceremonial” stands out more sharply than the “moral.” It does not speak directly about resting from daily labor. On the other hand, the *WLC* also shows weaknesses. This catechism is in fact quite negative toward activities of relaxation, because the whole day must be used for public and private worship, with the exception of time needed for works of necessity and mercy. In this way the day is certainly “spiritually” full, so much so that there is little opportunity left for doing what is also characteristic for Sunday: catching our breath through genuine physical rest.

Nevertheless, there is no incompatible difference between these two confessional traditions. Both start with the abiding validity of the Fourth Commandment. The matter becomes much more serious as soon as people declare the Fourth Commandment to have been *set aside*, severing the connection between Sunday and the Fourth Commandment. Never has a struggle broken out over the differences between these two catechisms. These differences were far too small for that to happen, involving no more than variety in emphasis in their interpretations of the Fourth Commandment.

2.5 ***MARRIAGE AND PERMISSIBLE DIVORCE*** (*WCF* 24.1-6)

The difficulty: In this chapter the *WCF* deals with marriage and divorce. Some wonder whether this chapter belongs in a Confession, whether it would be better in a book of church polity or a church order. In addition, others have objections with respect to statements in articles 4, 5 and 6. Third, others question whether it is biblical to permit divorce not only for adultery, but also for “such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate” (*WCF* 24.6).

The resolution: First, such material properly belongs in a Confession because it belongs to the teaching of the Word of God. In God’s dealings with men in the covenant of grace, the institution of the family is very important, inasmuch as the institution of the family is basic to both church and state. We believe there is good reason to include a summary of the teaching of Scripture for each of the three basic divine institutions of human life: the family, the church, and the state.

Second, in reply to the question whether wilful desertion is a biblically valid ground for permissible divorce, Scripture teaches clearly in 1 Cor. 7:15 that it is. Here the apostle Paul is dealing specifically with the case of desertion of a Christian by an unbeliever. Yet, when the *WCF* speaks of “such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate” (*WCF* 24.6), it is clearly recognizing this fact. It is precisely desertion of a believer by an unbeliever that is not only wilful, but often beyond remedy by the power of church discipline and by existing civil law.

In summary, the teachings of *WCF* 24.1-6 accord fully with Scripture and with the historical position of the Reformers themselves (cf. the views of Calvin and Bucer on permissible divorce).

2.6 *VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE CHURCH (WCF 25.1-4)*

The difficulty: This chapter is alleged to be based upon the distinction between the visible and invisible church, which distinction appears to originate from practice rather than from Scripture. Moreover, this distinction has been misapplied in church history in order to escape the obligation of church unity, or as an excuse for failure to address doctrinal or moral error within a particular denomination.

The resolution: First, Scripture clearly teaches that there is a sense in which the church is visible to us and a sense in which the church is not visible to us. It is therefore quite proper to speak of the church as both visible (in terms of one aspect) and invisible (in terms of another aspect). There is a sense in which the church is invisible, for, as Paul says, “The Lord knows those who are His” (2 Tim. 2:19). What man in this life has seen the “church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven” (Heb. 12:23)? And there is a sense in which the church is visible, for assuredly it was seen by men in those days (Acts 2:41-47) when “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (cf. Rom. 16:5, etc.).

Second, this distinction between these two aspects of the church is made in the *HC* (LD 21, Q./A. 54 and 55) and the *BC* (Art. 27, 28 and 29) and is virtually the same as the *WCF* as to the matter in question. When the *BC* speaks of “one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation of true Christian believers, all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit,” it is certainly describing the church in a sense which can only be called “invisible” to the human eye. Again, when the *BC* says that this church “sometimes for a while appears very small, and in the eyes of men to be reduced to nothing; as during the perilous reign of Ahab,” we have no other teaching than that of the *WCF*, which says that “This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible.” And when the *BC* teaches that “Furthermore, this holy Church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit,” we have no other doctrine than that taught in the *WCF* when it speaks of the church as it appears visible to the human eye. The *BC* also defines “the marks of the true church, and wherein it differs from the false church” (Art. 29). This article obviously describes the visible church, since it speaks of hypocrites who are externally in it, and of the visible marks by which it can actually be discerned in the world. The very purpose of this article is to tell us how to discern the visible church. And in this description we have no other doctrine than that taught in the *WCF* 25.2-5.

Third, the Reformers (and here we include Calvin, Ursinus and the rest) employed the idea of the church as invisible to emphasize that the church’s life depends on divine election and the operation of the Spirit which are not infallibly discerned by men. It does not mean that there are two churches, but that the one church may be viewed in two ways, and that the church as we see it is not to be thought of apart from its nature as a congregation of true Christian believers.

2.7 *POWER TO DEPOSE (WCF 31.1-4)*

The difficulty: Some argue that *WCF* 31 asserts the power of synods to depose office-bearers in local churches.

The resolution: In one denomination subscribing to the *WCF*, namely, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, deposition of elders is normally imposed by the local session. The deposition of ministers is imposed ordinarily by presbytery (in part because the membership of the minister is held by presbytery). But there are unavoidable exceptions. An exception would arise in cases of appeal and complaint, where a session declines to depose an elder guilty of heresy. If members of the church appealed to presbytery and if the facts warranted, the presbytery would then refuse to admit delegates from that session. Even in the history of continental Reformed churches, synods and classes exercised the power to depose.

What needs to be stressed is that as long as the principles enunciated in *WCF* 31 are followed, there can be no tyranny of local churches by broader assemblies.

Notice, first, that the words “it belongeth to the overseers and other rulers of the particular churches, by virtue of their office, and the power which Christ hath given them for edification and not for destruction, to appoint such assemblies; and to convene together in them, as often as they shall judge it expedient for the good of the church” (*WCF* 31.1) clearly establish the principle that original authority rests with the local office-bearers.

Second, when the *WCF* states that “It belongeth to synods and councils, ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience; to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his church; to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same,” several important principles are being enunciated. One is that these assemblies act ministerially, in service to the church, for her edification and unity. Moreover, these assemblies act decisively in cases of dispute, appeal and complaint.

But, third, the *WCF* immediately adds: “. . . which decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission; not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in his Word.” Two reasons are given for submitting to decisions, reasons of unequal weight. First, only decisions consonant to the Word of God are to be obeyed, and they are to be obeyed because they agree with the Word of God. Second, and subordinate, decisions are obeyed because they were made by procedures of church government which are themselves consonant with the Word of God.

Fourth, the *WCF* wisely warns us against placing undue confidence in ecclesiastical assemblies, when it states: “All synods or councils, since the apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.” The decisions of assemblies are not to be accorded the esteem due only to Scripture, and they are always to be evaluated in terms of Scripture itself.

2.8 *PRAYER AS A MEANS OF GRACE (WLC 154 / WSC 88)*

The difficulty: Both of these Confessions identify prayer as a means whereby “Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation.”

The resolution: This formulation is not without difficulty. Perhaps it may satisfy objectors to distinguish between official means of grace (the preaching of the Word and the sacraments), and personal means of grace (Bible reading, meditation, prayer and fasting).

3. *PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES IN THE THREE FORMS OF UNITY*

3.1 *TRUE AND FALSE CHURCHES EASILY DISTINGUISHED (BC 29)*

The difficulty: It appears to be a bit of overstatement for the *BC* to conclude its discussion of the true church and the false church with the claim that “These two Churches are easily known and distinguished from each other.”

The resolution: We must recognize that when the *BC* was written, there were far fewer church groups and denominations than we have today. In fact, at that time it was easy to distinguish the true church from the false church. Moreover, the fact should be acknowledged that those who subscribe to *BC* 29 function in terms of the

conviction of *WCF* 25.5, which states: “The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a church on earth, to worship God according to his will.”

SECTION II. A COMPARISON OF THE POLITIES

1. MATERIALS

The documents containing polity directives used for this study are the following:

- BCO* The Book of Church Order of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 2000 edition
- BD* The Book of Discipline
- CO* *Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America*, 2nd edition (1997)
- DPW* The Directory for the Public Worship of God
- FG* The Form of Government

The *BCO* of the OPC contains, in sequence, the *FG*, the *BD*, and the *DPW*. Each of these three documents contains Chapters that are enumerated with Roman numerals. When a Chapter contains numbered sections, an Arabic numeral is used. Hence, *FG XXI:6* refers to The Form of Government, Chapter XXI, section 6.

These documents are available online at the following websites:

- URCNA *CO* www.urcna.org
- OPC *BCO* www.opc.org

To assist our readers, we provide the Chapter headings which comprise the Table of Contents of the *BCO*.

THE FORM OF GOVERNMENT

- I. Christ, the King and Head of the Church
- II. The Church
- III. The Nature and Exercise of Church Power
- IV. The Unity of the Church
- V. Offices in the Church
- VI. Ministers or Teaching Elders
- VII. Evangelists
- VIII. Pastors
- IX. Teachers
- X. Ruling Elders
- XI. Deacons
- XII. Governing Assemblies
- XIII. The Local Church and its Session
- XIV. The Regional Church and its Presbytery
- XV. The Whole Church and its General Assembly
- XVI. Congregational Meetings
- XVII. Congregations without Pastors
- XVIII. Moderators
- XIX. Clerks
- XX. Ordination and Installation
- XXI. Licensing Candidates to Preach the Gospel
- XXII. Calling a Minister
- XXIII. Dissolving Ministerial Relationships
- XXIV. Electing, Ordaining, and Installing Ruling Elders and Deacons
- XXV. Divesting from Office
- XXVI. Missions

- XXVII. Ministers Laboring outside the Church
- XXVIII. Organizing and Receiving Congregations
- XXIX. Organizing of Members of the Church
- XXX. Incorporation and Corporations
- XXXI. The Constitution and Its Amendment

THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

- I. The Nature and Purposes of Discipline
- II. Jurisdiction
- III. Steps in the Institution of Judicial Process
- IV. The Trial of Judicial Cases
- V. Cases without Full Process
- VI. Censure and Restoration
- VII. Appeals
- VIII. Dissents and Protests
- IX. Complaints

DIRECTORY FOR THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD

- I. The Sanctification of the Lord's Day
- II. The Principles of Public Worship
- III. The Usual Parts of Public Worship
- IV. The Celebration of the Sacraments
- V. Public Profession of Faith
- VI. Ordination and Installation

SUGGESTED FORMS FOR USE IN CONNECTION WITH THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE

- I. Charge and Specification
- II. Citation of Accused
- III. Citation of Witness
- IV. Notice of Intention to Appeal (in Judicial Cases)
- V. Appeal (in Judicial Cases)
- VI. Complaint
- VII. Appeal (in Administrative Cases)

SUGGESTED FORMS FOR PARTICULAR SERVICES

- I. Marriage Service
- II. Burial Service
- III. The Dedication of a Church

THE RECOMMENDED CURRICULUM FOR MINISTERIAL PREPARATION IN THE ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2. COMPARISON AND EVALUATION OF RESPECTIVE POLITIES

We are using the URCNA Church Order as the basis for our comparison and evaluation, arranging our analysis in terms of the divisions as follows:

- Ecclesiastical Offices (Articles 1-15)
- Ecclesiastical Assemblies (Articles 16-36)
- Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks (Articles 37-50)
- Ecclesiastical Discipline (Articles 51-66)

2.1 ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICES (Articles 1-15)

<i>URCNA</i>	<i>OPC</i>
<i>Article 1:</i> Christ has instituted three offices in the church.	The offices of elder, deacon, and minister are recognized, but elders are distinguished as ruling and teaching elders (<i>FG V:3</i>).
<i>Article 2:</i> The duties of a minister are listed.	There is no difference (<i>FG VI:2; VIII</i>).
<i>Article 3:</i> The Consistory supervises the candidacy process for a man who aspires to the ministry.	The presbytery supervises the candidacy process (<i>FG XXI:2</i>).
<i>Article 4:</i> The candidacy examination is requested by the Consistory and conducted by a classis. The Consistory, with the concurring advice of a classis, declares the man a candidate for the ministry.	The candidacy examination is conducted by a presbytery, which declares the man a candidate for the ministry (<i>FG XXIII:3</i>).
<i>Article 5:</i> A man who is not a member of the federation but who aspires to the ministry must be under the supervision of a Consistory.	A man who is not a member of the denomination but aspires to the ministry must be under the supervision of the presbytery (<i>FG XIII:12</i>).
<i>Article 6:</i> The process for calling/ordaining a man to the office of a minister is outlined. This process is supervised by the Consistory with the concurring advice of classis with respect to the ordination examination.	The call is formulated by the session but is issued to the person called by the presbytery. A call can be issued by a presbytery or the general assembly (<i>FG XII:10-11</i>).
<i>Article 7:</i> Calling a minister from one congregation to another occur with the consent of a minister's present council.	A minister's call to another church is supervised by the presbytery (<i>FG XII:12</i>).
<i>Article 8:</i> The call of a minister from outside the federation is to be via a colloquium doctum, which is sponsored by a Consistory.	The call of a minister from outside the denomination is done by the presbytery (<i>FG XXII:13</i>).
<i>Article 9:</i> A minister may change his vocation only upon weighty reason which must be approved by his council with the concurring advice of a classis.	A minister desiring a change in vocation must receive concurrence from the body that he serves as well as from his presbytery (<i>FG XXIV:3</i>).

Article 10: Provisions for the minister, including retirement, are listed.

Provisions for the minister are promised and set forth in a letter of call. A minister's credentials remain with his presbytery through retirement (*FG XXII:9*).

Article 11: Provisions for a separation of a minister from his congregation due to non-disciplinary reasons are described. This separation is to be implemented only with the concurring advice of a classis.

The separation of a minister from a congregation is initiated by the session but must be carried out by the presbytery (*FG XXIV:2-3*).

Article 12: Provisions for nomination of qualified elders and deacons are described. They are chosen by the congregation.

The nomination process is similar (*FG XXV:2-4*).

Article 13: The term of office is specified by the Consistory.

The term of office may be for life time or a limited period; although the term maybe varied, a man usually remains in office permanently (*FG XXV:2*).

Article 14: The duties of an elder are set forth.

The duties of an elder are similar (*FG X:3*).

Article 15: The duties of a deacon are set forth.

The duties of a deacon are similar.

Comparison and Evaluation of Ecclesiastical Offices (Articles 1-15):

Similarities:

This section deals with the offices of the church along with their respective duties. It also deals with candidates (from both inside and outside of the denomination) for ministry with respect to their training, calling, and ordination. A minister's call to another congregation or vocation is covered. Finally, separation of a minister from his congregation is treated.

With respect to substance of the above areas, there are few differences between the two polities. Procedures are followed that seek to maintain and protect the purity of these offices. The local church is well served by both polities.

Differences:

Terminology

One may note a difference in terminology at several minor points. This is the case with respect to the number of offices in the church. The minister in OPC is an elder, more particularly, a teaching elder. In this way the minister and elders enjoy parity in the government of the church. This is also stressed and maintained in our CO even though there is a distinction between the office of elder and minister. Quite significant is the fact that in the OPC, the minister is, in addition to being minister of Word and Sacraments, also an elder and a deacon. An elder, though not a minister of the Word and Sacraments, joins with the ministers in the rule of the church; and elder is also a deacon.

Supervisory Assembly

What may be more of a difference is the identity of the supervisory body which oversees and implements the various procedures covered in this section. In the URCNA, candidates for the ministry both inside and outside the federation are under the supervision of the Consistory. In the OPC the presbytery exercises such supervision. In the URCNA, the Consistory is the only continuing ecclesiastical body, and initiates both examinations for candidacy and for ordination, with the classis providing concurring advice. In the OPC, the presbytery is the primary ecclesiastical assembly relating to matters of candidacy and ordination, with the session participating through its delegates to the presbytery. The office of minister is supervised by the presbytery. This is seen in the supervision that the presbytery provides over all phases of the candidate's examination, ordination, and installation, as well as his ministerial status. In fact, the presbytery itself is able to call and hire a minister. Though a local session may inquire into various aspects of the minister's work, any kind of disciplinary action must come before the presbytery. The above procedure is different than that of the URCNA.

In the OPC a minister is essentially a member of the presbytery (regional church) and has communicant fellowship in any local congregation of that regional church. The URCNA is not accustomed to this, since a minister is a member of a local church and his credentials are held locally. In the OPC the office of minister may be exercised outside the setting of a local church. For the URCNA, the phrase "communicant fellowship" refers to membership in a local congregation, something different than a minister being in communicant fellowship with every congregation of a regional church.

Elders are distinguished into two kinds. Unlike teaching elders, ruling elders do not have communicant fellowship with all churches within the regional church. Though ruling elders are members of the regional church they do not have communicant fellowship with all congregations in the region. This raises a question regarding the parity of office, and perhaps reveals a more substantial difference in viewpoint. Further discussion with the OPC may lead to better a understanding or even an agreement on this issue.

2.2 ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES (Articles 16-36)

<i>URCNA</i>	<i>OPC</i>
<i>Article 16:</i> Three assemblies are recognized, with the Consistory being the only continuing body.	Three assemblies are recognized, with all but the general assembly having continuing existence (<i>FG XII:1</i>).
<i>Article 17:</i> All assemblies address ecclesiastical matters in ecclesiastical manner.	The provisions are similar (<i>FG XIII:7; XIV:5; XV:7-8</i>).
<i>Article 18:</i> All meeting of the assemblies begin and close with prayer.	The provisions are similar (<i>FG XII:1</i>).
<i>Article 19:</i> The duties of chairman and vice-chairman are listed.	The provisions are similar. Moderators preside for one year, or less if the assembly so decides (<i>FG XIII:4; XIV:4; XV:3; XVIII:1-3</i>).
<i>Article 20:</i> The duties of the clerk are listed. The clerk is supervised by the next convening Consistory.	The clerk is chosen for a term (<i>FG XIX</i>).
<i>Article 21:</i> The composition of the Consistory is	The provisions are similar (<i>FG XII:3-4</i>).

given. The Consistory has direct authority from Christ over the congregation.

Article 22: The organization of a congregation within the federation is to be under the supervision of a neighboring Consistory with concurring advice of a classis.

The organization of a congregation within the denomination is under the supervision of the presbytery (*FG XXIX:2*).

Article 23: The council consists of elders and deacons, and operates under the authority of the Consistory.

The provisions are similar, except that the OPC has no council (*FG XIII:3-4*).

Article 24: Congregations are distinct and equal, having no dominion over each other. The unity of churches is manifested in the broader assemblies..

Churches are distinct and equal but are governed by the presbytery as well as the general assembly. The unity of the churches is manifested in the broader assemblies (*FG XII:2*).

Article 25: All delegates to broader assemblies are delegated by the Consistories. Only those matters that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies or that pertain to the churches in common, shall be considered by a synod. No broader assembly shall have the power to depose an office-bearer.

Ruling elders are commissioned to the broader assemblies by the session. All ministers within the presbytery are seated as commissioners to the presbytery. The presbyteries, but not the general assembly, have the power to discipline office-bearers (*FG XIV:3,5*).

Article 26: A meeting of a classis shall be convened by Consistories on a rotating basis. Inquiry into the faithful discharge of each church's ministry shall be carried out and advice given when requested.

Each presbytery determines its own meeting time and place (*FG XIV:7*).

Article 27: Church visitors shall be made available by the classis for the Consistories to invite. Church visitors are to inquire about the work of the church in general and offer advice and encouragement and report to the classis.

There is no provision for church visiting, but churches can ask for assistance by contacting the presbytery, and each presbytery annually reads the minutes of its member sessions (*FG XIV:7*).

Article 28: A meeting of a synod is held at least once every three years. Each Consistory delegates two of its members. A meeting of a synod is convened by an appointed Consistory.

The general assembly consists of ruling elders and ministers who are commissioned by the presbyteries in accordance with proportions determined by a previous general assembly (*FG XV:2*).

Article 29: The right of appeal to broader assemblies is permissible, provided that the appeal is first made to the Consistory. All decisions of assemblies are settled and binding unless proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. A Consistory may not be compelled to comply with a decision of a broader assembly, provided that they declare to that assembly the points at which the decision is in conflict with the Word of God. If a subsequent synod rules by

The right of appeal procedure is similar to that of the URCNA. Decisions of assemblies are viewed in the same way. Any congregation could appeal a decision, but if that appeal is not sustained, the congregation is required to comply with the decision. A congregation could withdraw, following the procedure set forth in *FG XVI:7 (BD VII:1-7)*.

majority that submission in the matter is essential for the unity of the churches, the congregation will no longer be eligible for membership in the federation.

Article 30: After an appeal a church may through its Consistory withdraw from the federation by submitting a written statement.

Though no procedure is provided for withdrawing from the denomination, we assume that a similar method would be followed.

Article 31: A member may appeal a decision of a narrower assembly. Until the appeal is resolved he must conform to the current judgment.

Provisions for a similar judicial appeal are found in *BD VII:1-7*, whereas provisions for filing a complain are found in *BD IX*.

Article 32: Any church may be admitted provisionally into the federation provided that the office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and the minister passes a classical examination. This provisional admission must be ratified by the next synod.

The provisions are similar, though without requiring subsequent ratification by the general assembly (*FG XXIV B:1-2*).

Article 33: The congregation through the Consistory exercises exclusive control over all of its temporalities. Broader assemblies shall not interfere in such matters.

The provisions are similar (*FG XXXI:5*).

Article 34: Churches are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with churches of like faith. Such activities are to be made known to the classis.

No formal procedure for this is provided; however, churches have freedom to engage in ecumenical activities.

Article 35: A classis may enter into ecumenical relations with other churches. Such activities are to be made known to the synod.

No formal procedures are provided.

Article 36: The federation may enter into ecumenical relations with other federations by synodical decision. Such decision must be ratified by a majority of the Consistories.

Ecumenical actions would be undertaken by committees of the general assembly (*FG XV:6*).

Comparison and Evaluation of Ecclesiastical Assemblies (Articles 16-36):

Similarities:

Both polities agree that there are three assemblies among the churches. These assemblies are composed of ministers and elders. Direct authority is seen in the offices of the Consistory. Decisions of broader assemblies are to be received as settled and binding. Church members who believe that they cannot abide by such decisions have a means of appeal, beginning with Consistory and ending with the synod, if necessary. These assemblies seek to provide mutual support among the churches in a variety of areas. In these areas there is great agreement and common practice.

Differences:

The relation between Assemblies

There appears to be a conceptual difference with respect to the interrelation of the Consistory and the broader assemblies. The URCNA begins with the local church and sees the broader assemblies as means of (1) guarding against human imperfections, (2) benefiting from the wisdom of a multitude of counselors, and (3) manifesting our spiritual unity. The OPC, however, begins with the universal church and sees it as organized in regional churches (called presbyteries) and in local churches. All members of churches within a presbytery are members of the regional church. All members of all presbyteries are members of the national church. The URCNA do recognize their shared unity in true faith as members of one holy catholic church, but we see that this church is made visible by means of local churches. This difference, perhaps, would not be of much concern if were not the case that this conceptual difference has practical implications as mentioned below.

For the OPC, the national church consists of all member presbyteries (regional churches). The general assembly is the governing body of the national church, and has exclusive original jurisdiction over all matters belonging to it. It settles all doctrinal and disciplinary questions brought before it. It promotes the unity of the church through correspondence with other churches. It organizes regional churches (presbyteries), and reviews records of presbyteries. It calls ministers and licentiates to the mission field or other ministries of the national church, either directly or through its standing committees. The general assembly consists of as many as 155 voting commissioners along with such ministers and ruling elders who are commissioned by the presbyteries in proportions determined by the previous general assembly. The general assembly is reminded assiduously of the fact that assemblies may not bind the conscience of the members of the churches in matters beyond the declarations of the Word of God.

In the OPC the regional church consists of all the members of the local churches in its region as well as all ministers in the same district. The presbytery as the governing body of the regional church consists of all ministers and all ruling elders within the regional church. The presbytery or regional church has responsibility for evangelism especially in areas not within the sphere of any one of the congregations in its region. It seeks to foster fellowship and nurture within its region. The presbytery has power to organize and receive congregations, unite or dissolve them at the request of the people and with the advice of the sessions involved. It resolves questions of doctrine and discipline. The presbytery takes under its care, examines, and licenses candidates for the ministry, and ordains, installs, removes, and judges ministers within its bounds.

In the URCNA, the Consistory that has the primary supervisory responsibility pertaining to its minister, although a Consistory must request the advice of a classis with regard to examining, ordaining, installing, removing, and judging ministers. Furthermore, a Consistory may delegate two of its members to meetings of a classis or a synod, with no distinction being made between a minister or an elder. In other words, two elders could be delegated or two ministers or one of each. Though in practice, the meetings of a classis and a presbytery may look very similar in terms of membership, yet clear differences exist regarding the functions of each assembly, differences that arise from divergent views of the church.

The nature and functions of the general assembly (OPC) and the synod (URCNA) differ along similar lines. These difference arise, again, from diverging concepts of the relationship between ecclesiastical assemblies. Sometimes the practice may be very similar, so that any charges of hierarchicalism seem out of place. This is seen when one compares the status of decisions made by the general assembly and by a synod. Both polities give similar status to decisions of the broadest body and hence both appear to exercise similar authority. However, such apparent similarity should not obscure the deeper matter of the respective views of the church. In the URCNA, the local church is viewed as complete and independent in that it receives direct authority from Christ. However, in the OPC, the general assembly seems to hold or at least to exercise authority over all the churches. It is one thing for churches to meet together for deliberations and commit themselves to certain procedures; but it is altogether another matter for a non-local assembly to exercise ecclesiastical authority over a congregation. This divergence deserves further discussion with the OPC, in order to remove misunderstandings and to understand more accurately the differences and similarities.

2.3 ECCLESIASTICAL FUNCTIONS AND TASKS (Articles 37-50)

URCNA

OPC

Article 37: Consistories shall call the congregation together for corporate worship *in observance of* special days in the Christian calendar.

No specific provision is mentioned for the observance of special days in the Christian calendar.

Article 38: Consistories shall regulate the services of corporate worship; the principal elements of corporate worship are identified.

The *DPW* (Chapter III) offers a brief explanation concerning the nature, purpose, and basic elements of corporate worship. Chapter III: 8 specifically states that ruling elders are not prohibited from leading in public prayer, reading the Scriptures, leading responsive readings, or, on occasion, exhorting the congregation as part of public worship.

Article 39: The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches; hymns that are faithful to Scripture and the Three Forms of Unity may be sung, provided they are approved by the Consistory.

“Since the metrical versions of the Psalms are based upon the Word of God, they ought to be used frequently in public worship. Great care must be taken that all the materials of song are in perfect accord with the teaching of Holy Scripture. Let the tunes as well as the words be dignified and elevated. The stately rhythm of the choral is especially appropriate for public worship. No person shall take a special part in the musical service unless he is a professing Christian and adorns his profession with a godly walk” (*DPW* III: 6).

Article 40: At one service each Lord’s day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word of God as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism.

No specific provision for catechism preaching is mentioned.

Articles 41-42: Baptism shall be administered with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

Ministers of the Word are not required to use a *specified* form, but only to follow the general pattern outlined in the *DPW* IV: B.

Article 43: Public professions of faith shall be conducted with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

No specific form for the public profession of faith is mandated. The *DPW* V: 5 stipulates that “the minister shall address the candidate in these or like words. . . .”

Article 44: Ecclesiastical memberships from non-URCNA congregations shall be received only after a consistorial examination and public announcement is made.

“The session is charged with maintaining the government of the congregation. It shall oversee all matters concerning the conduct of public worship; it shall concert the best measures for promoting the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation. It shall receive, dismiss, and exercise discipline over the members of the church, supervise

the activities of the diaconate, the board of trustees and all other organizations of the congregation, and have final authority over the use of the church property. The session also shall appoint ruling elder commissioners to higher assemblies.

The session shall keep the following records: (1) minutes of its meetings, including a record of the administration of the sacraments and changes in the membership of the congregation; (2) minutes of the meetings of the congregation; and (3) rolls of the members of the congregation, both of communicant members and of their baptized children, with the dates of their reception. Such rolls shall designate those members worshipping with a mission work. Births, baptisms, censures, restorations, deaths, and removals shall be noted on these rolls. The session shall submit its minutes and the minutes of the congregation to the presbytery for review at least once every year.

The names of members shall be placed upon or removed from the rolls of the church only by order of the session, and according to the provisions of the Book of Discipline.

When upon the request of a member the session dismisses him to another congregation the clerk shall send a letter commending him to its care, and the clerk of the receiving church shall notify the dismissing church of the date of his reception. When notification is received the clerk shall remove his name from the roll and record the fact in the minutes.

Whenever a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a certificate of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; upon being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll” (FG XIII: 7-9).

Article 45: The Consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord’s Table. Those who have not made a public profession of faith or who are currently not living a godly life are not to be admitted to the sacrament. Visitors may be admitted to the Lord’s Table provided the Consistory is assured of their proper profession of faith and godly walk.

“Since the sacraments are ordinances of the visible church, they are not to be administered except under the oversight of the government of the church. Moreover, in ordinary circumstances they are properly administered only in a gathering of the congregation for the public worship of God, baptism signifying solemn admission into the visible church, and the Lord’s Supper constituting the communion

of believers with Christ and with each other as members of his mystical body. Nevertheless, if a session judge that very unusual circumstances obtain in a particular instance, the sacraments may be administered elsewhere; but, in any event, the church must be represented in the service.

Although the efficacy of the sacraments does not depend upon the piety or intention of the minister, they are not to be administered by any private person but only by a minister of Christ, called to be a steward of the mysteries of God” (*DPW IV: A:3-4*).

Article 46: The Consistory shall ordinarily administer the Lord’s Supper at least every three months.

According to the *DPW*, “The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated frequently, but the frequency may be determined by each session as it may judge most conducive to edification” (*DPW IV: A:2*).

Article 47: The church’s missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. Mission work beyond the field of an organized church is to be carried out by ministers of the Word who are set apart to this labor and are called, supported, and supervised by their Consistory.

“Sessions, presbyteries, and the general assembly have their respective responsibilities for the work of missions. Each congregation and presbytery, as well as the general assembly, is obliged to pursue the task of evangelism within its respective bounds. Foreign missions is conducted by the general assembly on behalf of the whole church, or by individual presbyteries and congregations acting in coordination with one another and with the general assembly.

The general assembly or its agencies normally may initiate mission work within the bounds of a presbytery only with the consent of that presbytery; but in extraordinary circumstances the general assembly on its own initiative may appoint missionaries to labor within the bounds of a presbytery for a period not to exceed six months.

A person appointed to labor within the bounds of a presbytery shall place himself under the jurisdiction of that presbytery as soon as practicable. If his work is not limited to one presbytery he shall be under the jurisdiction of that presbytery most convenient to him” (*FG XXVII*).

Article 48: Christian marriages should be solemnized with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

The liturgical form for marriage contained in the *BCO* is only a suggested form.

Article 49: A Christian funeral is not considered to be a service of corporate worship nor subject to ecclesiastical government.

The *BCO* provides a suggested litany for funeral services.

Article 50: 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.

See the quotation above from *FG XIII: 7-9* (in connection with Article 44).

Comparison and Evaluation of Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks (Articles 37-50):

Similarities:

Your committee gratefully acknowledges the striking uniformity between the OPC and the URCNA in their common desire to promote God-glorifying, Word-centered worship, to administer the sacraments in an understandable and edifying manner according to the teaching of Scripture, and to conduct the affairs of the local church decently and in good order.

Differences:

There are, however, several notable differences between the OPC and the URCNA in matters relating to ecclesiastical tasks and functions.

1. Article 40 of the *CO* reflects the rich heritage of catechism preaching in the Dutch Reformed tradition. The OPC, on the other hand, does not mandate regular catechism preaching as part of its corporate worship services. In fact, no mention is made whatsoever of the place of the Larger or Shorter Catechisms in the service of corporate worship.
2. The *CO* mandates that the sacraments shall be administered with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. The same is true for the public profession of faith in the context of corporate worship. The OPC, reflecting its distinctive Presbyterian heritage, does not mandate specific liturgical forms for the administration of the sacraments, nor for the public profession of faith. Instead, Ministers of the Word and/or local sessions are granted the liberty to conduct these elements of corporate worship according to their own discretion so long as they follow a general pattern outlined by the Directory for Worship.
3. Article 47 of the *CO* assigns the primary organization and oversight of mission work to the local Consistory. In addition, those who are set apart for evangelistic and missionary labors are called, supported, and supervised by the Consistories that called them to their respective fields. The OPC assigns the work of evangelism to each ecclesiastical assembly (i.e., session, presbytery, general assembly) and specifically assigns the work of foreign missions to the general assembly and its committees/agencies.

2.4 ECCLESIASTICAL DISCIPLINE (Articles 51-66)

URCNA

OPC

Article 51: The spiritual nature and aims of church discipline are explained.

BD I: 1-3 distinguishes ecclesiastical discipline (for preserving the church's purity, peace, and good order) in two forms: administrative discipline (for maintaining good order in church government in non-judicial cases) and judicial discipline (for the prevention and correction of offenses).

Articles 52-53: Sins of a private character are to be handled according to Matthew 18.

Normally within two years of an alleged offense, a written charge of an offense may be brought by an injured party, by a person not an injured party, or by a judicatory (*BD III:* 1.-2.). Matthew 18:15-17 must have been followed faithfully before admitting a personal private charge. In the case of public offenses, it is permissible, but not required, to seek reconciliation in terms of Matthew 18:15-17 or Matthew 5:21-27 or Galatians 6:1.

Detailed instructions guide the judicatory called to render a verdict regarding a charge (*BD III:* 7.a.-d., III: 8.a.-c., and especially *BD IV*, 'The Trial of Judicial Cases'), including suggested forms for filing a written charge and for citing the accused to appear.

Judicial discipline contains five degrees of censure: admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication. These are described in detail in *BD VI:* B.1.-5. Suspension is for either a definite or an indefinite period of time, and applies to both church members and officers.

Article 54: Continuing or public sin requires the involvement of the Consistory.

"No charge of a personal private offense shall be admitted unless the judicatory has assured itself that the person bringing the charge has faithfully followed the course set forth in Matthew 18:15-17; nor shall a charge of a private offense which is not personal be admitted unless it appears that the plaintiff has first done his utmost privately to restore the alleged offender. However, even in the case of public offenses, it is not wrong to seek reconciliation in terms of Matthew 18:15-17 or Matthew 5:21-27 or Galatians 6:1" (*BD III:* 5.).

Article 55: The procedure for proceeding with office discipline is set forth, including the steps of public announcement and the role of the classis.

This article of the Church Order details necessary steps in the process of official discipline of church members. Chapter VI of the *BD* seems to indicate that the various degrees of censure would be followed—viz., admonition, rebuke, suspension, and

	excommunication (not necessarily followed seriatim)—and stipulates that indefinite suspension, deposition, and excommunication “shall be announced to the church.”
<i>Article 56:</i> The terms and procedure for public excommunication are explained.	“Excommunication is the most severe form of censure and is resorted to only in cases of offenses aggravated by persistent impenitence. It consists in a solemn declaration by an ecclesiastical judicatory that the offender is no longer considered a member of the body of Christ” (<i>BD VI: B.5.</i>). We observe that the <i>CO</i> stipulates that excommunication occurs in a public worship service.
<i>Articles 57-58:</i> The terms and procedure for public restoration of a penitent sinner are explained.	<i>BD VI: D.</i> speaks of the restoration of officers, and <i>BD VI: B.3.b.</i> speaks of restoration to either membership or office as being “accompanied by a solemn admonition.”
<i>Articles 59-60:</i> The terms and procedures for the official discipline and public restoration of baptized members is explained.	“When a noncommunicant member neglects the ongoing exhortation of the session to profess faith in Christ and rejects the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church, the session may upon prior notification erase his name from the roll” (<i>BD II: B.3.d.(6)</i>).
<i>Articles 61-63:</i> The terms and procedures for the official discipline and public restoration of office bearers is explained.	Suspension is either for a definite period or for an indefinite period (<i>BD VI: B.3.a.</i>). Indefinite suspension is reviewed annually. The indefinite suspension and deposition of officers involve action of the presbytery only in the case of a minister, including the dissolving of the relation between a suspended minister and his congregation.
<i>Article 64:</i> The procedure for transferring membership to another URC is explained.	<i>BD II: B.2.a.-f.</i> specifies ways of receiving memberships, such as transfer, reaffirmation of faith, profession of faith, and baptism. <i>BD II: 3.a.-g.</i> specifies occasions for removing names of members, such as transfer, dismissal, erasure (cf. also <i>BD V: 2.</i>), death, and excommunication. <i>BD II: C.2.</i> provides that the presbytery has original jurisdiction over all teaching elders (ministers).
<i>Article 65:</i> The parity of office is declared.	Neither the <i>FG</i> nor the <i>BD</i> contains a statement regarding the parity of the ecclesiastical offices.

Article 66: The procedure for changing the Church Order is explained.

The *FG* is very explicit regarding the procedures for amending the *FG*, the *BD*, and the *DPW*.

“With the exception noted in Section 3, below, the Form of Government, Book of Discipline, and Directory for the Public Worship of God may be amended only in the following manner: The general assembly after due discussion shall propose the amendment to the presbyteries; each presbytery shall vote on the question before the next regular assembly, and the clerk of each presbytery shall notify the clerk of the assembly, in writing, of the action of the presbytery; if a majority of the presbyteries has thus signified approval of the amendment, the amendment shall become effective on January 1 of the first year ending in 5 or 0 following the year in which the clerk announces to the assembly that a majority of the presbyteries has approved the amendment. If the assembly proposing the amendment desires it to become effective earlier than the date hereinbefore provided, it may set an earlier date, but not sooner than the next regular assembly, by a two-thirds vote. No amendments shall be proposed to the presbyteries without written grounds for the proposed amendments” (*FG XXXII: 2.*)

A similar procedure obtains for amending the denomination’s credal statements and form of subscription:

“The Confession of Faith and Catechisms and the forms of subscription required of ministers, licentiates, ruling elders, and deacons, as these forms are found in the Form of Government, may be amended only in the following manner: The general assembly shall determine whether a suggested change is worthy of consideration. If so determined, it shall appoint a committee to consider any suggested change and to report to the next regular assembly with recommendations; that assembly may then propose the amendment to the presbyteries by a two-thirds majority of the members voting; approval by a presbytery shall be by a majority of the members voting, and following the decision the clerk of presbytery shall notify the clerk of the assembly, in writing, of the decision of the presbytery; if two-thirds of the presbyteries approve the amendment it shall be adopted finally only after approval of the next ensuing assembly by a two-thirds vote of the members voting” (*FG XXXII: 3.*)

Matters in the BD not included in the CO

BD II: D.1. provides that when a session ceases to exist or becomes too small to work effectively, a presbytery shall provide for an election and ordination of elders or (with the congregation's consent) appoint ruling elders or ministers to be the acting session or to augment the existing session temporarily.

BD II: D.2.-4. stipulates that as a presbytery functions for a session or church that ceases to exist, so the general assembly functions for a presbytery that ceases to exist.

BD VII provides a detailed procedure for submitting an appeal in a judicial case.

BD IX provides a detailed procedure for submitting a complaint, which is a written charge, other than an appeal or protest, alleging a judicatory with delinquency.

Comparison and Evaluation of Ecclesiastical Discipline (Articles 51-66):

Similarities:

Both polities recognize the need for, and spiritual nature of, church discipline. Both are concerned to protect private admonition, and to provide for the orderly procedure of public, official discipline and public restoration upon repentance.

Differences:

The OPC has many more detailed procedural regulations for practicing church discipline at various assembly levels. One significant difference is that the presbytery has original jurisdiction over all teaching elders (ministers). Another significant difference is the explicit guidance provided to individuals and assemblies with regard to formulating, processing, adjudicating, and executing appeals, trials, and verdicts.

In summary, the polity regulations for ecclesiastical discipline are quite similar for the URCNA and for the OPC. The prominence given these regulations in the respective polities indicates the esteem and value with which church discipline is exercised as a mark of the true church of Jesus Christ.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Synod Escondido 2001 grant the privilege of the floor and of participating in all discussions involving this report to the committee's chairman, Paul R. Ipema, and its reporter, Nelson D. Kloosterman.
2. That Synod Escondido 2001 refer this report to the churches for study and discussion.
3. That Synod Escondido 2001 refer this report to the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity for use in fulfilling its mandate.
4. That Synod Escondido 2001 declare that the committee has fulfilled its mandate and dismiss the committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Clausing
Joghinda Gangar
Paul R. Ipema, chairman
Nelson D. Kloosterman, reporter
W. Robert Godfrey (advisor)

**REPORT 3:
PSALTER HYMNAL COMMITTEE**

Mandate:

Synod 1999 gave our committee the following mandate:

1. "...To begin the work of producing for publication a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal." (Minutes, Article XLI.b)
2. To provide "a recommendation of songs to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal" (Article XLI.c.(a))
3. To provide "a recommendation of other materials (Liturgical forms, the 3 forms of Unity, Creeds, Prayers, etc.) to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal." (Article XLI.c.(b))
4. "That the committee consult with those churches with whom we have entered into corresponding relations." (Article XLI.c.(c).i.(d))
5. "That the Psalter Hymnal Committee report to the next meeting of synod with a proposal for funding the new songbook." (Article XLIX.C)

Report:

The Psalter Hymnal Committee has met as a full committee and sub-committees to accomplish our mandate from Synod, 1999. At those meetings we agreed on principles of music for public worship, and began evaluating psalm renditions and hymns contained in the existing *Psalter Hymnal* and other sources.

The principles that we have agreed upon are guidelines for our committee as we make selections of psalms and hymns to be included. Those principles are:

1. Church music is an important element of the congregation's response to God's redeeming work in Christ Jesus.
2. The Music of the Church must be thoroughly Biblical.
3. When Scripture is set to music, the words must remain faithful to the inspired text.
4. In the case of music other than the versification of Scripture, the words must faithfully express the teaching of Scripture as summarized by our Reformed Confessions.
5. The music of the church must reflect, preserve and develop the distinct language of the universal church rather than accommodating secular trends.
6. The music of the church must express the full range of human experience as revealed in Scripture.
7. The music of the church must be intelligible and edifying to the body of Christ.
8. The melodies and harmonies of church music must be simple, avoiding complicated rhythms, excessive syncopation, and a wide range of pitch.

We were mandated to recommend to this synod "...a proposal for funding the new songbook." (Minutes of Synod 1999 - Article XLIX.C) We want the delegates to understand the difficulty of estimating the cost of producing such a book. Only after we have selected specific songs can we determine royalty or copyright costs. The actual production will require secretarial work, computer software, possible advisor fees, and any other materials required to present a finished draft to the publisher. A conservative estimate of production is \$70.00 (U.S.) per page (based on conversations with those involved in producing other songbooks). Our estimate for publishing and binding a 600 page "camera-ready," printable copy is \$5.00 (U.S.) per book (based on an earlier estimate we received from a publisher and book-binder in Michigan).

Estimated final cost of a 600 page Psalter Hymnal:

1. Production cost (@ \$70/page)	\$ 42,000
2. Publishing and Binding 20,000 books (@ \$5/book)	<u>\$100,000</u>
TOTAL	\$142,000 + copyrights

Recommendations:

1. That synod establish a fund to finance the cost of producing the new Psalter Hymnal;
2. That synod request the churches to contribute to that fund by asking for a specified amount per family, per year until the new Psalter Hymnal is completed;

The Psalter Hymnal committee also requests the churches to submit recommendations for Psalm renditions and hymns to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal. Such recommendations should be given to the reporter in writing (Email "derrickvm@juno.com"; 2025 Baldwin St., Jenison, MI 49428)

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. Glen De Jong
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REPORT 4:**BIBLICAL AND CONFSSIONAL VIEW OF MISSIONS****I. Articulation of the Biblical and confessional necessity and urgency for missions and for our involvement as churches.**

We begin by offering a biblical and confessional view of missions. In examining the Great Commission accounts of our Lord in the NT a number of things come to light.

Christian missions is the comprehensive sending activity of the sovereign triune God throughout the whole world, heralded through the preaching of the biblical gospel of repentance and remission of sins to the unconverted. Christian mission work will lead to spiritual reconciliation, resulting in the establishment and growth of the church, and the extension of the kingdom of God throughout the world. Christian missions is empowered by the Holy Spirit and will continue until Jesus comes again.

A. Christian Missions is the Comprehensive Sending Activity of the Sovereign Triune God

God-ordained missions activity is comprehensive in the following ways:

1. All of the Persons of the Trinity are active in missions
2. It is universal in its scope
3. It is directed to all people
4. The whole church is to participate in missions
5. All what Christ has taught is to be obeyed
6. Christ's presence is promised to the end
7. Missions is completely dependent upon God, so we are always to pray

Matthew 28:16-20 affirms that the whole Trinity is involved in missions. The Father gives all authority for missions to the Son. The Son commissions the apostles. Baptism of the new converts is in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Jesus commissions the church to make disciples among all peoples. All ethnic groups are welcome in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We call the churches to recognize the urgent need to evangelize the peoples all around us as well as to evangelize in all nations abroad (Acts 2; CD I. Art. 3).

The Great Commission includes the children of believers as disciples and recipients of water baptism and Christian instruction (Mt 28:20; Acts 2:37-39). We reject the notion that children of believers are not included in the covenant (CD I. Art. 17a).

Jesus entrusts us to teach the whole counsel of God. The church is to translate the Old and New Testament in the language of the peoples. Missionaries need to be trained in the doctrines of the whole counsel of God concerning God, man, salvation, the Savior, the church, ethics, missions, eternal life and related theological studies. We reject reducing the gospel to its bare minimum, but rather call on the church to send forth godly and biblically, theologically and ministerially trained missionaries who will, indeed, exalt the glorious name, words and deeds of God throughout the world (Ps 105:1-4; Phil 2:9-11).

B. Christian Missions Will Be Accomplished Throughout the Whole World

Mark affirms that the gospel is to be preached to all peoples (Mk 16:15-16). The church is to continue her task despite persecutions and obstacles (Mt 10:19; John 15:20; 16:1-3). The example of the early church shows her zeal for this (Acts 8:1-4). The gospel of the kingdom of God will be preached in all nations prior to the return of Jesus (Mt 24:14).

C. Christian Missions Will Herald the Good News Through the Preaching of Repentance and Remission of Sins to the Unconverted

Gospel preaching includes the call to repentance, that is, dying to sin, and the offer of the remission of sins, which is a complete forgiveness of our transgressions through faith in Jesus Christ (Lk 24:47). Gospel preaching is accompanied by the covenantal promise that those who believe will be saved and the curse that those who do not believe will be condemned (HC, LD 31; Q/A 84; Jn 20:23). There is a great need to evangelize and preach indiscriminately to the *unconverted*, pointing them to the crucified and resurrected Christ as the only way of salvation (John 14:6; CD II. 5).

D. Christian Missions Leads to Spiritual Reconciliation, Resulting in the Establishment and Growth of the Church, and the Extension of the Kingdom of God Throughout the World.

The spiritual fruit of gospel proclamation is that sinners are reconciled to God, transformed to be saints and sent into the world to bear witness to the risen Lord (Acts 2:47; 5:14). God's people are to be incorporated into the church, the living body of Christ, in which His fullness dwells (Eph 1:23). Christ is building His church, as witnessed to by the prophets and apostles (Mt 16:18; Eph 2:20-21; II Pet 1:16-21; HC LD 21, Q/A 54).

E. Christian Missions Is Accomplished Through the Church by the Empowerment of the Holy Spirit until Jesus Comes Again.

Christ mobilizes His church to extend into all nations (Acts 1:8; 2). The Father and the Son send the Spirit to enable the church to accomplish her missionary task. The church, mindful of her own inability and confessing God's ability, is called to pray continually for the work of missions (Luke 10:2; Rom 15:30-33; Eph 6:18-20; Acts 1:14).

Summary: We see, based upon scriptural teaching and our own churches' confessions, that the missionary task has been laid upon us as heirs to the apostolic mandate. We confess that we are to preach the gospel indiscriminately and promiscuously for it is only through this preaching that the elect will be gathered in. It is a biblical necessity that the church be strongly missionary minded. It is an urgent task, for there is no other way of salvation than in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12).

II. This portion of our report deals with part (b) of the Synodical mandate. It will address the following points: (A) An articulation of the Biblical teaching concerning the church as the agent of missions, (B) The centrality of preaching for the advancement of missions, and (C) The responsibility of every member of the congregation towards missions in the office of believer.

A. The Church as the agent of missions

By missions, we understand: The Church's official engagement in the proclamation of the completed work of Christ to the unconverted, in response to Christ's mandate that His Church be His witness in and to the world, through its commissioned officers, in reliance upon the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit who applies that completed work to the heart and soul of the sinner, wherein the unconverted is compelled to render obedience to the self-revealed Triune God, who in Christ summons the sinner to faith and repentance, and graciously offers him unmerited salvation and reconciliation.

From this definition, the following observations follow: (a) The Church of Jesus Christ must of necessity function as the proper and sole agent of missions. (b) The Church enters the mission field in an official capacity. Our involvement here is not as a spectator, nor as a contributing participant, but as the engineers following the Chief Architect's design in building the structure. (c) Christ is both the *author* and the *content* of missions. The missionary does not simply offer the benefits of Christ, nor merely speak about Christ, but presents Christ Himself as revealed in Scripture to the sinner. (d) It is Christ who sends out His servants to be His heralds in the world (cf. Mt 28: 18-20; Acts 9:15; 1 Cor 1:17, 4:1-2, 9:16-17; 1 Th. 2:4, 11-13). (e) It is clear that missions will not succeed if the Holy Spirit is not its driving force (Acts 1:8; 13:9; 16:6-7; CD III&IV: 11). (f) The Church, in engaging in missions, is privileged to participate in a cooperative – God-initiated, defined, and controlled – enterprise whereby Christ is pleased to use the meager and finite efforts of His Church as the official instrument of missions (cf. 1 Cor 3:9; 1 Thes 3:2).

The Bible – both prescriptively and descriptively – insists that the work of missions not only belongs to the Church of Christ, but also should only be conducted by those who have been commissioned as officers in His Church. In Acts 1:8, Christ enjoined the task of being His witnesses to those who were called and commissioned by Him for that very task. In Samaria, Philip represented the Church in an official capacity, and labored accordingly. Upon hearing that a church was planted in Samaria, the apostles officially dispatched Peter and John to investigate (Acts 8:14ff). The congregation at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4) gives an even more vivid and insightful picture of how the early Church understood and conducted missions. Here, it is evident that the five men mentioned were office bearers in that congregation. They were consecrated to their offices and were thus instruments of the Lord. The Holy Spirit commissioned Saul and Barnabas from among them to go to the mission field, through the officers of that congregation (v.3). Saul and Barnabas would be accountable to that congregation (Acts 14:26-28, 15: 30-35, 18:22-23), and to the one in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-5, 21:17-19), with which Antioch apparently enjoyed shared oversight of the mission field.

The Church's calling to do missions is also seen in the fact that it is the sole custodian of heaven's message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20), and of the keys of the Kingdom (Mt 16:18-19; 18:18). Therefore, it functions as God's ambassador in the world, representing the diplomatic affairs of His Kingdom. The Church alone has been given the task of summoning the lost to repentance. Not only has it been given the mandate to do missions, but also the manner in which to do it. Such a task does not belong merely to a group within the Church that operates outside or independent of the Church's authority, such as boards or groups of well-

intentioned but non-commissioned individuals. Elders must exercise direct oversight over the mission field as they do over an established congregation. A task so paramount may not be relegated anywhere else than where Christ Himself has placed it – in the hands and hearts of His officers in His Church, as our own *Church Order* affirms (Art. 47).

Finally, our definition of missions also suggests that theological institutions, e.g., Reformed seminaries, which prepare men to serve in the office of Minister of the Word and Sacraments must also adequately prepare them to be effective Reformed missionaries. The practical aspects of that training should include internships in actual mission fields under the supervision of an active Reformed missionary. The training of such prospective missionaries should include modern foreign languages in addition to the biblical ones. To that end, our Reformed seminaries are hereby encouraged to establish a missiological department.

In doing missions, therefore, the Church, by God's grace, seeks to outgrow its existing national and ethnic boundaries. It seeks to reproduce itself through extension and expansion by church planting, using as the primary vehicle the office of Minister of the Word and Sacraments. It avails itself of Christ's prescribed and God's procured means. These activities are not to be appended to the Church's overall mandate. They *are* part of its overall mandate.

B. Preaching and Missions

No church program carries the same weight as the faithful preaching of the gospel. Christ has nowhere promised to produce the same results - namely the building up of His Church - through any other church program as He does through the preaching of His word. Therefore, no one may substitute or parallel the unique divinely ordained means for doing missions and expect the Bible's predicted result. No church can be built on any surer foundation than the pure and faithful preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is also the missionary's confidence. The preaching of the Gospel is God's power unto salvation (Ro 1:16); and it is the missionary's comfort (2 Cor 5:18-20).

The reason for the centrality of preaching is that in hearing the preacher, the sinner actually *hears* Christ Himself. Such is the promise of our Lord (Mt 10:20, 40; Lu 10:16; Jn 10:16), “[t]hey will listen to *my* voice” (emphasis added). See also Jn 13:20; 17:20. That belief was both the foundation and the confidence of Paul's preaching (Ro. 10:14 NASV; Eph. 4:21 NKJV; 1 The. 2:14). God makes His appeal directly to the sinner, through the preacher's message (2 Cor 5:18-20). A Reformed understanding and implementation of missions must therefore rest on the *centrality, sufficiency, efficiency, uniqueness, and authority* of preaching (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 21 and 31; CD I:3-4; II:5; III&IV:6-8,17).

C. The Office of Believer - the involvement of every member of the congregation in missions

Although the Church's involvement in missions is to be conducted on an official and commissioned level, it would be a grave error to conclude that non-commissioned members of Christ's church are therefore excluded from participating. The New Testament is replete with examples of individuals who volunteered their time and gifts, and resources for the Kingdom (Luk. 19:29-34; 22:9-13; 23:50-56). During Paul's ministry we find even more participation from individual believers: those whose hospitality he enjoyed (Acts 16:14-15), his fellow travelers (Acts 19:29; 20:4) his fellow laborers (Rom. 16:3; Phil 4:2-3), and all the others who are typically mentioned at the close of most of his epistles. Those practices lead us to believe that there is ample room in missions for those who are not office bearers. They may be labelled “missionary helpers.” There is ample room for individual service. In certain areas, the work of individuals, or independent organizations can be effectively incorporated alongside the institutional work of the Church.

The following examples are some of the ways to assist the cause of missions on an individual basis:

- (1) The work of Christian mercy: Here the diaconate may seem most pertinent. Deacons should certainly acquaint themselves with the necessities common to the mission field and missionary households, whether that need be for equipment, personnel, finances, or otherwise. Although the office of the diaconate represents an official aspect of the Church, our deacons must avail themselves of the generosity and ability of individual Christians, and delegate appropriate responsibilities to their care. Our *Church Order* supports this view (Art.15).
- (2) Volunteering in Christian (mission) hospitals, or assisting in care-giving institutions has also been a means of bearing witness for Christ by individuals. Such opportunities may be wanting in rural or urban areas of North America, but are known to exist in other places where missionaries labor. These activities are an ideal means for Christians to exercise their gifts and promote the cause of missions.
- (3) Christian hospitality: This Christian behavior is not much practiced anymore. But it is also an important way of extending support to the cause of missions. The Bible admonishes us to that end (Heb. 13:2). When missionaries come into town, Christians should gladly offer their homes for the missionary's needs. In so doing, they will serve Christ and His cause. Ministers and elders should therefore encourage the flock to serve Christ in this way.
- (4) Correspondence with the missionary: The mission field can be a most discouraging place, especially in a day when the world grows more intolerant of Christ and His messengers. To missionaries who are thus situated, maintaining correspondence with caring Christians "back home" can have incalculable benefits, and will encourage them in their distresses. Likewise, we should make it a practice of keeping such people in our prayers, and inform the entire congregation of the work of our missionaries.
5. Doing missions locally: Increasingly it is becoming clear that the mission field is no longer "out there." That means the North American Christian now lives *in* the mission field. To take advantage of this new "Pentecost", Christians should be encouraged to invite their unbelieving friends and neighbors to attend worship services and other church related activities with them. The Samaritan woman had the right idea, and saw its glorious results (Jn 4:39-42).

III. An articulation of the proper relationship between "word" and "deed" in the mission of the churches.

A. Introduction: In the early days of the New Testament church everything was growing rapidly and the Apostles were giving leadership to all aspects of the church's ministry. The Apostle's soon found that it was physically impossible to meet all of the needs of the church by themselves. So the church chose 7 men to assist them in meeting the material needs of the members, while the Apostle's continued to attend to the spiritual needs of the church. (Acts 6:1-4)

Such a ministry of "deed" was not new to the church. The Old Testament church was also commanded to remember the physical needs of the poor. (Lev 19:9-10)

It was the command of the Lord to remember the poor (their poorer fellow believers in the Lord here in this context) and even those strangers (unbelievers) who were in their midst. The principle of extending mercy is not new for God's people, however, it unfolds in the New Testament in a different manner than in the Old.

In the Old Testament the people lived in the land and expressed mercy to the poor through their agricultural system. In the Apostolic Era the Jewish nation-state ceased to exist and the church was no longer characterized by geographical locale. The church began to spread across the entire world and now encompasses all peoples in all lands.

Appropriately then in the New Testament, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles of our Lord created an office in the church to carry forth, in an official manner, the work of Christian mercy. We call this

office the diaconate. As a result there is now a mechanism within the church so that both the ministry of the word and the ministry of mercy could flourish together. The burden of this section is not to elucidate all of the possibilities for the deacons of a local congregation. The purpose is to investigate how preaching and the ministry of mercy should function together on a denominational level, especially in the context of missions.

B. Definition of terms.

When speaking of "word" in this context we are referring to the public proclamation of the Word of God by those appointed to such tasks by the church; i.e. the preached word. "Deed" in this context is any organized work of mercy done in the name of Christ and his church. Any believer may practice private mercy and we are encouraged to do so to the glory of God (Matt. 5:16). But "deed" in this sense is a work of mercy done officially through the diaconate of the church.

The consideration of word and deed in this section is confined to the official actions of the churches in their pursuit of missions on a denominational level.

C. The word - the one great task of the church.

As is developed in other parts of this report, discipling the nations through the preaching of the Word of God is the great commission of the church. The word must have preeminence in the mission of the church. The Apostles were loathe to wait on tables, not because "mercy" was beneath their station as apostles, but because preaching and prayer had to have a higher priority than even food distribution.

This is the pattern all through the apostolic missionary journeys. It was preaching, preaching, preaching which was the first priority. Paul and the others healed many, but it was secondary to preaching.

As we compare the accounts of Apostolic missionary activity revealed in the NT we see the following patterns:

1. There are instances of preaching where there is no record of diaconal deeds of mercy (Acts 2:14-39; 14:1-7).
2. There are instances of preaching and deeds of mercy practiced together by the Apostles (Acts 3, 14:8-18).
3. There are instances of preaching within the newly established churches and then diaconal activity arising from the new churches (Acts 14:21-22; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). What is striking is that there is no evidence that diaconal deeds of mercy were ever practiced independent of preaching.

D. The relationship of word and deed.

It is significant that the word and deed were extricably linked in apostolic missionary activity. Present missiological practice often divides word from deed, if not theoretically, then practically. So, for example, there are separate organizations for missions and for relief and development. And relief and development are often carried on irrespective of whether preaching is being accomplished or not. It is not even necessary to have an ordained minister upon the scene.

In fact, some governments forbid the preaching of the gospel in conjunction with humanitarian relief efforts. For example, following the earthquake in Turkey, Christians were allowed to bring relief efforts but were not allowed to preach openly. This does mean that it is inappropriate for the church to bring relief in such situations. The church may testify to the mercy of Christ through her deeds (cf. Mt 5:16). But such a situation should be considered abnormal and irregular. Such use of "deed" without "word" may be necessary in times of disaster relief, but surely should not be the normal practice in other types of deeds of mercy, like schools, hospitals, and development projects.

Compassion has parameters in the Bible. The church is obligated to mercy only within certain boundaries. The church needs to be merciful, but also has the mandate to uphold moral standards and to teach Christian virtues in the way she dispenses mercy.

Its first obligation is to recognize the need of its own fellow believers and to meet those needs.

Matthew 25:31-40

Jesus here is not endorsing a general feeding, clothing and prison ministry. He is rather talking about feeding, clothing and visiting "my brethren." It is the care of one believer to another believer that is in view here. This text is often misused to promote indiscriminate distribution to the poor of the world. It speaks only of believers.

The practice of the church was to be discriminating in their works of charity. They would not even accept all Christian widows for financial assistance. The family was to take care of their widows in the first instance. If that were not possible, then the church would step in. Even this only takes place if the widow was spiritually responsive to the church's teaching. See 1 Tim 5:3-16.

Paul speaks of collecting for the "saints at Jerusalem" (Ro 15:26). He also speaks of offerings that were collected for ministering to the saints (2 Cor 8:4; 9:1).

But what of sharing with unbelievers, as was commanded in the Old Testament and Gal 6:10? Galatians 6:10 is often cited as a text to prove that mercy should be extended to all people of the world without any preconditions.

But even in this text there are parameters. The household of faith is held up as the most important recipient of the good deeds of a believer. The "all men" is reduced by this statement to a lesser priority. So there is a place for mercy towards the unbeliever, but it comes after the needs of the believer are met. And this whole passage seems to be talking to local believers working and living on a local level.

The unbeliever living far away is not contemplated either here or in Lev 19:9-10. Does this mean that there should be no mercy shown to unbelievers who are far away? No, it does not. But for the principles that apply to that situation we should look to the passages in the Bible which deal with missionary activity. And these texts always portray word and deed going hand in hand.

In summary, we affirm that the biblical example is:

Preaching first. Preaching and mercy together. No extension of mercy where there is no preaching allowed. (Though we recognize that it may be necessary to save life through emergency disaster relief even if preaching is not allowed.) "Deed" should be channeled through the local churches on the mission field if the cultural and maturity level of the local church permits it without undue harm to the church..

E. Development of such a relationship of word and deed on the denominational level.

The New Testament information we have for this type of situation is limited. It seems as if gifts for mercy were entrusted to the apostles and whomever the church appointed to help them administer the gifts (2 Cor 8:18-19).

This text is not a command but an example how the situation was handled. The analogous situation today would be this. Monies are collected from the local church. They are sent with a missionary preacher to be administered. Along with the missionary, the church chooses and sends men to help in this task. The gospel would be preached and mercy ministered at the same time.

Any long term missions of mercy (hospitals, clinics, experimental farms, schools, orphanages, etc.) would be initially administered by the missionary minister and his helpers until such time as they come under the diaconal oversight of a faithful local church.

This view of the relationship of word and deed and the missionary task will necessitate all three of the offices in the church to be active in missions. Elders and deacons will have to be active in identifying diaconal needs on the mission fields of their missionaries. They will be called upon to supervise deeds of mercy and be active in recruiting capable individuals from their congregations and other sister churches to assist as helpers (both short and longer term). Through their deeds, influential and talented persons of many vocations can enhance the work of missionary preaching.

There will be need for young people and retirees and every age between. There will be need of doctors, teachers, mechanics, builders, and distributors of tracts and Bibles.

The deacons will need to evaluate how best to bring Christian mercy to bear. If there is the possibility of using other personnel and/or organizations besides their own missionary and helpers, then these personnel/organizations need to be evaluated. Can they be used without compromising the Reformed faith and preaching?

We must be resolute about maintaining the vital connection between word and deed, that the preaching of the Gospel may be adorned by acts of Christian kindness.

IV. An articulation of a proper Biblical balance between the responsibility of the "autonomous" local church for the carrying out of missions, on the one hand, and our federation responsibility toward cooperation, coordination and mutual encouragement on the other.

A. Should we form a denominational mission board?

One of the concerns we have as United Reformed Churches is the matter of boards. We believe it is incumbent on us to send out a new generation of Reformed missionaries, but how can we do this most effectively? One of our answers has been the establishment of local committees, i.e. a committee set up under a local consistory. The Lord has used this to the benefit of our present missionaries. It has also been a system that has involved the local church much more in missions. Yet we do not want to be independent of each other in our missions efforts.

We wish to maintain the local church and its consistory as the calling, sending and administrating body for the mission effort. This, however, needs to be done in cooperation, coordination, and with the encouragement of other churches. In other words, we desire to maintain the intimate relationship that the missionary has with his consistory and his church, while at the same time we would like to encourage the participation of sister churches in this effort. Therefore, rather than a denominational board, and pursuant to Church Order Art. 47b, we recommend the Joint Venture model of missions.

B. Proposal #1: The Joint Venture Model



Calling Church Art.

Sister Church Art. 47(b)
Sending Funds to
Missionary through Calling
Church
Sending representation to
calling church's missions
committee

Sister Church Art. 47(b)
Sending Funds to Missionary
through Calling Church
Sending representation to
calling church's missions
committee



Missionary working under
the authority of the calling
church



Missions Committee of the
calling church

Focusing on the work of the
missionary.
Advising the calling church on
how best to proceed.
Answerable to the calling church
consistory



Sister Church Art. 47(b)
Sending Funds to Missionary
through Calling Church
Sending representation to
calling church's missions
committee

Sister Church Art. 47(b)
Sending Funds to Missionary
through Calling Church
Sending representation to
calling church's missions
committee

1. The Local Church: The Sole Sending Agency

In light of the aforesaid, on the basis of Scripture, missions is properly the activity of Christ exercised through the local church, not para-church agencies or the synod. The local church is called to conduct missions through her officially commissioned officers. Here we are further instructed by the wisdom of our forefathers in the faith. A synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the Synod of 1896, in calling our attention to the Great Commission, pointed out that the church as a whole does not baptize but only the locally instituted church. The synod does not disciple, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded" (An Introduction to the Science of Missions, J.H. Bavink, p.59-60). This echoes the pattern of the New Testament church where missions was the task and responsibility of the local church.

In the Joint Venture Model the missions committee is responsible to the consistory of the calling church. One church is the 'sending church' and a certain number of churches (usually in the same classis) serve as 'supporting churches.' This model, we believe, provides "the churches with the most appropriate means of assistance and encouragement for the missionary task" and at the same time enables us as churches to "assist each other in the support of their missionaries" (CO Art. 47).

We propose the Joint Venture Model for the following reasons:

Guidance and Coordination: It may be advisable, due to the sheer weight of responsibility, that the council organize a missions committee to serve the council under its authority. In a multitude of counselors one finds wisdom and guidance (Proverbs 15:22, 20:18, 24:6). We can also better organize and coordinate the assistance and support of our missionaries, in terms of developing mission policies and actions for the field, as well as sharing in the weight of the responsibility including financial costs.

Participation: This model provides a more "hands on" approach to missions. It should encourage closer and more direct relationships between churches and missionaries. There is a shared sense of responsibility in doing the work of missions. Second, direct involvement may stimulate a godly zeal for the cause of missions within these "several local churches." A federation-wide support tends to a more superficial, distant relationship between the churches and the missionary and does little to stimulate godly zeal for the cause of missions. Third, this also allows churches to participate who are unable to call and send a missionary due to financial considerations.

Stewardship: This model provides a more efficient use of resources such as time and hard-earned monies as it minimizes travel, accomodation and other expenditures which might otherwise be incurred.

Strengthened Relations: This enables the missionary more time during his furlough to minister at his home base, strengthen relations among the several local churches via reporting and representation work, and strengthen relations with his family.

Biblical Precedent: The Holy Spirit commissioned Saul and Barnabas from the congregation in Antioch to go to the mission field (Acts 13:1-3). They were accountable to this congregation (Acts 14:26-28) and also to the congregation in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-5; 21:17-19).

Safe Guard: This safeguards the authority of the local sending church who has responsibility for the supervision of the field, including the raising and administration of necessary funds, as well as the oversight of their own missionary.

Prevention: This also prevents the committee from having a "life of its own." A committee is a group of people to which something has been committed by the council of the church. It does not have any reason for existence apart from the mandate of the local church council.

Avoiding Conflict: In the event that one of the cooperating churches calls and sends a missionary to the same field, the local church ultimately should be responsible for the supervision of the field. This may be necessary to avoid conflict. However, the cooperating church would have oversight over her missionary.

2. Composition of the Missions Committee in the Joint Venture Model

Ideally, the missions committee should be as follows:

- a. Equal representation on the missions committee from the several local cooperating churches for a defined term and appointed by the various councils of the cooperating churches.
- b. Representation might consist of members of council and members of the congregation. For example, it may be modeled after the following structure:

Chairman: from the council of the sending church supervising the field
Recording Secretary
Corresponding Secretary (takes care of correspondence with missionary and with supporting churches)
Treasurer
Liaison members from councils of supporting churches

c. The Function of an Organized Missions Committee

The committee may assist the consistory in the following areas:

- choosing the fields
- establishing priorities
- establishing a budget
- defining the principles and standards by which the prospective missionaries will be evaluated
- encouraging prayer (Acts 1:14) by keeping the congregation aware
- encouraging missionary zeal in the congregation by way of education and hands on involvement opportunities with the missionary. This will help inspire future missionaries among us.
- informing each consistory of the missionary's progress, successes, challenges and prayer needs

d. The Benefits of an Organized Missions Committee

- order and establishment of guidelines which assist in smooth functioning
- help in handling quickly the myriad of requests for assistance

We must be clear in our understanding that the work of the missions committee is just that --- the work of a committee --- and functions as an advisory body under the supervision and authority of the council of the local sending church.

3. The Recruitment of Missionaries

As consistories decide to support missionaries they should keep the following guidelines in mind:

- a. Take special care in seeking out Spirit-filled, able men in our own congregations, training them with a view to ordaining and sending these men as missionaries into the mission field. It is absolutely improper to use untrained missionaries. Missionary work is exceedingly exacting and requires deep insight and knowledge. The mistakes made by missionaries are often still visible after centuries. As churches we should keep in mind, the following:

- i) Call ministers of the Word and Sacraments to be sent as missionaries
 - ii) Send missionary helpers to assist them (for example, nurses, teachers, pilots, mechanics, etc.)
 - iii) Seek out specialized training, in addition to seminary, as need requires (language training, cross-cultural training, internships)
- b. Bear in mind, the apostolic pattern of sending out missionaries two by two, a pattern which is exemplified throughout the Gospels and the Book of Acts.
 - c. Ensure the sending of and support for faithful missionaries. Just as we do not ordain men to be pastors of our churches, unless they subscribe with deep conviction to the Three Forms of Unity, so we should not send or support missionaries to the field who do not have this self-same sterling quality. If, in the event we should support missionaries outside of our federation or even foreign nationals, our rigorous theological standards ought to be the same for them as they are for pastors and missionaries in our own churches.

4. The Local Church and the Broader Assemblies

- a. In order to promote awareness of our missionary task as churches and stimulate our involvement in missionary work, we would propose that our calling churches and/or missionaries regularly give oral and/or written reports on missionary activity at classis and at synod. This is in accord with the apostolic pattern in the New Testament (Acts 14:26-27; 15:3-4; 18:22; 21:19-20).
- b. Not only is it our duty to promote and motivate but also to inform our churches on the federational level of the different fields of labor and recruitment for more missionaries as the need arises.
- c. If an urgent need for prayer or support arises in a particular field, the sending church is encouraged to correspond with the other member churches in the federation in order to make this need known. The councils then are encouraged to place an announcement of the same in the church bulletin and encourage a corresponding action from their members. If large amounts of monies or supplies are to be sent, it is advisable that diaconates appoint faithful men to go and oversee their use.

C. Proposal #2: Missions Update

Pursuant to Section D of the synodical mandate that there be an articulation between autonomous local churches and our federational responsibility for the cooperation, coordination and mutual encouragement of missions, and pursuant to Church Order Article 47b, we, the synodical committee, propose the following: That the URC publish a denominational semi-annual missions update.

Grounds: The printed page unites, informs and solidifies people of a common goal, as evidenced by the use of the printed page in the Reformation.

Means:

- 1) Each Joint Venture missions committee shall forward its missions reports (see proposal 1) to the editor.
- 2) The editor shall see that the publisher obtain the edited and collated reports.
- 3) The editor shall take care that the consistories obtain the published update. The consistories shall then distribute it among its members.

D. Stimulation of Godly Zeal for the Cause of Missions

Cultivating a proper motivation and participation for missions must be bolstered through pastoral exhortation, and be demonstrated in the way funds are appropriated for missions, in the way the work of missions, missionaries, their families, and their fields, are brought before the Lord in public prayers during worship, and, in the way the work of missions is accentuated through preaching and specific applicatory challenges. Young people should especially be encouraged to participate in the work of missions to the extent that they are able (e.g., clerical duties, fundraising activities, prayer, summer missions trips, and correspondence with missionaries).

1. **The Primacy of the Pulpit.** We confess that the preaching of the Word is the primary means of grace and that God creates and strengthens our faith through the preaching of the Word (HC Q/A 84). It follows therefore, that the stimulation of godly zeal for the cause of missions will come from a heartfelt response of obedience to the claims of Christ from the pulpit. Certainly as we know the depth of our sin and the richness of our salvation, this will prompt the covenant community as a whole to a holy zeal for the glory of God and the cause of His Kingdom in this world. Practically, however, men must be regularly challenged to consider seriously the call to the mission field. With great expectation, the elders should be ready to recruit able Spirit-filled men from the congregation. The stimulation of godly zeal for the cause of missions ought first to be evident in the pulpit and in the officebearers (cf. Eph 4:1-16).

2. **Elder Direction.** Elders in their home visits should encourage all believers to invite their unbelieving friends and neighbors to attend worship services and other church-related activities with them. The Samaritan woman had the right response, and saw the glorious results (Jn 4:39-42).

3. **The Role of Prayer .** The role of prayer cannot be underscored enough. Godly zeal for the cause of missions ought also to be evident in our public and private prayers. We are called to pray for our missionaries and the persecuted church around the world, but as churches we should also pray expectantly that the Lord will raise up men within our congregations. Did not our Lord say: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest" (Mt 9:37-38)? In obedient response to His Word, we can expect that our Lord will raise a great number of harvesters!

4. **Reporting.** Encourage missionaries on their furloughs to preach regularly in their calling church as well as in the cooperating churches, to speak in Christian day schools and home-school gatherings, and hold information evenings.

5. **Information.** Encourage missionaries to write newsletters regularly (4-6 times/year) to the supporting churches. We recommend that the churches photocopy every missionary newsletter from missionaries they are supporting and see to it that every family in the church receives a copy, instead of posting them on a back bulletin board.

6. **Hospitality.** Encourage members of the calling churches as well as members of the cooperating churches to offer hospitality to the missionary/missionary helper when they are on furlough. Encourage members to correspond regularly with the missionary/missionary helper. One idea implemented by many churches already is to assign two or three different families every week to write their missionary.

7. **Activity.** We recommend that churches strongly encourage youth, young adults and retirees to invest their time by offering practical assistance to missionary families on the field as needs arise.

8. Budget Funding. We encourage churches to place the cause of missions as an item on their budgets. This establishes missions as an important facet of our church life.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Neal Hegeman
Rev. Tony Zekveld
Rev. Patrick Eduoard
Rev. Ernie Langendoen
Rev. Peter Adams, Chairman

REPORT 5: **OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSIONS IN MEXICO**

I. Introduction:

A. Mandate

Synod 1999 appointed our committee to fulfill the following mandate: "That Synod appoint a study committee to investigate the opportunity for missions in Mexico. This committee is to report to the next meeting of Synod. This study needs to include attention to the following:

- (1) With which Mexican Federation(s) may we cooperate?
- (2) Is it feasible to cooperate with other northern North American federations in identifying specific geographic locations for division of labor?
- (3) Visit(s?) to the field to place the matter in proper context."

B. History

Synod of 1999 was approached with Overture 9, which urged Synod to adopt the "general scope and plan for the *Vision for Missions to Mexico* document". This vision, signed by Dr. J.P. Roberts and Dr. P.Y. DeJong, urged conservative Reformed denominations to follow a jointly formed plan of missions for Mexico. The plan included dividing up Mexico by regions, with each denomination dedicating its energies to conducting missionary activity in that region to which it was assigned. The Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPC) and the Juan Calvino Seminary of the IPC were assigned central roles in the plan. In response to this overture and vision statement, Synod appointed our committee to investigate opportunities for missions in Mexico.

We wish to note that another committee was appointed to advise synod concerning how URC churches should conduct missions cooperatively and to provide synod with recommendations concerning implementation. Therefore, our committee did not concern itself with these matters, and thus we did not consider it our mandate to cover all aspects of missions in Mexico.

C. Introductory comments

Our committee met for three days, made many phone calls, communicated by e-mail wrote letters to the appropriate people, and utilized the knowledge gained from the 58 years of pooled experience in Mexico and Central America of our committee members. Although our mandate suggested a possible visit to Mexico, our committee felt that there was sufficient first-hand knowledge of the Mexican situation in our committee so that such a visit was not necessary. What follows is our humble effort to give guidance to Synod regarding the task assigned to us.

II. Body

A. Issues raised by the "Vision for Mexico" document

Even though the document "*Vision for Missions in Mexico* " was not officially recommended to Synod, it does appear to be playing a present role in some URC congregations, and it does provide the background for our committee's assignment. Our committee feels, however, that there are several reasons why Synod should proceed with much caution as regards the said document.

1. Mission strategy - The "Vision", while purporting to offer a cooperative mission effort, is actually IPC-centered, ignoring other significant Reformed churches in Mexico which are much larger and possibly more viable.

We believe the "*Vision for Mexico* " recommends an unsuitable method of involvement by our churches. Our Committee believes that an effective mission strategy must give priority to the sending of church planters to build Christ's church primarily through the preaching of the gospel, and that other ministries, such as schools, seminaries, and Christian bookstores, should follow the growth of the church. In contrast to this, the "*Vision* " is vague as to what the "adoption of an area" of Mexico requires of each participating church, It does not recommend that church planters be sent to the areas adopted by the churches (rather, it stipulates that one ordained person be sent to train leaders, and that some volunteers also be sent to the area; cf. IV: 1 of *Vision 2000*). It appears that the real strategy of the "*Vision*" is to support Mexican Bible schools, and, as stated in IV:5, to adopt the Juan Calvino seminary of the IPC as the "flagship" for spreading the Reformed faith (see also Appendix B). It does not provide a concrete strategy for the deployment of (URC) church planters.

The "adoption of an area" seems to consist primarily of sending some volunteers and money, with a disproportionate emphasis on the maintenance of the IPC seminary facility. As we read the document and notice its emphases, we ask: Can we simply send our money and so absolve ourselves of the personal sacrifices necessary for a true church planting effort? Do we no longer need to send our sons and daughters into the harvest? Are we creating an undesirable financial dependency by heavily financing an institution which by the admission of the "*Vision*" belongs to a church which is very needy and quite small? Our committee believes that an effective mission strategy must give priority to the sending of church planters to build Christ's church primarily through the preaching of the gospel, and that other support ministries should follow the growth of the church. These strategic issues call into question the appropriateness of adopting major aspects of the "*Vision* " document as a strategy.

Other concerns about the *Vision 2000* strategy include the following:

- (1) The document states that it is not an official request from any Mexican church. The "*Vision*" itself affirms, correctly in our opinion, that mission work should be done in consultation with a Mexican federation. Therefore, the "*Vision* " does not provide a legitimate ecclesiastical basis for work in Mexico.
- (2) If the "*Vision* " strategy were to be applied, it would place our church planters in the north, while requiring funds to be sent to the Juan Calvino seminary in Mexico City. The distance between these two ministries would be significant, making it difficult for our mission team to participate in the oversight of the funds in any meaningful way. We feel that the issue of accountability is vital.
- (3) Some of the biggest needs for Mexico are in Mexico City and Chiapas, which we should possibly consider for future work.

2. Ecclesiastical issues - The *Vision 2000* document contains significant exclusions which must be taken into account if we wish to be responsible in our mission relationships. For example, the history of the IPC is much more complex than is stated in the document. The split between the IPC and the *Reformed Presbyterian Church* (RPC) involved the wresting of properties, the later sale of some of these very valuable properties, and other acts of corruption. Also, the IPC is a very small fraction of the original church, even though it legally

kept the name, and calls into question whether it is the proper heir of Felipe Delgado's movement (founder of the original IPC; cf. " *Vision for Missions in Mexico* " Appendix 2:III). Furthermore, the IPC presently exhibits internal instability evidenced by churches leaving, seminary professors resigning, and conflicts over J.P. Roberts' role in the church (see letter from seminary faculty, dated April 28, 1999 and newsletter 1998 - see appendices).

3. Financial issues - Good stewardship requires accountability. The committee contacted various people involved in Mexico and has many concerns about what appears to be a significant lack of accountability in the spending of donations for the IPC seminary. These people include representatives from the United Reformed Churches, Canadian Reformed Church, and Reformed Church in the United States. In fact, we have found no one who appears to be satisfied with the financial accountability of the seminary. Furthermore, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church had done exploratory work concerning future work in Mexico, but this investigation is on hold due to the divisions within the IPC regarding the role of J.P. Roberts (as of the writing of this report). We believe that there are sufficient reasons to withhold continued support for this institution due to its resistance to give account. It has come to our attention that various URC congregations and individuals are giving support to the seminary, and this committee would like to express its *grave* concern about this, both for financial and strategic reasons (as mentioned above).

4. Academic issues - The "*Vision*" document would make the IPC seminary the flagship for spreading the Reformed faith in Mexico. This school purports to offer Licenciatura (Bachelors), Masters and Doctor's degrees. Our question involves the academic standards being applied. We note from documents from the seminary (September 1999 "Lista Oficial de Alumnos") that several of the professors are studying in a doctorate program in theology from the same institution, i.e. the Juan Calvino Seminary (Virgilio Crisóstomo, José Velazquez, and Jorge Ramirez Catalán). We ask: Is there a qualified program offered by the seminary which fulfills the standards to give these degrees? Our findings lead us to question whether the institution has the personnel and resources needed to issue the degrees it claims it will give. Such issues should be clarified for the sake of honesty and good testimony. Also, the document "*Vision for Missions in Mexico*" mentions a large number of students enrolled in ministerial studies (cf. *Vision for Missions in Mexico*, III), but our findings show that only a handful of students are enrolled to study for the ministry.

5. Other issues -It appears that some promoters of the IPC and Juan Calvino Seminary have portrayed the IPC's existence as a response to liberalism, even a response to the CRC's liberalism. But the historical events leading to the IPC's separation from the RPC cannot sustain this affirmation. An objective study of the split will demonstrate that theological "liberalism" was not the issue at all. The split had to do with personality clashes and the struggle for power in the IPC and ownership of the properties. And an evaluation of the RPC and other Presbyterian churches in Mexico has led this committee to question further the validity of these claims; the leadership of the RPC today is solidly Reformed and very concerned about liberalism - even in the CRC with whom they work. In spite of what many of us have suffered at the hands of the CRC, this committee wishes to caution our churches from seeking mission endeavors on an "anti CRC" basis. We need to evaluate each opportunity with good missiologial criteria.

6. Conclusion - On the basis of the concerns expressed, we recommend that the URC churches not follow the guidelines expressed in the *Vision 2000* statement, nor give support to the IPC or its seminary (Juan Calvino Seminary).

B. Cooperation with other North American denominations

The mandate asks, "Is it feasible to cooperate with other northern North American federations in identifying specific geographic locations for division of labor?" We note in summary the following information regarding, the mission work of other Reformed denominations: as of March 2000 the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America have never carried out work in Mexico through their denominational mission boards (the OPC has one missionary working in Tijuana sent by the southern California presbytery). The Canadian Reformed Churches and Reformed Church in the US no longer are conducting work

in Mexico. And the Presbyterian Church in America and Associate Reformed and Presbyterian Church are conducting work in Mexico.

At this point our committee believes that it is premature to consider involving other North American denominations in a mission endeavor. While some of these denominations have fine missions strategies and could provide future possibilities for joint endeavors, our ecclesiastical relationships with many of these churches are still being defined, and a joint strategy could take years to develop. We are convinced that the urgent need of the day is to send out our own missionaries now. We are confident that if God so wills, future working relationships will develop with churches of like mind. Neither do we recommend dividing up Mexico by denomination. Our committee feels that this would place a restriction on the way that contacts are often made and the way in which opportunities arise. The populous cities of Mexico are in great need of the gospel, and there is room enough for all.

C. Mission opportunities we can recommend

We recognize that there is a great need for the gospel in the nation of Mexico, which has the largest city of the world, fast population growth, rapid social changes taking place, and much spiritual and material poverty. Deployment of missionaries from the URC should occur under the criteria set by the URC Synod or classes. We would like to give some guidelines that we feel are pertinent to Mexico.

1. Divine call - One important element of mission opportunities is people who are called by God and who are willing to go. In order to develop mission opportunities, churches need to impress on their members, especially the youth, the need for workers in the harvest. People need to be encouraged to consider prayerfully God's call, and should be urged to respond positively to God's call. Are there people who feel this call among us?

We sense a weakness in our churches with regard to preparation for missions. Many of our theological institutions do not seem to prepare adequately winners of souls. It is of crucial importance that our churches and each member seek to regain the urgency and importance of God's call to take the gospel to the lost. We believe that the only way missionaries and evangelists will be raised up is by actual involvement in evangelism through their local churches and/or educational institutions. Without willing workers the Church has no opportunities for missions.

2. Missions as "sending" - There will always be worthy causes in this world that will need our financial support, but God's *mission* call is: "**Whom** shall I send? And **who** will **go** for us?" (Isa. 6:8) and "How shall they believe on him of whom they have not heard, and how shall they hear without a preacher, and how shall they preach unless they are **sent**" (Rom 10:14,15). Mission work involves the sending and going of people. Our committee wishes to warn our churches of the danger of developing mission programs which send money overseas but do not seek to send proclaimers of the gospel.

In this same vein, we also wish to question the wisdom of sending missions money to ministries where there is a lack of financial accountability. The obstacles of distance and language barriers should cause us to use much caution in this regard.

3. Respect for other Reformed bodies - The Mandate asks, "With which Mexican Federation(s) may we cooperate?" Any work in Mexico should take into consideration the presence of Reformed church bodies in this country. This committee recommends that we do not initiate a new denomination in Mexico. We also feel that the URC could do fruitful work in relationship with either the Reformed Presbyterian Church, certain presbyteries of the National Presbyterian Church, or the Associate Reformed Presbyterian church of Mexico. With regard to the National Presbyterian Church, while we recognize that there has been justifiable criticism regarding the effect that liberalism has had on a number of professors at it's Mexico City seminary as well as some pastors, we also recognize that there is a renewal of confessional Reformed practice, evidenced by the founding of 9 other seminaries to train pastors in Reformed theology. Furthermore, discipline has been carried out against pastors who have sought to ordain women, and against churches considered too Pentecostal in their

practice of worship. In the event that the URC would wish to work with the NPC, this committee suggests working at a presbytery level, since this is the manner in which that denomination carries out its church planting efforts, and this would allow us to identify those presbyteries which are solidly Reformed.

4. Organic use of the Body and networking. The cause of missions is urgent and demands that we utilize whatever resources we possibly can. Local churches should be encouraged to send church planters and other mission support personnel to the field rather than simply searching for causes to support financially. Given the fact that the URC does not have a denominational mission board, our recommendation is that men or women who feel called to Mexico should be encouraged to take into account networks that exist in our midst with experienced missionaries. We suggest that local churches or classes follow the steps of recommendation "D" below.

5. Other opportunities for service - While recognizing the great needs for a Reformed work in Mexico, this committee wishes to bring attention to the pressing need of a Reformed work in Central America as well. For the past century there was a strong Presbyterian mission effort in Mexico and Guatemala which produced fruit, but the countries of El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama were virtually ignored. There is a Reformed group in northern Honduras planted by the Evangelical and Reformed Church (German Reformed), but this church has been influenced heavily by pentecostalism. And the CRC has worked in Central America since 1969, but the fruit - outside of Honduras - is virtually nonexistent. The only significant church options in these countries are an emotionalistic neo-pentecostal church emphasizing health and wealth, and a "reviving" Catholic Church which is seeking to regain lost members through the promotion of seminars, studies, and activities. Coupled with this are growing social political and economic factors which contribute to increasing despair among the poor or lower classes. Those holding power in many countries are also those with economic advantages, and politics is wedded to economics in favor of those in power; the result is growing poverty in the region. Although all countries of Central America hold "democratic" elections, in reality those in government are still a relatively small elite who continue to exploit their countries. Conditions for the poor continue to be a great burden, and many young people and children are turning to drugs and delinquency as a way of life. We believe that a vibrant, Reformed work is crucial in this region.

6. Conclusion - It is apparent to us that there are many and pressing needs in Mexico and Central America. Certainly the huge population centers of Mexico warrant mission endeavors, as do the poor and war torn region of Chiapas. Central America also cries out desperately for a faithful mission work founded on the Gospel message. Our committee wishes to emphasize that mission opportunities begin with God's call to missionaries, and the churches sending them. If these concerns are uppermost in our minds, we are confident that the Lord will guide missionaries to specific fields of service. We offer to the churches the following model for the deployment of missionaries.

D. A tentative model for the deployment of missionaries

While our committee understands that another committee has been named to treat this topic, we wish to include some ideas which have arisen out of our study. This is meant to be a tentative model defining steps that a local church could use as a means to deploy missionary candidates.

- 1) Local churches should actively assist missionary candidates in determining their call from the Lord. One way they can do this is by consultation with experienced missionaries regarding the needs and opportunities for service in a particular region. The local congregation should be encouraged to pray for God's leading in the candidate's life; consistories should be willing to call or commission missionaries if God's leading is confirmed and financial support should be arranged,
- 2) The local church together with the missionary candidate (with the advice of an experienced URC missionary) will determine where language study will be received.
- 3) The local church and the missionary candidate (with the advice of an experienced URC seminary) will determine who will be a mentor for on-field training in mission work. (We recommend normally one year language study, followed by a period of time for work under a mentor).

- 4) The area of work and job description should be agreed upon by the sending congregation, the missionary candidate, and the Mexican national church body if applicable.
- 5) Original accountability for the missionary's doctrine and life will reside in the sending consistory, but the Mexican church body with whom the missionary works should be taken into account for his or her testimony and work.
- 6) Financial support for the missionary may be shared with other churches in the URC, possibly on a classical basis.

III. Recommendations

- (1) That Synod grant Allen Vander Pol, Ernie Langendoen, Abe Marcus, Richard Gainer and Bill Green permission to address Synod when this report comes to the floor. This long list of names is requested because of the variety of mission experiences represented by our committee
- (2) That Synod not adopt the guidelines of the "*Vision for Missions in Mexico*" document
See II:A: 1-4
- (3) That Synod encourage churches to nurture an interest in missions to Mexico, and to urge their youth to consider this as a calling from the Lord.
- (4) That Synod urge our churches to recognize that missions consists first of all in sending our sons and daughters to proclaim the gospel and extend God's kingdom. Funding overseas causes should serve this primary purpose.
- (5) That Synod urge individuals and churches to utilize experienced URC missionaries for advice concerning opportunities for missions in Mexico. Resources this committee has cognizance of are:
Rev. Bill Green, World Fellowship of Reformed Churches
Abe Marcus, retired Mexico missionary
- (6) That Synod to recommend section **II: D** to the churches as a model for deploying missionaries.
- (7) That Synod communicate the need for a Reformed work in Central America and encourage the churches to consider this field for service also.
- (8) That Synod include in our Year Book the following names, with addresses, as contacts for working in missions in Spanish speaking countries: Ernie Langendoen, Bill Green, and Abe Marcus.

Respectfully submitted,

Richard Gainer
Bill Green - reporter
Ernie Langendoen
Abe Marcus
Allen Vander Pol - chairman

REPORT 6: CANADIAN CHARITABLE GIFTS

Introduction

Synod 1999 appointed a Committee of four Churches to answer the question posed by an overture before it concerning the Rules of Revenue Canada pertaining to charitable gifts and receipts. Synod subsequently appointed the Cornerstone URC, London, Ontario, Zion URC, Sheffield, Ontario, Emmanuel URC, Neerlandia, Alberta and Covenant URC, Grande Prairie, Alberta to serve the Churches as this committee. The Cornerstone URC of London was assigned the task of convening the committee for its work.

Unfortunately, the only one of the other Churches to respond to our request for input was the Zion URC of Sheffield – we appreciate their input. The Neerlandia and Grande Prairie Churches did not respond. In order that we might fulfill our appointed task, the Cornerstone Consistory appointed one of our brother deacons to do the research in their behalf and submit a report of his conclusions.

Following are the responses to the 7 parts of the mandate given our Committee. The material submitted below is from the Cornerstone URC taking into account the material sent from Sheffield and we are solely responsible for this material.

1. Examine the rules of Revenue Canada regarding churches with charitable status, especially those rules relating to the offerings collected by such churches.

A gift, for the purpose of the *Income Tax Act*, is a voluntary transfer of property without consideration. A registered charity can issue an official donation receipt for a gift when *all* of the following conditions are met.

- there is a transfer of property (usually cash) to the charity;
- the property is given voluntarily; and
- The donor receives no benefits in return.

Payments that do not qualify as Gifts

Some payments to registered charities do not normally qualify as gifts. Therefore, a charity should not issue official donation receipts for payments such as:

- amounts received through loose collections, such as a gift made at an offering during religious services, because a particular donor cannot be identified as having given a particular amount;
- provision of services where, instead of payment for services rendered, the person simply requests an official donation receipt for the value of the services;
- gifts of items of little value, such as hobby crafts or home baking (an exception can be made where some fair market value can be established – see pamphlet *Gifts-in-Kind* and Interpretation Bulletin IT-297R2, *Gifts-in-Kind to Charity and others*);
- private benevolence

Issuing Official Donation Receipts

A registered charity must issue official donation receipts indicating the year in which it actually received the gifts. If it receives a gift in a new year, but the gift was dated, mailed and postmarked in the previous year, it can issue a receipt indicating a date in the previous year as the date of the gift. A charity must keep on file a copy of all official receipts that it issues (see Appendix A ,which outlines the information required on official donation receipts).

2. Determine whether or not there are any legal means by which churches with charitable status can give money to causes that are presently not charities registered with Revenue Canada.

In general, a church may collect for *its own* charitable activities *or for* qualified donees, i.e. other registered charities. The churches are technically not to accept funds that are not for the charitable objects of the church or for other registered charities. Some churches have occasional collections for non-registered activities and exclude the donated amounts from official receipts, however this is technically unacceptable. Members of such churches could however pool resources to favor such non-registered activities, without the church becoming officially involved. To the best of our knowledge there are no known circumstances where Revenue Canada has taken action against a church collecting for and not receipting donations intended for non-registered charities.

3. Determine what happens when Canadian churches with charitable status either willingly give up their charitable status or have this status removed by Revenue Canada.

When a charity's registration is revoked;

- the charity is no longer tax-exempt;
- it can no longer issue official donation receipts; and
- it may have to pay a tax one year after the date its revocation takes effect. The amount of the tax is equal to the fair market value of the charity's assets as they were on the day the Department mailed the notice of intended revocation *plus* the amount of receipted donations and gifts from other charities it received after that day. The amount of the tax is reduced by the fair market value of assets and any funds transferred to other

qualified donees and amounts spent on charitable activities, on reasonable expenses and on any debts outstanding as at the day the Department mailed the notice

A charity that has lost its registration because it failed to file an information return can apply for reinstatement of its charitable status. In its formulation of administrative practice Revenue Canada states the following:

The department is committed to ensuring that registered charities file their annual Registered Charity information Return (Form T3010) on time. To encourage charities to take their responsibility for filing public information on time, and avoid the costly process of revocation and re-registration we anticipate that as of spring 1999; a fee of \$225 will be charged for each application for re-registration. Because we are concerned with charities that go on issuing tax receipts after they are revoked, we also propose to implement a new policy whereby a charity's re-registration will not be backdated to the date that it lost its registration status. Please note that we do not automatically re-register a charity that has lost its registered status. A charity must file a new application to show that it meets the current registration requirements.

4. Evaluate the pros and cons of Canadian churches maintaining charitable status with revenue Canada. Especially important would be evaluating these pros and cons in light of our biblical and confessional teachings; regarding the church and its work.

It would seem that the rules put in place by Revenue Canada for churches are eminently reasonable and favorable. Most if not all organizations that we would be inclined to support could be registered in Canada if they have not already done so. We should keep in mind that half of our church budget, facilities and buildings are paid for by the Canadian taxpayer, as well as the fact that substantial tax benefits are offered to Clergy, benefits that other taxpayers do not enjoy. Two guiding principles should be kept in mind when considering registration or not, namely; that our actions in no way contravene God's rule for our lives and that we, in accordance with His word exercise good Stewardship with what He has entrusted to us. In both cases Calvin in his institutes gives some insights as quoted below:

32. Obedience to man must not become disobedience to God.

But in that obedience which we have shown to be due the authority of rulers, we are always to make this exception, indeed, to observe it as primary, that such obedience is never to lead us away from obedience to Him, to whose will the desires of kings ought to be subject, to whose decrees all their commands ought to yield, to whose majesty their scepters ought to be submitted. And how absurd it would be that in satisfying men you should incur the displeasure of Him for whose sake you obey men themselves! The Lord therefore, is the King of Kings, who, when he has opened His sacred mouth, must alone be heard, before all and above all men; next to Him we are subject to those men who are in authority over us, but only in Him".

Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV CH XX sec.32.

How We Must Use the Present Life and Its Helps

1. *Double danger: mistaken strictness and mistaken laxity*

By such elementary instruction, Scripture at the same time duly informs us what is the right use of earthly benefits—a matter not to be neglected in the ordering of our life. For if we are to live, we have also to use those helps necessary for living. And we also cannot avoid those things, which seem to serve delight more than necessity. Therefore we must hold to a measure so as to use them with a clear conscience, whether for necessity or for delight. By his word the Lord lays down this measure when he teaches that the present life is for his people as a pilgrimage on which they are hastening toward the heavenly kingdom (Lev. 25:23; I Chron. 29:15; Ps. 39:13; 119:19; Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16; 13:14; I Peter 2:11). If we must simply pass through this world, there is no doubt we ought to use its good things in so far as they help rather than hinder our course. Thus Paul rightly persuades us to use this world as if not using it; and to buy goods with the same attitude as one sells them (I Cor. 7:31). Book III CH X sec.1.

In regards to being good stewards our Lord Himself; although expounding a much greater principle, chastised the servant in the parable of the talents who was given one talent but failed to even deposit it with the bankers and thus receive interest due. See Matt 25: 14-30.

5. Make recommendations to those Canadian churches wishing to retain charitable status as to what they need to do to operate legally.

Maintaining a Charity's Registered Status

A charity will keep its registration if it complies with the requirements of the Income Tax Act. In particular, it must:

- (a) devote its resources to charitable purposes and activities
- (b) not pay, or otherwise make available, its income to any of its members (it can however pay reasonable salaries or reimburse reasonable out-of-pocket expenses)
- (c) issue official donation receipts in accordance with the Income Tax Act and the Income Tax Regulations
- (d) keep proper books and records, and provide these and other relevant information to the Department as required by the Income Tax Act
- (e) file an annual information return on time (Form T3010)
- (f) meet its disbursement quota (as outlined in Form T3010)
- (g) not try to meet its disbursement quota by exchanging gifts with other registered charities
- (h) only carry on related business activities

Books and Records

A registered charity must keep adequate books and records at a Canadian address it has in file with Revenue Canada. A charity must also keep information that Revenue Canada can use to determine whether its activities continue to be charitable. (I.e. copies of minutes of meetings).

Books and records should be retained as follows:

- (a) duplicates of receipts must be retained for a minimum of two years
- (b) Books and records, together with the accounts and vouchers, containing the summaries of the year-to-year transactions of the charity, must be held for a minimum of six years.
- (c) The following must be kept as long as the charity remains registered and for two years after the registration is revoked:
 - all records of any donations received by a registered charity that are subject to a direction by the donor that the property given be held by the charity for a period of not less than 10 years
 - minutes of meetings of the executive
 - minutes of meetings of the members
 - all governing documents and by-laws

Failure to keep adequate books and records constitutes in itself, grounds for revocation of the charity's registration.

Filing an Annual Return

All registered charities receive the Registered Charity Information Return (Form T3010) from Revenue Canada each year. This form must be completed within six months from the end of the charity's fiscal period. Financial statements must be included. A charity can lose its registration if it does not file an annual return. Revenue Canada sends notices to remind charities to file this return, but does not grant extensions.

Form T3010 will help a church determine its "Disbursement Quota" which must be met in order to retain charitable status.

APPENDIX A

Contents of Receipts

Each receipt that a registered charity issues must state that it is an official receipt for income tax purposes and include in a manner that can not be readily altered at least the following information:

- the charity's registration number, name and address in Canada as recorded with the department;
- the serial number of the receipt;
- the place or locality where the receipt was issued;
- if it is a cash donation, the day on which or the year during which the charity received the donation;
- if the donation is a gift of property other than cash
 - a) the day on which the charity received the donation,
 - b) a brief description of the property,
 - c) the name and address of the appraiser of the property if an appraisal was completed;
 - the day on which the charity issued the receipt (if that day differs from the date on which the charity received the donation)
 - the name and address of the donor including, in the case of an individual, the first name and initial;
 - the amount of a cash donation, or if the donation is a gift of property, the amount that is the fair market value at the time the gift was made; and
 - The signature of the individual(s) the charity authorized to acknowledge donations.

RECOMMENDATION:

If a Church should seek to establish or maintain Charitable Status it would seem pertinent that they avail themselves of all necessary information as is readily available from Revenue Canada to assist them in carrying out their fiduciary responsibilities seriously and wisely. All forms and documentation should be completed precisely and on time as we seek to honor our Lord even in this sometimes-arduous task.

Praise be to Him alone.

REFERENCES

1. Holy Bible NKJV Matthew 25:14-30
2. Information from Revenue Canada, Customs, Excise and Taxation pg.4, 5,13,16.
3. Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion *Book III CH X sec.1. , Book IV CH XX sec.32.*
4. *Registered Charities and the Income Tax Act. Bulletin RC4108E*
5. *Books and Records Retention/Destruction. Bulletin 78-10R*

For Additional Information see:

C.C.C.C.
Charities Handbook
Income Tax, Fundraising & Accounting
Ronald C. Knechtel C.A., C.M.A.
Dick L. Kranendonk, Ed.D.

REPORT 7:
ECUMENICAL CONTACT WITH CHURCHES ABROAD

This committee was appointed by Synod Hudsonville, June 15 - 17, 1999. The mandate given this committee is to be the same as that of the CERCU "with necessary adjustments." Appointed to serve on this committee were the Revs J. Gangar, R. Sikkema and D. Royall and the Rev. Dr. M. Horton. Our committee chose Rev. Gangar as our Chairman and Rev. Royall as Reporter.

Your committee has held one "official" meeting, by way of telephone conferencing. That meeting took place August 10, 1999.

The committee set as its primary goal the contacting of those Churches presently participating in the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). To that end we have corresponded with some 14 of the churches abroad, among whom are the Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa, the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and the Presbyterian Churches in Korea (Kosin). We have also communicated with the CRC of Myanmar. We have received further communications from several of those churches indicating a desire to explore further relations.

Committee members Rev's Sikkema and Royall (joined by the Rev. Dr. Mark Vanderhart who also sat in on and participated in the meetings) met with delegates from the GKSA June 5, 2000 in Grand Rapids. This was a most blessed meeting. We discovered that these brothers, and, according to their statements, the churches they represent, are like-minded with us in matters of the faith and faithfulness to the Lord and His Word. The brothers from the GKSA were in Grand Rapids to meet with the Synod of the CRC for the first time since their relationship had been "suspended" by the CRC over the issue of Apartheid. The brothers said they were present to evaluate and report back to their churches concerning the state of the faith in the CRC. We have not received further word from them since that meeting.

Three of the members of our committee (Dr. Horton and Rev's Sikkema and Royall) are planning to attend the meeting of the ICRC which will take place June 20-29, 2001, in Philadelphia. As time constraints did not permit delegation by way of a Synodical decision we requested of our Stated Clerk that he provide us with letters of delegation. At this meeting we will have a great opportunity for face-to-face contact with the churches present.

The Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad recommends that our terms of service be the same as that set by the CERCU, namely, three years. The difficulty with this, of course, is that unless it is decided that Synod will meet in 2002, the 3rd year of our terms will expire between the meetings of Synod. Synod will need to give attention to this matter, too.

Your Committee makes one request and offers one observation:

1. First of all, we request the advice of Synod concerning which denominations and how many denominations we should actively seek relations with.
2. Our observation is that the guidelines for ecumenical contact which Synod has set do not comport well with contact with Churches abroad. Perhaps Synod will wish to appoint a committee to set workable guidelines for this committee or offer its own guidelines from the floor.

Sincerely, in Christ,
for the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
Rev. Dennis Royall, Reporter

**REPORT 8:
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE CORPORATION (U. S.)**

To the Directors:

Each of you receiving this letter was asked to serve on the Board of Directors of the United Reformed Churches in North America . This letter serves as our annual board meeting to keep us in compliance with the By-laws of the Federation.

We are proceeding with a postal meeting, since it is difficult because of geographical locations for us to meet in person and telephone conference is difficult because of varying vacation plans.

Each board member should know that the Synod of June 15, 1999 approved the incorporation structure and by-laws. Along with this, they approved the Board of Directors and mandated that we make work of getting the Federation incorporated.

Rev. Besteman and Gerald Rozema, who are board members, met with attorney Doug Brackman, who is the attorney that formulated the original incorporation documents and by-laws which were approved by Synod. Attorney Brackman registered these with the State of Michigan. As of September 14, 1999, the incorporation has been accomplished and we have received registered documents from the State of Michigan.

We did not register with the United States government to acquire a Federal Identification Number since we have no employees and thought there was no need for one. The Federation clerk, Rev. Julien, inquired about this tax exempt Fed. I. D. number because some churches were asking for this number. After informing him that we had not registered for a number, he volunteered to apply for one. We have been informed by him that he has now received a number.

The only other business the board should approve at this time is the appointment of replacement board members at the next Synod meeting. We, as a Board of Directors of the United Reformed Churches in North America, do now ask the Clerk of the Federation to put on the agenda of the June 2001 Synod meeting, the appointment of new board members. Our recommendation is to also appoint officers, since most official documents require signatures of a president, vice-president, treasurer, and secretary. A president can also serve as treasurer or secretary and vice-president can serve as treasurer or secretary. This board will transfer any and all information to the new directors.

If as a board member you are in agreement with what has been stated in this document, please sign below. Each board member must sign and send this document on to the next board member who has not signed. The last person to sign must return it to Rev. Besteman. If there are any questions, please call Rev. Besteman at 616-656-9934. (Please note that Rev. Besteman will be on vacation from Dec. 14 - Jan. 6.)

Respectfully,
Gerald Rozema
Acting as secretary

Rev. Arthur Besteman
2837 Valley Spring Dr. S E
Caledonia, MI 49316

Gerald Rozema
4653 Grenadier Dr. SW
Grand Rapids, MI 49509

Henry Nuiver
7738 Hearthway
Jenison, MI 49428

John A. Dyke
11433 N. 600 West
De Motte, IN 46310

Tom Zandstra
108 Beiriger Drive
Dyer, IN 46311

NOTE: This meeting was held by means of mail.

**REPORT 10 a:
VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT PENSION PLANS
(CANADIAN PERSPECTIVE)**

MANDATE:

Synod 1999 requested Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto (in co-operation with Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids) to investigate voluntary retirement pension plans for the benefit of pastors and full time employees of the denomination with the following specific mandate:

1. Investigate the benefits of group plans as opposed to individual plans;
2. Pay special attention to Canadian (and American) particulars;
3. Present various plans for the churches perusal; and
4. Bring its recommendations as a report to be sent to the churches as part of the agenda for the 2001 Synod.

BACKGROUND:

Covenant appointed a committee of two elders (Charles Loopstra and Art Miedema) to carry out the mandate. Working together with Walker proved not to be feasible. The committee felt it should carry out its mandate primarily from a Canadian perspective.

The matter had come to Synod by way of two overtures summarized as follows:

Overture IV from Classis Michigan to appoint a committee to investigate retirement plans for ministers, since the need is obvious, especially for the younger ministers.

Overture XIII from Classis Eastern US to explore the feasibility of establishing a voluntary pension plan for the benefit of pastors and employees of the denomination in order to free pastors from concern over the management of retirement funds. Some particular issues raised in this overture were:

1. To provide uniformity;
2. To provide adequate investment diversification, facilitate portability of coverage, and provide increased retirement income;
3. An URCNA plan would supplement or replace the former CRC benefits; and
4. Uniformity would assist in the calling process.

THE CHURCH ORDER:

Article 10 of the CO provides:

Each church is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. Those who have retired from the active ministry shall retain the title and dignity of the office of the minister of the Word.

Since a minister is bound to the services of the churches for life (Article 9) the article which requires the churches to make adequate provision for its ministers must be read in conjunction with article 9. It is therefore up to the local church to adequately provide for its ministers and their families even in retirement. It is the opinion of this committee that upon retirement of a minister, the local church cannot simply take the position that the minister should have taken care of his retirement needs or that of his family or widow, in the case of early retirement or

disability. If in fact the minister does not have adequate resources, the church is bound by articles 9 and 10 of the CO (so long as the minister remains with that congregation) to supplement his income if required. The same would apply to the income of the minister's widow and/or dependents.

LACK OF UNIFORM PRACTICE:

Covenant conducted a survey of all Canadian URCNA churches to determine what retirement benefit practice was prevalent and whether the churches favoured any particular option. Attached hereto as Appendix "A" are copies of covering letters and survey questionnaires forwarded to the churches and pastors. The committee received 19 responses from the churches (out of 27) and 10 responses from individual pastors. A summary of the survey results is found at Appendix "B". (Churches and pastors are not identified to maintain confidentiality.)

At the present time there is no uniformity within the Canadian churches. Some churches make no provision at all, whereas other churches contribute towards the ministers private Registered Retirement Savings Plan ("RRSP").

Some churches state that they do not have the financial means to support a retirement plan for their minister or have the ability to contribute to a denominational fund.

None of the churches indicated that the ministers or churches participated in any existing group pension plans.

Some of the ministers (although this was not reported through the survey) are entitled to benefits which vested under the CRC Ministers' Pension Plan ("CRC Pension"). This is a defined benefit plan, which entitled every CRC minister to a retirement benefit based on a formula. If a minister retires or leaves the denomination, the benefits are calculated on the basis of 1.1% times the average salary in effect for CRC ministers at that time (in 1992 it was \$29,816 CDN) times the years of service. A similar plan was maintained for US ministers, thereby entitling a retiring minister to benefits from both plans if he served in both countries. For example a former CRC minister who had 25 years of service (while a CRC minister) and left the denomination in 1992 but retires 10 years later, will have his benefits frozen as of 1992. On retirement he would receive approximately \$750 CDN per month in retirement benefits or \$9,000 per year.

The lack of uniform practice within the churches can create a number of difficulties:

1. If a minister has not adequately provided for his own retirement, it will put a considerable burden on his church to supplement his income after retirement.
2. If the minister is disabled and needs to take an early retirement, unless the church or minister has purchased disability insurance coverage, the local church will be faced with an even greater financial burden.
3. The present lack of uniform practice will discourage churches from calling ministers closer to their retirement, especially if they have not made adequate provision for their retirement.

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS BASED ON SURVEY RESULTS:

1. Many churches do not assist their ministers with retirement planning.
2. None of the churches are supporting a retired minister at this time.
3. None of the churches are participating in any group plan.
4. The majority of the ministers participate in a private RRSP program. Two reported they do not and have made no provision for their retirement.

5. Ten churches do not contribute to the minister's private RRSP program, whereas 16 stated they did. The contributions vary from \$1000 per year to \$6,600 per year.

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE:

The following government programs are available to Canadian residents to assist in their disability or retirement:

Old Age Security ("OAS"): OAS is payable to at age 65 regardless of employment history to all Canadian citizens or legal residents with a minimum of 10 years residency in Canada. Full benefits are payable to qualified persons who have lived in Canada for 40 years or who were born before July 1, 1952 and lived in Canada for the 10 years preceding the application for benefits. In all other cases only partial benefits are payable. In 2000 the maximum OAS payable was \$5,080 annually.

Guaranteed Income Supplement ("GIS"): This is a supplement that is only payable if a retired person's annual income and that of his spouse falls below \$16,032 annually (\$12,312 for a single person). It should be noted however, that if the churches pay any supplement, that would be added to the income and would disqualify the payment of GIS. Since it is unlikely that any minister and his spouse can or will live on a combined income of \$16,032, the payment of a GIS is not relevant for the purposes of this report.

Canada Pension Plan ("CPP"): CPP is a contributory, earnings related social insurance program. There are 3 kinds of benefits:

- disability benefits (which include benefits for disabled contributors and benefits for their dependent children)
- retirement pension
- survivor benefits (which include the death benefit, the survivor's pension and children's benefit)

Contributions are made by the minister to CPP based on annual earnings. The maximum contribution for 2000 was \$1,329 (2001 will be \$1,496.60) based on annual earnings of \$37,600 (2001 will be \$38,300). Benefits are payable according to a formula based on contributions made during the contributory period. The maximum CPP retirement pension in 2000 at age 65 was \$9,155 annually, to be increased to \$9,300 in 2001. These maximum benefits are based on the last 5 years of pensionable earnings. The CPP benefits are reduced in proportion to the contributions made. It is expected that many retiring ministers will reach the maximum benefits since housing and other benefits are included in pensionable earnings (if properly reported for income tax purposes). However, that may not be the case if a minister is called late in life and did not previously accumulate maximum pensionable earnings, or lived abroad for a large portion of his career.

None of these government programs would be sufficient to allow a minister to retire at 65 (or earlier) if he was not able to supplement his income. Moreover, if a minister has moved from the USA to Canada, and has only worked part of his working career in Canada, his entitlement may be further limited. Although he may be entitled to similar benefits from the USA, it is beyond the scope of this report to examine this aspect.

ILLUSTRATIONS:

The following illustrations were developed to demonstrate the various scenarios that a church could encounter when their minister retires or becomes disabled. Each illustration assumes that a certain level of income is required before tax.

Example 1

A minister has worked in Canada most of his life (30 years) and 4 years in the USA and retires in 2000. His income during his last year of employment is \$30,000 plus use of a manse, car allowance and book allowance. During his years of employment in Canada he has made maximum contributions to CPP based on his income with benefits and is eligible for OAP on his retirement in Canada. His wife is of the same age, and has made no CPP

contributions, but is also eligible for OAP. The minister has accumulated a modest private pension (RRSP), which on his retirement at age 65 he intends to utilize towards a downpayment on the purchase of his own home. It is assumed that he will need a minimum annual income (before tax) of \$35,000.00 CDN to live in Canada after his retirement in order to maintain his own home, own a car, and live modestly. He left the CRC in 1993 (after 25 years of service) and is entitled to \$9000/year in pension benefits from the CRC Ministers' Pension Plan.

CRC Pension	\$	9,000
RRSP		Nil
CPP		9,155
OAS (joint)	\$	<u>10,160</u>
Total	\$	28,315
Church Supplement required		<u>6,685</u>
Total	\$	35,000

Example 2

A minister has worked in Canada all of his life and at retirement (2000) his CPP contributions only entitle him to 85% of the maximum benefits available. He was not a former CRC minister and he has no private pension or RRSP, but has some modest savings that will earn him \$3,000 annually. His wife has not worked. He wishes to retire at 65, but his wife is only 60. He needs \$30,000 a year to retire and live modestly.

CRC Pension		Nil
RRSP		Nil
Other income	\$	3,000
CPP		7,782
OAP (husband only for the first 5 years)		<u>5,080</u>
Total	\$	15,862
Church Supplement		<u>14,138</u>
Total	\$	30,000

Example 3

A minister is disabled at age 42 with a wife and 3 dependent children. He and the church have not purchased any disability insurance. He does not have a drug plan, and needs \$30,000 a year to support his family plus free accommodation or the equivalent of \$50,000 a year. He has made the maximum contributions to CPP for 17 years. He has accumulated only \$20,000 in his RRSP. He was not a former CRC minister and has no other pension benefits.

CRC pension		Nil
RRSP	\$	1,500
CPP (maximum disability benefits)		11,220
OAS (joint)		<u>Nil</u>
Total		12,720
Church Supplement		<u>37,280</u>
Total	\$	50,000

Example 4:

A minister was ordained at age 40. In his previous employment and during his employment as a minister he never achieved more than 75% of the maximum pensionable earnings. He has no other savings or pension benefits. He retires at age 65 with no savings, and an RRSP with a value of \$100,000 which yields about \$7,500 annually. His

wife is the same age. He lives in an urban environment and needs a minimum of \$40,000 annual income to maintain a modest standard of living.

RRSP	\$ 7,500
CPP	6,867
OAS (joint)	<u>10,160</u>
Total	24,527
Church Supplement	<u>15,473</u>
Total	\$ 40,000

OBSERVATIONS:

The following observations can be derived from the above examples:

- If a minister is close to retirement age and is eligible for maximum CPP benefits, maximum OAS benefits (both husband and wife being at least 65 years of age) as well as receiving a substantial benefit from the CRC Pension Plan, and some RRSP benefits, the need is minimal. This of course assumes that the needs will stay constant. Since the CRC benefits are frozen, an inflationary period may change that need.
- If a minister is not part of any pension plan, the need becomes more critical. His retirement earnings must be supplemented either by his own RRSP or by a church supplement.
- If a minister becomes disabled, and is not the beneficiary of any disability insurance, the need becomes critical.
- Since our younger ministers will not be receiving any benefits from the CRC Pension Plan, a significantly greater responsibility has been placed on the minister to provide for his own disability benefits and retirement out of his current income.
- To achieve a reasonable retirement income, with some hedge against inflation, will require the accumulation of a large RRSP to supplement government benefits. If the churches do not make this possible, they will be required to supplement the income of a retiring pastor.
- It is unlikely that on the basis of current salaries paid to ministers in URCNA that sufficient funds can be set aside to accumulate a RRSP of sufficient amount on retirement.

OPTIONS:

1. Maintain the status quo

This option means that the denomination will not participate in any joint effort to assist ministers in their retirement, nor spread the burden over the churches (other than through assistance to needy churches). In addition, there will be no mandated requirement for the local church to contribute to a minister's private RRSP or maintain disability insurance. Each church would have to honour its obligations pursuant to Articles 9 and 10 of the CO and heed the requirements of Deuteronomy 15: 7-11, Galatians 2:10 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

Advantages:

- a. It will ensure the autonomy of the local church.
- b. It will encourage ministers to set aside funds to save for their retirement.
- c. It will not create portability problems when a minister or church leaves the denomination.

Disadvantages:

- a. It places an onerous burden on the minister to adequately provide for his retirement.
- b. It will place an additional burden on the local church to supplement the minister's needs when required.
- c. It discourages the calling of older ministers, who may not have adequately provided for their retirement.
- d. It does not create a mechanism to allow for the churches to share the burden in the event of financial hardship due to disability, early retirement or other reasons for which no provision has been made.

2. Establish a Group Disability and Pension Plan in which all ministers/churches must participate.

Advantages:

- a. Separate plans could be established for Canada and the USA with a co-operation agreement between them.
- b. Contributions could be made by the churches or the ministers, or both.
- c. If the Plan was a defined benefit plan, benefits could be paid on the basis of need.
- d. If the Plan was a contributory plan, benefits would be payable on the basis of ability of the Plan to pay.
- e. Vesting and portability could be built into the plan. (In Canada pension benefits vest after 2 years, but portability is not mandatory.)
- f. Eligibility to participate in disability coverage would not depend on meeting certain health qualifications. This would ensure protection for ministers who would otherwise not qualify for disability coverage.
- g. Such a plan would spread over all of the churches the financial burden of assisting ministers in their retirement, especially those churches who are faced with a minister who is approaching retirement without adequate funding.

Disadvantages:

- a. The small size of the denomination (especially if two separate plans have to be established for Canada and the USA) makes the establishment of such a plan expensive and subject to fluctuations in funding and payouts.
- b. If the churches primarily were responsible for funding this plan, they would not likely favour vesting (even if required by law) and portability, especially if the minister or church left the denomination.
- c. Any mandatory group plan involves supervision and administrative costs. Since the denomination does not maintain an office, this would have to be delegated to a committee or board, with accountability to the churches.
- d. A defined benefit plan could place an onerous financial burden on the churches, beyond their capacity to pay the defined benefits.
- e. The cost of setting up two plans (one in each country) is onerous. (Actuarial and consulting fees for the establishment of a Canadian plan alone could be as much as \$50,000 CDN.)

3. Establish a Denominational Retirement Savings Fund (Superannuation Fund) to assist churches in funding retirement obligations to their ministers

Such a denominational fund would use actuarial evidence to establish the likely need for retirement funding on an ongoing basis. It would then assess the churches on a communicant member basis, for an annual contribution to the fund which would be invested. Each church would then be able to obtain from the fund an annual payout to assist them in funding their financial obligations to a retiring or disabled minister. The Canadian Reformed Churches have adopted such a plan which has been in effect since 1959. A copy of their Constitution is attached as Appendix "C".

Advantages:

- a. The fund could operate internationally.
- b. The fund could be established with flexible guidelines:
 - i) it could pay out a fixed amount to any qualifying church if it was required to support a retiring or disabled minister;
 - ii) it could pay out a fixed amount to any qualifying minister, directly.
 - iii) it could pay out a flexible amount, based on need.
- c. If the contributions to the fund are made by the churches, then in effect they are tax deductible.

Disadvantages:

- a. If the fund is authorized to pay out flexible amounts based on need, it will discourage the churches and ministers from making provision for the disability and/or retirement of the ministers, thereby rewarding the minister or church that has made no provision, and penalizing the minister or church that has.
- b. It is doubtful that such a fund could be established to take care of all of the needs of a disabled or retiring minister. Disability insurance should still be purchased and the plan could only be used to supplement the needs of the local church and/or minister.
- c. If the contributions are made by the minister, they are not tax deductible.

4. Have each congregation assist the minister in establishing and maintaining a suitable personal retirement savings plan (RRSP):

Advantages:

- a. If ministers are able to maintain their own personal retirement savings plans they will have the maximum flexibility, tax deductibility, and portability.
- b. Churches could direct funds to be paid to the minister's RRSP. The payment would be tax neutral, since the contribution is tax deductible
- c. The majority of churches and ministers appear to favour this option.

Disadvantages:

- a. Many churches are not ensuring that adequate contributions are made to a minister's RRSP.
- b. Most RRSP's will not adequately finance a minister's retirement, unless the contributions are substantially increased.
- c. There is a lack of uniformity with this approach, and no guarantee that the investment returns are properly managed.
- d. There is no provision for early retirement as a result of disability.

CONCLUSION:

The committee is of the opinion that a denomination administered defined benefit plan would ultimately best suit the needs of the churches and the ministers they are obligated to support for life. However, the establishment of such a plan is premature, given the size of the denomination, the cost of establishing such a plan, and the fact that two plans would have to be developed (one for each country).

The committee is of the opinion that the churches must share in the responsibility of ensuring that all retiring ministers are adequately provided for. Given the financial disparity within the churches, the disparity among the ministers with respect to their ability to support themselves after retirement, and the need for creating a mechanism to alleviate these disparities, the committee has made the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- a. **All churches should, as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister, include an allowance for a contribution to an RRSP in amount not less than 10% of gross remuneration, including any housing allowance or the equivalent cost thereof. This contribution should be paid directly by the church to the minister's personal RRSP.**
- b. **That all churches be encouraged to contract for disability insurance for their ministers, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of their gross remuneration. (These policies should be owned and paid for by the ministers, in order to ensure that the benefits are received tax free. The minister's salary should be grossed up (on an after tax basis) to pay for these premiums.)**
- c. **That the churches establish a Denominational Retirement Savings Fund to assist the churches in supporting retiring ministers in need. Such a Fund should be established by assessing churches in a modest amount on a per confessing member basis, based on actuarial evidence, to a maximum of \$12,000 per year per church supporting a retiring minister, to be adjusted annually by the Canadian cost of living index.**
- d. **That these recommendations, if adopted, be applied equally, with necessary modifications, to the US churches and that a committee be struck to implement recommendation c.**
- e. **That the church visitors, as part of their duties, report on each church's compliance with recommendations a., b., and c.**
- f. **That these recommendations, if adopted, be reviewed every second Synod, with a report circulated to the churches by the committee given the mandate to implement recommendation c., beforehand.**

Submitted with Christian greetings and in brotherly love on behalf of Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto
Charles M. K. Loopstra, Q.C.
Arthur Miedema, B.Com.

APPENDIX 'A'

Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto
259 Albion Rd.
Etobicoke, Ontario
M9W 3P1

March 17, 2000

To Consistories of the URCNA churches in Canada

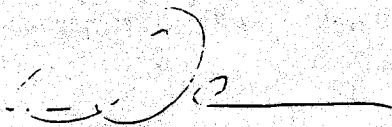
Dear brothers in our risen Saviour:

Please find enclosed a survey concerning pensions for our pastors. We would ask you to please take some time to fill out the survey so that we might bring something to the next Synod of the URCs as mandated by Synod 1999. Feel free to make comments on the back of the pages we purposely print on one side only.

One last request concerning the return of the completed survey; please do so by April 30th, 2000 to the attention of the clerk at the address above, so that we can carry out this mandate in a timely manner.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation.

Your fellow servants in the Lord



On behalf of consistory
Henry Bonvanie, clerk

URCNA PENSION SURVEY

Mandate:

Synod 1999, Article XXIII - Recommendations:

1. Request two churches with the specific mandate of investigating voluntary retirement pension plans for the benefit of pastors and full-time employees of our local URCNA churches.
2. That the churches have the following mandate:
 - a) Investigate the benefits of group plans as opposed to individual plans.
 - b) Pay special attention to Canadian and American particulars.
 - c) Present various plans for the churches' perusal.
 - d) Bring its recommendation as a report to be sent to the churches as part of the Agenda for the next meeting of Synod that the churches will have time to study the matter prior to Synod.
3. That the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto and the Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids be requested to do this work.

URCNA Church Order:

Article 9: - A minister of the Word is **bound to the service of the churches for life** and may change the nature of his labour only for weighty reasons, upon approval by his supervising council with the concurring advice of classis.

Article 10: - **Each church** is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and **should contribute toward the retirement and disability needs** of its minister. Those who have retired from the active ministry shall retain the title and dignity of the office of minister of the Word.

In order for the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto and the Walker URC to fulfill its Synodical mandate, Covenant Reformed Church is undertaking a survey of Canadian Churches as to current practice and support for various options.

SURVEY:

A. Does your church currently support your minister with retirement planning?

Yes No (please circle desired response)

How? (please describe if Yes)

B. Are you supporting any retired-ministers? Yes No

If so how?

C. Are you part of any pension plans? Yes No

i) How much does the church contribute? \$ _____

ii) How made and to whom? -

- iii) Who is the beneficiary under the plan?
- iv) Does the minister contribute to the plan and if so how much?
Is this in addition to the church's contribution?

- D. Does your minister participate in a RRSP program? Yes No
- i) Does your church make and contribution to this? Yes No
 - ii) How much? \$ _____

E. Please comment on the following retirement funding options:

1. Pension Plan Option:

- i) Are you in favour of a pension plan(s) for the benefit of retired ministers contributed to and administered by the churches?
- ii) Should such a plan be portable? (i.e. the minister has right to benefits on retirement age regardless of status)
- iii) If separate Canada/USA plans are required, are you in favour of a co-operation agreement between the two plans to provide for transfer of benefits.
- iv) Should the plan require any contributions from the minister over and above the church contribution, and if so what percentage?
- v) What should be the minimum qualifications for full retirement benefits under the plan:
 - a) retirement age _____
 - b) years of service _____
 - c) years of contribution to the plan _____
- vi) Should current retired ministers be entitled to full benefit or partial benefits under the plan? _____

If so, should the churches be assessed a surcharge to pay for these additional benefits?
- vii) Should a similar surcharge be assessed against churches who have ministers that will retire with less years of service than is necessary to qualify for full benefits under the plan?
- viii) Should the church's contribution to the plan be assessed:
 - a) on a flat rate
 - b) on a per communicant member basis
 - c) pro-rated on the basis of the minister's age

2. Superannuation Fund

Are you in favour of a joint retirement fund, contributed to and administered by the churches, which provides fixed payments to the churches on the retirement of their ministers, to assist the individual church in meeting its obligation under the Church Order to provide for a retiring minister and his family?

3. Individual Retirement Savings Plans

Would you favour personal RRSP plans by individual ministers?

- i) Contribution by churches? Yes No
- ii) Suggested amount: _____ % of salary \$ _____
- iii) Assistance for smaller churches? Yes No
Suggestion - How to set up?

iv) What happens if ministers invest poorly?

(Note: The churches still have the obligation to 'provide adequately for the minister of the Word'.)

F. Are there any special comments/suggestions you want make on this mandate?

**COVENANT REFORMED CHURCH OF TORONTO
259 ALBION ROAD
TORONTO, ONTARIO
M9W 3P1**

PASTORS

December 12, 2000

Dear Reverend:

Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto was mandated by Synod 1999 to investigate and report on retirement plans for our Ministers of the Word, with special regard to the distinctions between group plans and individual plans. In March, 2000 we sent a survey to your consistory.

In order to present a balanced report to Synod 2001, we felt it was appropriate to obtain the views of the URCNA pastors in Canada on the same issue. This is especially relevant, since there appears to be no uniformity among the URCNA consistories with respect to pension matters. In fact some survey results received would indicate no provision is being made for the retirement needs of the pastors in certain congregations. This may be due to the fact that churches have differing views in interpreting their obligations under Article 10 of the Church Order.

We are therefore requesting your personal participation in the pension survey. We are enclosing a copy for your convenience. Please return it to us by no later than January 31, 2001.

Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Yours in Christ,

On behalf of the consistory of Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto
Charles M. Loopstra, Clerk

URCNA PENSION SURVEY

Mandate:

Synod 1999, Article XXIII - Recommendations:

1. Request two churches with the specific mandate of investigating voluntary retirement pension plans for the benefit of pastors and full-time employees of our local URCNA churches.
2. That the churches have the following mandate:
 - a) Investigate the benefits of group plans as opposed to individual plans.
 - b) Pay special attention to Canadian and American particulars.
 - c) Present various plans for the churches' perusal.
 - d) Bring its recommendation as a report to be sent to the churches as part of the Agenda for the next meeting of Synod that the churches will have time to study the matter prior to Synod.
3. That the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto and the Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids be requested to do this work.

URCNA Church Order:

Article 9: - A minister of the Word is **bound to the service of the churches for life** and may change the nature of his labour only for weighty reasons, upon approval by his supervising council with the concurring advice of classis.

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In order for the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto and the Walker URC to fulfill its Synodical mandate, Covenant Reformed Church is undertaking a survey of Canadian Churches as to current practice and support for various options.

SURVEY:

A. Does your church currently support your minister with retirement planning?
Yes No (please circle desired response)
How? (please describe if Yes)

B. Are you supporting any retired ministers? Yes No
If so how?

C. Are you part of any pension plans? Yes No
i) How much does the church contribute? \$ _____
ii) How made and to whom? -

- iii) Who is the beneficiary under the plan?
- iv) Does the minister contribute to the plan and if so how much?
Is this in addition to the church's contribution?

- D. Does your minister participate in a RRSP program? Yes No
- i) Does your church make and contribution to this? Yes No
 - ii) How much? \$ _____

E. Please comment on the following retirement funding options:

1. Pension Plan Option:

- i) Are you in favour of a pension plan(s) for the benefit of retired ministers contributed to and administered by the churches?
- ii) Should such a plan be portable? (i.e. the minister has right to benefits on retirement age regardless of status)
- iii) If separate Canada/USA plans are required, are you in favour of a co-operation agreement between the two plans to provide for transfer of benefits.
- iv) Should the plan require any contributions from the minister over and above the church contribution, and if so what percentage?
- v) What should be the minimum qualifications for full retirement benefits under the plan:
 - a) retirement age _____
 - b) years of service _____
 - c) years of contribution to the plan _____
- vi) Should current retired ministers be entitled to full benefit or partial benefits under the plan? _____
If so, should the churches be assessed a surcharge to pay for these additional benefits?
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- viii) Should the church's contribution to the plan be assessed:
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Would you favour personal RRSP plans by individual ministers?

- i) Contribution by churches? Yes No
- ii) Suggested amount: _____ % of salary \$ _____
- iii) Assistance for smaller churches? Yes No
Suggestion - How to set up?

iv) What happens if ministers invest poorly?

(Note: The churches still have the obligation to 'provide adequately for the minister of the Word'.)

F. Personal Information:

What is the date of your birth? _____

What is the date of your wife's birth? _____

Do you have any dependent children? If so please list the dates of their birth:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

- _____

Do you own your own house? Yes No

What year do you expect to retire? _____

If you were to retire today, what income would you need to sustain yourself, your spouse and your dependents on an annual basis in 2000 dollars? _____

Do you or the church have a disability policy in the event you become disabled? YES NO
If so what is the amount of the monthly payment? _____

G. Are there any special comments/suggestions you want to make on this survey to assist us in fulfilling our mandate to Synod? Please write below.

APPENDIX 'B'

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES Pension Survey - Synod Report

RESPONDENT CHURCHES	church size no of com m.	Currently Support'g part of Retired Pension Planning		Minister have RRSP?	Church Contib.	1. PENSION PLAN OPTION		Min. Qualifications for Church benefits Cont.	2. SUPERANNUATION FUND		3. Personal RRSP's		COMMENTS
		Retiree Planning	Minister Pension			Favour	Separate US/Can. Plan		Portable	Joint fund admin. by the churches providing fixed payments	Contribute by church	Amount	
C-1	30	No	No	Yes	No	NO			NO	No	0	No	- Salary should be adequate for minister to take care of themselves
C-2	180	No	No	Yes	Yes	NO			NO	??		??	- responsibility of each congregation to look after its minister
C-3	45	No	No	Yes	Yes	NO			NO	Yes	3% of sal.	Yes	fund for needy churches via classis
C-4	305	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	NO			NO	Yes	\$ 3,000	Yes	fund for needy churches via classis
C-5	35	No	No	Yes	No	SECOND CHOICE	Yes	3-3.5%	FIRST CHOICE	Yes	10% of sal	Yes	- concern for smaller churches to pay
C-6	60	No	No	No	No	YES	No	65	YES	Yes	Dependent on plan	Yes	- help via classis level - poor invest. -> deaconal concern.
C-7	70	RRSP	No	No	Yes	YES	Yes	65	YES	Yes	5% of sal	Yes	- if minister wants extra pension over CPP T29. look after it himself
C-8	135	Yes	No	Yes	No	NO	Yes	65	NO	NO	5% of sal	No	- smaller churches should budget, & request needy church support
C-9	130	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	NO	Yes	65	NO	NO	5% of sal	Yes	- retiring pastor if needy deaconate matter
C-10	90	Yes	No	Yes	No	YES	Yes	65	Yes - pay directly to minister	NO	Yes	Yes	- smaller churches should budget, & request needy church support
C-11	275	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	NO	NO	65	NO	NO	Yes	Yes	- if minister wants extra pension over CPP T29. look after it himself
C-12	115	?	?	?	?	NO	to a URC controlled plan		NO	NO	Yes	Yes	- smaller churches should budget, & request needy church support -> to deact
C-13	85	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	NO	NO		NO	NO	Yes	Yes	- responsible Pension Plan should be created
C-14	95	Yes	No	Vacant	budgeted 2,000	Val group	yes	depends	NO	NO	Yes	Yes	- "stay away from quotas"
C-15	200	No but Fin. Planner in congregation	Yes	Yes	2,500	YES	yes	no	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	- against quota sy. - can set up a fund thro colle
C-16	190	Yes	No	Yes	2,000	?? Not sure	yes	??	?? Not sure	?? Not sure	Yes	Yes	- denomination has a responsibility under Church Order to support its' ministers for life
C-17	215	Yes	No	Yes	6,600	Yes	yes	optional	NO	NO	5%	Yes	- prefer RRSP's
C-18	95	Yes	No	Yes	1,000	NO	no	yes	Yes	Yes	5%	Yes	- Church Order to support its' ministers for life
C-19	150	Yes	No	Yes	Both	YES	if set up with minister beneficiary and portable		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	- if all else fails
survey sent to 27 churches													

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES
Pension Survey - Synod Report

RESPONDENT PASTORS	Expected retirement needs/yr	Disability Insurance	church size no of comm	Retirement Planning	Supporting Retired Minister	Currently part of pension	Minister have RRSP?	Church Contrib	1. PENSION PLAN OPTION						2. SUPERANNUATION FUND		3. Personal RRSP's		COMMENTS		
									Favour	Portable	Separate US/Can	Min. Contribution by pastor	Min. Qualifications for benefits	Church Cont.	Joint fund admin. by the churches providing field payments.	Contribute by church	Amount	Small church assist			
P-1	?	No	30	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes, 1st choice	Yes	2.3% of sal	Min. 5 yrs service	per member	No	2nd choice	Yes to RRSP	7?	Yes	adequate salary. Need help with planning
P-5	\$ 30,000	No	35	No	no	no	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$3,000/10%	Min 2,000	per member	If better	Yes	\$3,000/10%	Yes	have someone available for minister to call for advice, etc	
P-7	?	Yes	70	Yes	No	No	Yes	3,000	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	5% of sal	65	no assessment	No	No	Yes	min 2,000	adequate salary. Need help with planning	
P-9	\$ 45,000	No	130	No	No	No	Yes	2,200	No	No	Yes	Yes	Y-50-50	85	per member	No	Yes	5% of sal	Yes	adequate salary. Need help with planning	
P-10	\$ 30,000	No	90	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Y-50-50	85	per member	No	Yes	5% of sal	Yes	adequate salary. Need help with planning	
P-14	\$ 40,000	Yes	95	Yes	no	no	Yes	2,000	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	7?	7?	per member	7?	Yes	7?	Yes	adequate salary. Need help with planning	
P-15	\$ 25,000 75% of income	Yes	200	Y, use of fin planner	no	no	Yes	2,500	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	If he chooses	fall rate	No	No	Yes	as able	Yes	have someone available for minister to call for advice, etc	
P-18	\$ 50,000	Yes	150	Yes	no	No	Yes	2,500	No	No	Yes	Yes	7?	per member	No	No	Yes	10%	Yes	adequate salary. Need help with planning	
P-20	?	?	80	No	No	No, nothing	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Y-5%	65/25yrs	per member	Yes	Yes	6% \$1-2,000	Yes - joint fund	adequate salary. Need help with planning	
P-21	?	?	155	Yes	no	no	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	half	65	per member	No	Yes	5% of sal	Yes	adequate salary. Need help with planning	
P-22	\$ 24,000 as single person	No	?	Yes	Yes	working part-time	No	4,000	No	No	No	Yes	7?	7?	per member	No	Yes	7?	7?	financial planning not my strong point. have thought a lot about these things	

Note: 1) P-1 is pastor from C-1.
2) P-20 and onward are from churches whose Council has not responded.
survey sent to 27 churches

APPENDIX 'C'

FOUNDATION FOR SUPERANNUATION OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES CONSTITUTION

Preamble

1. The name of the Foundation shall be "FOUNDATION FOR SUPERANNUATION OF THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES."
2. The head office of the Foundation shall be in the Municipality of Surrey in the province of British Columbia.
3. The Foundation was established on April 13, 1959, and shall continue in existence until such time as it is terminated and liquidated in accordance with the provisions of Articles 62 and 63 of this Constitution.

Objects

4. The objects of the Foundation shall be to assist the members in fulfilling their financial responsibilities with respect to their ministers, missionaries, or professors, and towards their widows, children or orphans, as the case may be, insofar as they result from the provisions of Article 13 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches.
5. The Foundation shall not engage directly or indirectly in any business enterprise whatsoever but this Article shall not prevent the Foundation from investing, directly or indirectly, in the shares, bonds, debentures, and similar securities, of any corporation whose shares are traded on a recognized stock exchange.

Board and Administration Committee

6. There shall be a governing Board of the Foundation consisting of the members of the consistory of two or more churches designated as the governing body by a meeting of the general membership.
7. The Board shall be accountable and responsible to the members and shall provide such information and explanations as a member may properly request at a general membership meeting.
8. The Board may delegate the management of some of its affairs to an Administration Committee, as defined in Article 12 in this Constitution.
9. The Board shall meet in joint session with the Administration Committee when necessary, but at least once in each year.
10. The Board shall elect from its members a chairman, a vice-chairman, and a secretary.

11. The Board may make by-laws relative to the management and objects of the Foundation, but no by-law or amendment thereto has force or takes effect until it has been approved at a general meeting of the members or at a special members meeting called to consider the same.
12. The Board shall appoint an Administration Committee to be responsible for and carry on the day-to-day functions of the Foundation.
13. Any member of the Board may be appointed to the Administration Committee.
14. The Administration Committee shall consist of five members who must be communicant members of the Canadian Reformed Churches and/or the American Reformed Church.
15. The offices of the Administration Committee shall be: Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Second Treasurer, and the Board may assign these offices to specific committee members.
16. The members of the Administration Committee shall be appointed to hold office for a period of four years. Every year one member of the board shall retire with the exception of the treasurer who shall be appointed annually. The order of retirement shall be as follows: Vice-Chairman, Secretary, Second Treasurer, Chairman.

Membership

17. All those churches that are members of the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches and the Theological College that is controlled and directed by the general synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches may become members of the Foundation.
18. A church or college which did not become a member of the Foundation at the time the Foundation was established may obtain membership at any later date with the approval of and upon such terms as are prescribed by the Board.
19. Membership in the Foundation does not entitle a member to ownership of any portion of the Foundation's assets.
20. A church that withdraws from or is expelled from the federation of the instituted Canadian Reformed Churches shall thereby forfeit its right to continue as a member of the Foundation.
21. Any group which ceases to be part of an instituted Canadian Reformed Church or American Reformed Church shall not be

- entitled to exercise any right in the Foundation or be entitled to any portion of the assets thereof.
22. In case a member church is divided into two or more churches, the churches shall inform the Board which of the churches is to continue the membership.
23. Upon termination of membership, a member shall not be entitled to any refund of contributions made.
24. Notwithstanding Article 23, the Board may propose to the general membership that a refund of all or a part of the accumulated contributions received by the Foundation be made.
25. The Board shall cause to be kept a register, in which shall be entered in alphabetical order the names of all members in good standing; and those members only whose names are entered in the register shall be deemed entitled to the privileges associated with membership in the Foundation.
26. Any member whose contributions are in arrears for more than one year shall be considered not to be a member in good standing.

Contributions, Assessments

27. At the beginning of each calendar year the Administration Committee shall determine the annual contribution required of each member in accordance with the instructions given to the Board by the general members meeting and shall advise the members of the quarterly instalment then due; each instalment shall be due and payable on the first day of the first month in each quarter of the calendar year.
28. In the event that the general members meeting does not give new instructions to the Board the assessment method in effect at that time shall continue in force.
29. If the Board deems it necessary to levy an emergency assessment against the members, the Board shall notify all members of the emergency assessment in writing, giving full particulars of the reason for the assessment.
30. Having established the total amount of the emergency assessment required, the Board shall levy the assessment
- (a) in the case of the churches, on the basis of the number of communicant members at the end of the preceding calendar year, and
- (b) in the case of the college, on the basis of the number of communicant members forming the college's contribution base, as defined in Article 31, at the end of the preceding calendar year;

the amount of the levy per communicant member shall be the same under (a) and (b), above.

31. For purposes of Articles 30 and 63 (e) (iii), the college's contribution base shall be calculated as follows:

$$\text{Total communicant members} \times \text{Active professors} =$$

Active ministers in member churches
communicant members for contribution base
and for liquidation purposes

Benefits

32. Benefit payments shall not commence until the Board receives a written request from the member, giving the required particulars of the superannuation or death, as the case may be.
33. The Administration Committee must receive authorization in writing from the Board in each case before superannuation payments may commence.
34. In accordance with Article 4 a member shall be entitled to receive benefits upon
- (a) the retirement from active service of any minister, missionary, or professor serving the member, due to age or disability, or
- (b) the death of a minister, missionary, or professor serving the member.
35. Members shall be entitled to superannuation payments as of the first day of the month following the date of superannuation.
36. Each claim shall expire on the last day of the month in which the entitlement to superannuation payments ceases to exist.
37. It shall be the member's responsibility to advise the Board upon the expiration of entitlement to benefits.
38. Benefit payments shall be made payable to the member concerned or to a financial institution properly designated by the member but shall not be paid directly to the minister, missionary, professor, or dependents, as the case may be.
39. A member shall not receive benefit payments while not a member in good standing of the Foundation but nothing shall prevent the accrual of benefit payments to which the member is entitled other than withdrawal or expulsion.
40. Except as herein provided, the amount of the monthly benefit payment to a member shall be in accordance with that prescribed by By-Law.
41. The amount of the annual benefits payable by the Founda-

tion shall be established by a vote of the members at the tri-annual meeting of the members and, unless otherwise directed by the membership, the annual benefits so determined shall be adjusted annually on January 1st by applying the Canadian consumer price index change for the last twelve-month period ending October 31st.

42. In the event that a widow of a minister remarries, any benefit payable by the Foundation in respect of the widow shall cease on the last day of the month in which she remarries.

43. If the widow of a minister remarries and subsequently becomes a widow again, the member originally responsible for her support may, if the member is satisfied that full support is again required, make application to the Board for reinstatement of superannuation benefits; such application must include a declaration by the member that it has satisfied itself that the support assistance is required.

44. If a minister who is single or a widower at the time that he is the subject of a benefit claim subsequently marries or remarries, the Foundation shall only be liable to the member making the superannuation claim for the current benefit payable in respect of a minister/widower.

Investment of Funds

45. Unless otherwise directed by a general members meeting, the funds of the Foundation shall be invested prudently by the Administration Committee in accordance with instructions received from time to time from the Board.

Financial Year

46. The financial year of the Foundation shall coincide with the calendar year.

Records and Reports

47. The Administration Committee shall keep proper accounting records in respect of all financial and other transactions of the Foundation, and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, shall keep records of

- (a) all money received and disbursed by the Foundation and the matter in respect of which the receipt and disbursement took place,
- (b) every asset and liability of the Foundation, and
- (c) every other transaction affecting the financial position of the Foundation.

48. On or before the end of February of each year the Administra-

tion Committee shall prepare or cause to be prepared a financial statement consisting of at least a statement of receipts and disbursements for the year ending on the previous December 31st and a balance sheet as of the end of that period, but it is not necessary that the statements be identified by those names.

49. On or before the last day of February of each year the Administration Committee shall submit to the Board a report covering its administration of the affairs of the Foundation for the last financial year ended December 31st.

50. The Administration Committee's report to the Board shall include at least the following:

- (a) a financial statement together with the auditors' report,
- (b) a report of the investment activity of the Foundation, and
- (c) a summary of the significant activities undertaken by the Committee during the year.

51. Upon receiving the said reports, the Board shall convene a meeting which the Administration Committee or its representatives, as the Board may decide, shall attend for the purpose of examining and discussing the reports, notwithstanding that the Board may deal with these matters at a regular meeting of the Board.

52. Within three months after the end of each financial year the Board shall send a copy of the above reports to every member of the Foundation except that where the reports are lengthy the Board may publish a summary of some or all of the reports, provided that such summaries are described as such; in that event, the detailed report which was summarized shall be made available to any member upon written request.

Audit

53. At the end of each year the Board shall appoint two auditors, who preferably shall be members of the Canadian Reformed Churches and/or the American Reformed Church, to carry out an audit of the books and records of the Foundation for the purpose of expressing

- (a) that the accounting records of the Foundation have, in their view, been properly and diligently kept, and
 - (b) that the financial statement prepared by or for the Administration Committee for presentation to the Board, in the auditors' opinion, presents fairly the financial position of the Foundation as at the year-end date and the results of its operations for the year then ended.
54. The auditors shall be entitled to inspect all records, books of

account, and any other material as they may require in order to prepare a complete audit report.

55. Where the Board can secure the audit services of a member in good standing of the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants or of the Canadian Association of Certified General Accountants, the Board may appoint only one auditor.

56. A person shall not be the auditor of the Foundation if he is
(a) a member of the immediate family of a member or a spouse of a member of the Board or Administration Committee, or

(b) a member of the Board or Administration Committee.

Meetings, Voting

57. General members meetings shall be held if possible at the same time and place as general synod meetings; otherwise at such time and place as a majority of the members may from time to time decide.

58. Notice of such meetings shall include the proposed agenda and any proposed changes to the Foundation's constitution and by-laws and shall be given in writing to all members at least 30 days in advance of the scheduled meeting date.

59. Members who are not able to be represented at the general members meeting may express their views in writing concerning any item or items on the agenda but such communication shall not be accepted as a vote on any issue.

60. Members may appoint a communicant member of any Canadian Reformed Church or American Reformed Church to attend a general members meeting as its representative and to exercise its voting rights upon presentation of proper credentials.

61. Where the communicant member representing a Foundation church member is not a member of the congregation of that church, he shall be considered to be voting by proxy and his credentials shall explain fully how the member has instructed its voting rights to be exercised, whether for or against any issue or whether the proxy has the discretion in voting.

Liquidation

62. Upon vote of two-thirds of the total membership at a given time the Board shall take all steps to discontinue operation of the Foundation.

63. Upon a resolution passed by at least two-thirds of the total members of the Foundation, the Board shall:

(a) cease all operations of the Foundation with respect to payment of benefits;

(b) convert all assets of the Foundation to cash or bank term deposits not exceeding 90 days in duration;

(c) collect any and all outstanding assessments or other amounts due from the members, subject to subsection (e), below;

(d) determine the cumulative contributions made to the Foundation by those who are members of the Foundation at the time of the decision to liquidate;

(e) pay a refund to each member calculated by using the following steps:

(i) divide the net realized assets of the Foundation, including collectible amounts receivable, by 2;

(ii) multiply the accumulated contributions of the member by the result of (i), above, and divide by the total accumulated contributions of all members entitled to a refund under this Article;

(iii) multiply the number of communicant members reported by the member at the last December 31st, by the result of (i), and divide by the total number of communicant members, including those of the college as defined in Article 31;

(iv) add the results obtained in (ii) and (iii), above, and deduct any amounts owing by the member to the Foundation at the time of liquidation.

Amendments

64. Any article of this constitution may be changed, amended, repealed, or added to, provided such change, amendment, repeal, or addition is presented to a general members meeting and is passed by at least two-thirds of the members represented at such a meeting; except that any change, amendment, repeal, or addition to Article 4 must be approved in a unanimous vote of the members at such meeting.

65. The Board shall inform the members at least 30 days in advance of a general members meeting of any changes to the constitution and by-laws it will propose at such a meeting.

**FOUNDATION FOR SUPERANNUATION OF THE
CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES**

BY-LAWS

Membership

1. A church or theological college may apply to the Board for membership in the Foundation and on acceptance by the Board shall be a member.
 2. The amount of the entrance fee required from an applicant shall be determined by the Board except that a newly instituted church shall not pay an entrance fee.
 3. In determining the amount of the entrance fee the Board shall consider at least the following:
 - (a) the period of time that the applicant would ordinarily have been a member but did not apply for membership,
 - (b) the period of time that a minister, missionary, or professor was serving the applicant while the applicant was not a member, and
 - (c) such other matters as the Board may decide are pertinent to the making of its decision,but the Board shall at all times remain mindful of the interests of all the Foundation members in applying standards of fairness.
 4. The Board shall notify the applicant of the entrance fee, if any, that it has determined and shall advise the effective date of membership acceptance.
 5. Contribution assessments shall accrue from the date of membership acceptance as referred to in Article 4 of these by-laws.
 6. Every applicant being notified of acceptance for membership shall forthwith pay the entrance fee determined by the Board or upon such terms and conditions as the Board may decide; the applicant shall also pay any assessments which may be due at that time as notified by the Board or the Administration Committee.
- Meetings of Members**
7. The Board shall convene the members meetings as provided for in Article 57 of the Constitution and shall attend to the agenda for such meetings.
- Proceedings at General Meetings**
8. A quorum is 30% of the number of Foundation members.
 9. The chairman of the Foundation Board shall preside over the

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- general membership meetings, unless that meeting shall decide otherwise.
10. No resolution proposed at a meeting need be seconded and the chairman of a meeting may move or propose a resolution.
 11. The chairman at a general members meeting shall not be entitled to a vote unless he is the authorized representative of a member of the Foundation.
 12. In case of an equality of votes the chairman shall not have a casting or second vote in addition to the vote to which he may be entitled as representative of a member and the proposed resolution shall not pass.
 13. A member in good standing represented at a meeting of members is entitled to one vote.
 14. Voting is by show of hands.
 15. Voting by proxy in person is permitted provided the proper credentials are submitted to the meeting.
- Foundation Board and Administration Committee**
16. The Board may exercise all such powers and do all such acts and things as the Foundation may exercise and do, and which are not by these by-laws or by statute or otherwise lawfully directed or required to be exercised or done by the Foundation at a general members meeting, but subject, nevertheless, to the provisions of
 - (a) all laws affecting the Foundation,
 - (b) these by-laws, and
 - (c) rules, not being inconsistent with these by-laws, which are made from time to time by the Foundation at a general members meeting.
 17. No rule, made by the Foundation at a general members meeting, invalidates a prior act of the Board that would have been valid if that rule had not been made.
- Proceedings of Board and Administration Committee**
18. The Board and Administration Committee may meet at such places as they think fit for the despatch of business, adjourn and otherwise regulate their meetings and proceedings, as they see fit.
 19. The quorum necessary for the transaction of business shall be a majority of the members of the Board or Committee.
 20. The chairman may at any time, and shall at the request of a majority of the Board or Administration Committee, convene a meeting of the Board or Administration Committee, as the case may be.

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21. The Board may delegate some, but not all of its powers to the Administration Committee as it thinks fit.
22. The Administration Committee of the Foundation shall carry out all the responsibilities delegated to it by the Board and shall keep the Board informed of its acts by sending a copy of the committee's approved meeting minutes to the secretary of the Board.
23. Questions arising at any meeting of the Board or Administration Committee shall be decided by a majority of votes.
24. In case of an equality of votes the chairman does not have a second or casting vote.
25. No resolution proposed at a meeting of the Board or Administration Committee need be seconded and the chairman of a meeting may move or propose a resolution.

Duties of Officers

26. The chairman is the chief executive officer of the Foundation and shall supervise the other officers in the execution of their duties.

27. The secretary shall

- (a) conduct the correspondence of the Foundation,
- (b) issue notices of meetings, as required,
- (c) keep minutes of all membership and Board meetings,
- (d) have custody of all records and documents of the Foundation except those required to be kept by the secretary and the treasurer of the Administration Committee,
- (e) maintain the register of members.

28. In the absence of the secretary from a meeting, the Board shall appoint another person to act as secretary of the meeting.

29. The officers of the Administration Committee shall abide by the aforementioned duties as they may apply in the conduct of their respective offices.

Investment of Funds

30. The Board shall give instructions to the Administration Committee regarding investment of the funds of the Foundation.

Calculation of Contributions

31. In determining the amount of the annual assessments to the members the following calculation shall be used:

- (a) — Estimate the funding shortage
 - Add 3% of the shortage
 - Add required increases and subtract allowed decreases in funding over the coming year

- Add benefits and expenses for the year
- Deduct interest income for the year
- (b) — Divide the result in (a), above, by the number of minister positions, missionaries, and professors
 - The maximum result herein shall be 25% of current annual benefits per active minister
 - The minimum result herein shall be 15% of current annual benefits per active minister
- (c) — Having determined the total assessments required by (a), above, and using the limits described in (b), if applicable,
 - Deduct from that amount the contribution required for each active minister serving the churches in common (e.g., missionaries, professors)
 - Divide the remainder into two equal portions, one to be divided by the remainder of the active ministers serving Foundation members; the other half to be divided by the number of communicant members in the churches participating in the plan.

Collection of Contributions

32. The Board shall assist the Administration Committee, whenever it is requested to do so, in obtaining payment of contribution arrears from any member.
33. The Board shall take such steps to effect collection of contribution arrears as it may consider necessary and justified in the circumstances and, if a member is in arrears for six months or more and is currently entitled to benefit payments, the Board may order the benefit payments to be applied against the arrears.
34. The Board shall establish the annual benefit rate in accordance with the direction of the membership meeting.
35. Annual benefits as determined in Article 34 shall be paid in equal monthly instalments.
36. The Board shall remain mindful of the necessity of maintaining sufficient cash resources to meet current benefit entitlements and, to that end, shall require the treasurer of the Administration Committee to keep the Board informed of the Foundation's cash position on a monthly basis whenever the total cash resources are reduced beyond an amount equal to the benefits required to be paid within the following twelve-month period.

REPORT 10 b:
VOLUNTARY RETIREMENT PENSION PLAN
U. S. PERSPECTIVE

Introduction: The Synod of Hudsonville, 1999, Article XXIII gave Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto, Ontario; and Walker United Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan the task of investigating voluntary retirement pension plans for the benefit of pastors and full-time employees of local URCNA congregations.

Background: Churches expressed concern that our present situation lacks direction, organization, discipline, and responsibility. Those just entering the ministry are left to make their own arrangements for retirement. There is no uniformity among the churches as to whether they provide their pastor with a retirement pension, nor is their uniformity in amount that is contributed to the pension each year.

Recommendation: Having reviewed results of a pension survey, and gleaned advice from various URCNA pastors, and after having met with representatives from AEtna Retirement Services, Regal Capital Planners, and Vanguard Group Retirement Services,

The Committee on Ministers' Pensions recommends the following to Synod:

#1 That Synod not attempt to set up a denominationally run pension plan.

Grounds:

1. A denominational pension plan, while providing a certain security for all, would also result in much lower returns for all those invested.
2. A denominational pension plan would require setting up our own centralized office to consolidate monthly or quarterly deposits, provide helpful advice and information for plan participants, and to recruit new pastors to join the pension group and educate them to the choices available under the plan we set up.
3. At this time most URCNA pastors would rather have their annual pension contributions deposited in private plans they manage themselves, rather than see those same dollars deposited in a larger group plan where they have a lot less personal control.

#2 That Synod remind all church Councils of the importance of establishing some kind of retirement plan for their minister, and that all the churches remind their minister that he is responsible for setting up the details of his own pension plan! In the U.S.A. that may take the form of a Traditional IRA, SEP IRA, Roth IRA, or a 403 (B)7 plan. In Canada that may take the form of a RRSP or some other qualifying investment vehicle.

This results in each minister establishing, investing in, and managing his own accounts.

Grounds:

1. This appears to be the present and the preferred practice of the majority of churches and their pastors.
2. This will result in the greatest flexibility for pastors and will eventually provide for retirement needs in the most beneficial way.
3. This is in keeping with Church Order Article 10 which makes provision for pastors both during their service and after retirement a responsibility of the local church and its pastor.

#3 That Synod adopt the general guideline that each church provide their minister a pension of at least \$4,000 USD or \$5,600 CND.

Grounds:

1. These general guidelines would bring some healthy uniformity to the conditions under which our pastors labor.
2. This amount invested carefully over time would yield a handsome supplement to other personal savings and assets to retire on.
3. This general guideline does not place undo hardship on the churches.
4. This amount is keeping with the pension plans of other employers.
5. This guideline gives some definite content to the wording of C.O. Art. 10 which states: **Each Church**

is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and **should contribute toward the retirement** and disability needs of its minister.

#4 That Synod recommend that churches unable to meet this general guideline should seek assistance from their sister churches within their Classis. And that each Classis set up a fund for needy churches to assist with Salary Support and/or Pension Support for the assistance of churches who prove deserving of help.

Grounds:

1. The general principle that the strong ought to help the weak is a wonderful tenet of our Christian faith.
2. This would help insure that smaller churches could call the pastors of their choosing without embarrassment.
3. This would help provide all pastors with an adequate pension upon retirement.

Respectfully submitted by the Ministers' Pension Study Committee of Walker United Reformed Church

Rev. Joel A. Vander Kooi

Elder James Morren