

PROVISIONAL AGENDA
 For the TENTH Synod of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
 Convening Tuesday, June 14, 2016, at 8:00 A.M., Eastern Daylight Time
 At Bethany United Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan
 Ending Friday evening, June 17, 2016
 Registration Monday, June 13, 2016, at 1:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.
 Prayer Service at 7:00 P.M.
 Convened by Bethany United Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan

I. OPENING MATTERS

- A. Meeting called to order by the convening Consistory, Bethany United Reformed Church, Wyoming, Michigan.
- B. Opening Devotions
- C. Presentation of the Credentials and roll call of delegates
- D. Report of Credentials Committee
- E. Assent to the Form of Subscription by all the delegates
- F. Synod declared constituted

II. INITIAL BUSINESS

- A. Welcome to delegates, visitors, and guests
- B. Election of officers
- C. Reception of Article 32 churches and assent by their delegates to the Form of Subscription
- D. Adopt the provisional agenda and advisory committee assignments
- E. Adopt the proposed time schedule:
 - Morning session: 8:00 to Noon
 - Lunch: Noon – 12:45 p.m.
 - Afternoon session: 1:00 – 5:00 p.m.
 - Supper: 5:15 – 6:15 p.m.
 - Evening session: 7:00 – 10:00 p.m.
 - 30 minutes breaks at 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.
- F. Setting times for the special orders of the day; for Ecumenical Observers and Delegates

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IV. ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS

- A. Stated Clerk and Alternate
- B. Treasurers and Alternates
- C. Webmaster
- D. Boards of Directors
- E. Standing Committees
- F. Others if required

V. CLOSING MATTERS

- A. Choosing the calling consistory, place, and date for the next synod
- B. Reading of Concept Minutes
- C. Acknowledgments
- D. Closing Devotions
- E. Adjournment

Report of the Convening Consistory To Synod Wyoming 2016

Set the date for Synod from June 13 through 17.

Set the location to be at Bethany United Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

Set the official name for Synod to be “Synod Wyoming 2016”.

Signed a lease agreement with Adams Christian School adjacent to church property to use for additional meeting rooms, coffee time, and meals.

Shipped out the Acts of Synod Visalia 2014 to the churches.

Established a Synod Planning Committee and appointed a general coordinator.

Opened a bank account using funds received from Synod Nyack.

Approved chairman for subcommittees of the Synod Planning Committee to handle facilities, Meals, Clerical, Financial, Transportation, and Technology.

Approved a budget for Synod 2016.

Approved a budget for Synod 2016 with the registration fee to be \$100 per delegate.

Approved display tables for the following organizations:

Reformed Mission Service

Tabling Bibles

Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling

Mid America Reformed Seminary

Word and Deed

CLIR

Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary

Denied a request to have an individual use the mailing list of the federation to promote a newly published book.

Finalized contracts with various local hotels.

Set up Web site.

Mass email sent notifying the churches of the March 15 deadline for overtures, appeals, and communications.

Sent letter to churches regarding registrations to be completed by April 30.

Contacted CECCA and CERCU requesting names of fraternal delegates.

Approved that the cost of registration and hotel rooms for our fraternal delegates and observers be covered by the surplus funds from prior synods.

Recommend the cost of the meals for volunteers and non-paying participants be paid out of surplus funds from prior synods.

A reimbursement form was completed for expense requests for expenses related to Synod.

Approved a letter of invitation to be sent to all churches in ecclesiastical fellowship.

The Federation's songbook committee was asked to set up the music and devotions schedule, specifying our desire to have Rev. Ed Knott (the chairman of our first synod) be asked if he is willing to lead Synod in devotions.

Motion to approve welcome letter to the churches regarding the registration process, what the delegates should bring with them, accommodations, etc.

Recommendations:

Recommend that a financial statement be given post synod showing beginning funds, receipts, expenses, and ending fund balance to be completed by the US Treasurer.

Recommend that Synod adopt the following procedure for financial accountability for all future convening consistories:

Depending on the location of Synod either the federation's US treasurer or Canadian treasurer shall be the synodical treasurer and maintain a Synodical account for both income and expenses to be reviewed and approved as part of the normal treasurers' reports.

Grounds:

1. The current Synodical regulation is unclear: "Expenses incurred in connection with these duties shall be reimbursed by the synodical treasurer(s)".
2. Excess income over expenses for past Synods has been handled in very different ways. We are convinced that it important to have excess funds available from one convening consistory to another. This procedure would facilitate this.
3. This still allows for some flexibility on the part of convening consistories in how to implement the day to day expenses and income and at the same time be accountable to the federations for the Synodical funds received and distributed.
4. This would require initial and final reports for expenses for each Synod to be given to Synod itself.
5. Up until this Synod there have been no financial reports for Synodical expenses given to Synod.

Received request from the Missions Committee to have 24 missionaries and church planters invited to synod for presentations. We are recommending to synod that the missions committee have opportunity for missionaries and church planters to have up to a total of 2 hours to present during the time of synod.

Clerk of the Bethany United Reformed Church Consistory
Robert Huisjen

Appendix 1

Report of the Stated Clerk to Synod 2016

March 25, 2016

Dear Brothers and Fathers,

It has been my great pleasure to continue to serve as your Stated Clerk. I consider this a huge privilege. I have sought to faithfully fulfill my labors.

Since our last synod, I prepared the Acts of Synod 2014. I am thankful for the assistance of Reformed Fellowship in distributing them to the churches. I also conducted the usual correspondence of the federation.

In the course of my duties, I am often asked to give my opinion on Church Order matters. It is always my intention to give an opinion only on the process involved and not to the substance of the matters. I do offer advice when asked, but I remind those asking, that I am only providing one man's opinion. The Stated Clerk is not the official exegete of the Church Order or The Regulations of Synodical Procedure. That is synod's job. He offers an informed opinion, but in the end, it is only an opinion.

I have worked with the convening consistory in various matters in preparation for Synod. I submitted all Communications and Appeals to them to rule on their admissibility. We agreed not to print one Appeal and one Communication in the agenda, since they contained names of individuals and churches within the federation. These materials will be sent to the Advisory Committees to which they are assigned, as well as to any delegate who requests them from me by e-mail. Three other Communications from one person were ruled inadmissible and therefore are not included in the agenda.

We have not received an invitation from any of our churches to host the next synod. According to the decision of Synod 2001 regarding the rotation of synod among the classes, churches from Classis Southwestern Ontario or Classis Ontario-East are eligible to issue such an invitation. I informed them of this opportunity for their consideration.

It has been my honor to serve the churches of the federation for the past six years. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity. Where things have gone poorly, I ask for your forgiveness. Where they have gone well, I give the glory to God.

Respectfully,
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer
Stated Clerk
United Reformed Churches in North America

United Reformed Churches in North America

Robert D. Huisjen, US URCNA Treasurer
8443 Farview Dr SE, Byron Center, Michigan, 49315

March 19, 2016

To: Pastors, Elders, and Deacons of URCNA member churches
From: US URCNA Treasurer

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving the Lord as the US Treasurer during 2015. The purpose of this letter is to provide some observations and information relative to the finances of URCNA as well as summarize the US URCNA's finances for last year.

As you can see on the attached financial report, total income for the year for the general fund was \$122,951 and total expenses were \$114,805 which resulted in income in excess of expenses in the amount of \$8,145. As of the date of this report I have received \$4,525 (compared to \$2,294 in 2015) in deposits subsequent to year end which were for 2015 askings but reported as income in the 1st quarter of 2016 since that is when they were received.

The Pastors and Elders who attended Synod 2014 approved a budget of approximately \$134,148 (US Share) for the calendar years 2015 and 2016. Askings were increased to \$34.10 per family from the previous amount of \$13.61 per family. The primary reason for the increase was the addition of a Missions Coordinator position at the Federation level. For the upcoming calendar year, please continue to plan your Askings accordingly.

OBSERVATIONS

1. According to the 2014 Directory, the US has 78 churches. Of those 78 churches
 - a. 9 remain "unorganized" (not member churches)
 - b. none of the "unorganized" churches provided askings
 - c. 64 of the remaining organized churches provided askings.
 - i. This translates to a participation rate of approximately 93%, compared to 92% in 2014
2. Classical Dues are not the same as the Synodical "Askings". Any fees that are due to a particular classis must be paid to that Classis Treasurer. Any Synodical "Askings" must be paid to the US (or Canadian) Treasurer. These are separate amounts that are due. Classis will not forward a church's "Askings" to me.
3. When seeking reimbursement for work done on a committee, Synod 2012 implemented that all committee expenses be paid directly by the Joint Venture. Continue to send me the reimbursement form and I will forward it in a timely manner to the Joint Venture treasurer along with the US portion of the expense and Joint Venture will pay the full amount of the

expense to the committee member. Committee chairman have been provided with revised reimbursement forms.

STATISTICS

This below chart, very simply, indicates the historical percentage of member churches that did not provide any Askings. Organizing churches were omitted from the calculation.

Year	Church Non-Participation
2007	26%
2008	25%
2009	23%
2010	27%
2011	24%
2012	7%
2013	10%
2014	8%
2015	7%

This chart, very simply, indicates the number (not percentage) of US churches that took a collection for the Hymnal Fund.

Year	Church Participation
2003	7
2004	7
2005	10
2006	7
2007	10
2008	9
2009	8
2010	4
2011	2
2012	2
2013	6
2014	6
2015	5

ASKINGS

URCNA “Askings” equals “Suggested Donation”. Beginning in 2015, the askings donation was increased to \$34.10 per family with the Treasurers (US and Canada) reviewing annually the recommended askings per family for the following year. This money is used for the ongoing activity of URCNA. Some churches choose to take a free-will offering instead of using the formula. Each member church has a responsibility to participate, in whatever way, in the overall ministry of URCNA.

It has been suggested that many member churches do not remember about the “Askings” from year to year because of the yearly changes in the council. Beginning in 2014 the treasurers started to send out reminder “statements” reminding the churches of their recommended “Askings”. Please inform your deacons and have last year’s treasurer remind this year’s treasure about “Askings”.

Please make your check payable to URCNA and send the check to Robert D. Huisjen, 8443 Farview Drive SE, Byron Center, Michigan 49315. Canadian churches MUST send their checks to the Canadian treasurer, Mrs. Pam Hessels.

PSALTER HYMNAL FUND

The first resolution from Report 3, from the Psalter Hymnal committee, that was adopted by Synod 2001 was “That synod establish a fund to finance the cost of producing the new Psalter Hymnal.” The second resolution that was adopted from the Psalter Hymnal committee states “That synod request churches to contribute to that fund by suggesting that free-will offerings be collected for this cause until the new Psalter Hymnal is completed.”

Please make your check payable to URCNA Hymnal Fund and send the check to Robert D. Huisjen, 8443 Farview Drive SE, Byron Center, Michigan 49315. Canadian churches MUST send their checks to the Canadian treasurer, Mrs. Pam Hessels.

WEB SITE FUND

Article 88 of Synod 2004 directed the treasurers of US and Canada to set up funds for the URCNA Web Site. A separate fund has been established by the US Treasurer. Article 84 B of Synod 2005 states: “That the initial funding of the web site be through equal contributions from each classis in the amount of \$500 (USD) by December 31, 2004 and \$500 (USD) annually thereafter payable on or before the calendar year end. The treasurers of the URCNA US and Canadian corporations shall set up and jointly manage this fund.” Synod 2007 modified that amount to \$200 per classis. **Synod 2010 modified that amount to \$100 per classis.** For those churches that are responsible for the classis treasurers, please inform your classical treasurer to mail the **\$100** check payable to URCNA-Web Fund to Robert D. Huisjen, 8443 Farview Drive SE, Byron Center, Michigan 49315. Canadian churches MUST send their checks to the Canadian treasurer, Mrs. Pam Hessels.

ENCLOSURES

Synod 2014 developed a budget for 2015 through 2016 in order to provide information on the ongoing activities.

The following pages contain the unaudited End-Of-Year Report for 2015. In addition, guidelines for reimbursement are also provided. The reimbursement guidelines are intended to adhere to the guidelines defined by the U.S. Government.

INCOMING MAIL

All mail for the US Treasurer should be sent to the address at the bottom of the letter. This is the best method for a timely response.

CHECKS

Please make all “askings” checks payable to “URCNA”.

Please make all Hymnal Fund checks payable to “URCNA – Hymnal Fund”

For Classis Treasurers, please make all Web Site Fund checks payable to “URCNA – Web Fund”

REIMBURSEMENT GUIDELINES

All reimbursement requests must be submitted to the committee chairman for approval prior to being sent to the Treasurer for reimbursement. The goal is to keep the process from being complicated while providing the chairman knowledge of what is being spent. To reduce the amount of time between submittals and reimbursement, once the committee chair has approved the expense, he should mail the reimbursement request directly to the appropriate Treasurer. Attached to this document is a copy of a Synodical Expense Reimbursement Form.

1. Receipts must be presented to the Committee Head who will approve the receipts and send them to either the Canadian or US Treasurer, depending on if the member has a Canadian or US address.
2. When possible, provide actual receipts. (Fax or scanned copies are acceptable. Just make sure the information being faxed is legible.)
3. For airline travel, provide the last portion of the ticket, which contains the entire round-trip information. For those who get E-tickets, the cost of the ticket will not be printed. In addition to that ticket, please provide some sort of receipt from the travel agency or, as a last resort, a photocopy of the bankcard statement with the ticket charge circled. Please do not send boarding passes. You may keep them as a souvenir of your trip.
4. If a receipt has items that are personal, send a photocopy of the receipt and circle the reimbursable items.
5. Mileage will be reimbursed at the IRS rate, which, for 2016, is currently **54** cents per mile, down from 57.5 cents per mile in 2015. Gasoline is not reimbursed when mileage is submitted.
6. Meals will be reimbursed.
7. Please also submit receipts for meals.
8. If somebody pays for a group meal, that receipt must be submitted.
9. When staying at a hotel, sharing a room is not a requirement.
10. Please indicate which URCNA committee is being represented when requesting a reimbursement so that it can be properly documented.

The goal is to get a reimbursement check out as soon as possible, so if additional information is needed, it will be requested when the reimbursement check is sent. The process is working well and will continue to be modified, as needed.

Thank for your attention to these financial items.

Serving the Lord together,

Robert D. Huisjen, U.S. Treasurer, URCNA
8443 Farview Drive SE, Byron Center, Michigan 49315
Home: 616-554-0051, Fax: 616-698-0900, E-Mail: bob@firstcompanies.com

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

Robert Huisjen, US URCNA Treasurer
 8443 Farview Dr. SE
 Byron Center, MI 49315
 Phone 616-588-4113 (Day) 616-554-0051 (Evening)
 Email Address: bob@firstcompanies.com

Financial Report for Year Ended December 31, 2015

	Avg. Annual Budget - US	4th Qtr Actual	YTD Actual
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/15 (General Fund)			\$54,184.01
INCOME			
Contributions / Askings		\$41,530.37	\$120,540.95
Contributions / Askings (2014)			\$2,292.43
Interest		\$27.03	\$117.78
Total Income		<u>\$41,557.40</u>	<u>\$122,951.16</u>
EXPENSES			
Accounting / Government Filing	\$25.00		\$20.00
Bank Fees	\$41.00		
CECCA (1)	\$10,075.00	\$696.44	\$3,293.09
CERCU (2)	\$4,875.00	\$2,512.57	\$4,653.97
Clerk	\$2,600.00		\$2,600.00
Doctrinal Study Committee			
Dues			
NAPARC	\$325.00		\$455.00
ICRC	\$1,170.00		\$3,234.84 (9)
PRJC/MNA(dues) (3)	\$520.00		\$390.00
ICRC Travel			
Missions Coordinator	\$81,110.00	\$22,253.97	\$71,929.31
Mission Committee	\$5,850.00	\$1,046.23	\$5,928.91
PRCC	\$325.00		
Postage / Supplies	\$133.00	\$15.25	\$94.87
Acts of Synod (25 copies) plus shipping	\$81.00	\$153.68	\$153.68
Joint Church Order Committee			
Song Book Committee	\$7,443.00	\$1,509.92	\$6,642.11
Liturgical Forms Committee	\$5,850.00		\$7,534.49
Membership Departure	\$1,950.00		
Emeritation/ Retirement Committee	\$3,250.00		
Synod (Functionaries to attend)	\$650.00		
Legal (6)			
Treasurer - US	\$3,000.00		\$3,000.00
Treasurer - Joint Venture	\$1,950.00		\$1,950.00
Webmaster Honorarium	\$2,925.00		\$2,925.00
Total Expenses	<u>\$134,148.00</u>	<u>\$28,188.06</u>	<u>\$114,805.27</u>
TOTAL INCOME OVER EXPENSES		<u>\$13,369.34</u>	<u>\$8,145.89</u>
ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/15 (General Fund)			<u><u>\$62,329.90</u></u> (7)

	4th Qtr Actual	YTD Actual
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/15 (Hymnal Fund)		\$36,173.50
Contributions / Askings	\$3,106.25	\$7,300.44
Expenses		
Interest	\$25.55	\$110.79
ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/15 (Hymnal Fund)		<u>\$43,584.73</u> ⁽⁸⁾
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/15 (Web Fund)		\$6,818.70
Contributions / Askings	\$158.00	\$758.00
Web Maintenance	\$561.93	\$561.93
Interest		
ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/15 (Web Fund)		<u>\$7,014.77</u>
TOTAL CASH BALANCE - 12/31/15 (All Funds)		<u>\$112,929.40</u>
	4th Qtr Actual	YTD Actual
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/15 (Synod Fund)		\$0.00
Carryover balance transferred from previous Synods		\$38,282.35
Income		\$0.00
Expenses	\$3.00	\$3.00
ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/15 (Synod Fund)		<u>\$38,279.35</u> ⁽¹⁰⁾

General Fund Notes

1. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
2. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
3. PRJC = Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel
4. URCNA General Fund pays expenses for Synodical Functionaries as approved by convening council.
5. MNA is the Dues paid, set by the number of URCNA Chaplains, as part of PRJC
6. Synod London established Honorariums for the Treasurers and the Web Master. US and Canadian treasurer's are paid fully by their respective countries and the JVA Treasurer and Web Master are paid jointly based on the 65/35 split.
7. \$15,382.39 of the general fund balance has been invested in a short-term cd
8. \$25,637.36 of the hymnal fund balance has been invested in a short-term cd
9. This amount for ICRC represent dues for 2014 and 2015
10. Excess funds from prior Synods to be used in conjunction with future Synods

URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
74025 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2014 End of Year Report (not audited)

February 16, 2015

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of the Lord. Please find the End of Year Treasurer's report for the Canadian churches of the United Reformed Churches in North America attached. From a participation perspective, I have received 2014 askings from 40 (2013 – 35) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 6 (2013 – 8) Canadian churches. Three classis (2013 – 2) provided the \$100 US for the web fund.

Overall, 2014 was a positive year with 100% of churches participating and remitting askings. The number of churches contributing to the Psalter Hymnal fund decreased slightly from 2013,

I would like to draw your attention to the small loss in the general fund for 2014. The URCNA corporation is a federally incorporated charity. In 2014, the URCNA needed to engage the services of a lawyer to redraft our corporate by-laws to ensure that our paperwork was in accordance with the new Not-for-Profit Corporations Act. This item was not budgeted for in 2014. The remaining loss is due to committee work that exceeded the amount budgeted by the June 2012 Synod.

The Not-for-Profit Corporations Act requires that all non-profit organizations be audited (or reviewed if they fall below a specified threshold) by a public accountant, yearly. This expense has also not been included in the 2015 and 2016 budget set at Synod in June 2014. We will be obtaining quotes for this service and will report to you this additional expense once it is known.

The per family asking was set at Synod in June 2014. The asking for 2015 is set **\$36.00 per family**. Thank you to many of the churches who made their remittances early in the year.

I have also attached a report for the joint venture activities from January to December 2014. This report is in US dollars.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Serving the Lord together.

Pam Hessels
Treasurer, URCNA
74025 Wellandport Road
Wellandport, ON
L0R 2J0

Fax: 905-386-0477
Home: 905-386-0492
E-Mail: kphessels@bellnet.ca

URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
74025 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2015 End of Year Report (not audited)

March 3, 2016

Dear Brothers,

Greetings in the name of the Lord. Please find the End of Year Treasurer's report for the Canadian churches of the United Reformed Churches in North America attached. From a participation perspective, I have received 2015 askings from 40 (2014 – 40) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 8 (2014 – 6) Canadian churches. Three classes (2014 – 3) provided the \$100 US for the web fund.

Overall, 2015 was a positive year with 100% of churches participating and remitting askings. The number of churches contributing to the Psalter Hymnal fund increased slightly from 2014.

As I indicated in my quarterly reports, the family information reported on the URCNA website was used to calculate and to set the asking amount for 2015. I am happy to report that the actual amount received, compared to what was budgeted to be received from the churches was underfunded by only 6 families for 2015 (significantly decreased from the 32 families reported in the first quarter). I want to encourage the churches to please make sure that the information on the website is up to date.

The URCNA corporation is a federally incorporated charity. The Not-for-Profit Corporations Act requires that all non-profit organizations be audited (or reviewed if they fall below a specified threshold) by a public accountant, yearly. This expense has not been included in the 2015 and 2016 budget set at Synod in June 2014. The URCNA board has obtained quotes for this service and yearly review fees, starting in 2016, will be \$2,300 Canadian.

I would like to draw your attention to the small surplus in the general fund for 2015. This surplus is a result of sheltering some of the decline in the Canadian dollar by offsetting the transfers to/from the JVA. The decline in the Canadian dollar was not reflected in the financial statements until the fall when the JVA funds were used up. In 2016, the surplus was expected to be much smaller (a deficit) with the declining dollar and unbudgeted expenses to be incurred. The per family asking was set in US dollars at Synod in June 2014. To ensure that there are enough funds to cover expenses, the asking for 2016 is increased to **\$45.25 per family**. Thank you to many of the churches who make their remittances early in the year.

I have also attached a report for the joint venture activities from January to December 2015. This report is in US dollars. Effective January 1, 2014, all committee expenses, dues and stipends are paid directly by the joint venture as recommended by the finance committee and approved at Synod 2012. Committee chairmen should use this report to evaluate their spending room and to set budgets for their committee.

In the beginning of 2015, the US Treasurer and Canadian Treasurer revised the expense reimbursement form and drafted an expense reimbursement guideline to help speed up the reimbursement process. Committee members are asked to contact either the US or Canadian Treasurer for a copy of the guideline and reimbursement form, if they do not already have a copy.

Also, to ensure that expense reimbursements do not get lost in my personal email inbox, I have set up a new gmail account for expense reimbursements and correspondence related to the URCNA to be sent to me. Please use this email address (CdnURCNA@gmail.com) in the future.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Serving the Lord together.

Pam Hessels
Treasurer, URCNA
74025 Wellandport Road
Wellandport, ON
L0R 2J0

Fax: 905-386-0477
Home: 905-386-0492
E-Mail: CdnURCNA@gmail.com

URCNA – Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer

2014 End of Year Report (not audited) In Canadian \$

General Fund	Budget	Actual
INCOME		
Askings		28,844.42
Donations		200.00
TOTAL INCOME		29,044.42
EXPENSES		
Joint Venture Advances		
Bank charges and supplies	9	9.56
Committee expenses		
CECCA ¹	4,550	5,017.35
CERCU ²	2,275	2,943.93
Liturgical Forms	2,100	2,791.22
Mission	2,450	1,854.16
Songbook	4,008	7,137.79
Dues		
MNA	175	184.63
NAPARC		190.72
Missions Co-ordinator		567.17
Stipends	4,025	4,423.80
Supplies		40.02
Government filing fee	18	30.00
Postage	140	18.67
Treasurer	3,000	3,402.89
Professional fees – lawyer ³		3,816.04
Synod		1,394.58
TOTAL EXPENSES	23,468	33,822.53
NET TOTAL		(4,778.11)

NOTES

1. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
2. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
3. Professional fees paid to be in accordance with the new Not-for-Profit corporations act.

Balance Sheet

Bank¹	39,390.37
Accounts Receivable²	5,964.67
Accounts Payable	3,058.16
General Fund Balance	42,296.88

NOTES

1. The bank balance is being provided for information purposes at the end of each quarter. In 2014, \$11,000 of the accumulated funds was invested in a short term GIC. The term is 12 months with 1.6% interest.
2. Represents the refundable portion of GST (goods & services tax) to be received from Canada Revenue Agency, accrued 2014 askings received in early January, and 4th quarter committee expenses to be reimbursed from JVA.

Hymnal Fund

INCOME	
Collections	3,147.60
Interest	258.19
TOTAL INCOME	3,405.79
EXPENSES	
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	3,405.79
Bank balance at Dec-31-14 ¹	30,987.07

NOTES

1. In 2014, \$29,000 of the accumulated funds designated for the Hymnal Fund was invested in a short term GIC. The term is 12 months with 1.6% interest.

Web Fund¹

INCOME	
Classis	400.00
TOTAL INCOME	400.00
EXPENSES	
Annual fee	344.34
TOTAL EXPENSES	344.34
NET TOTAL	55.66
Bank balance at Dec-31-14	3,038.11

NOTES

1. As established by Synod 2007, each Classis must provide the Treasurer with \$200 US each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA. Synod 2010 reduced this amount to \$100 US each year.

URCNA - Canada

Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer
74025 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2015 Year End Report (not audited)

General Fund

	Jan to Sep	Oct to Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Askings	72,324.00	6,516.00	78,840.00
Acts of Synod	1,728.70		1,728.70
Donations (Colloquium)	600.00		600.00
Interest	176.00	87.20	263.20
Total Income	74,828.70	6,603.20	81,431.90
Expenses			
Joint Venture Advances			
Bank charges	11.30	5.80	17.10
Committee expenses	-		-
CECCA (note 1)	1,636.72	1,408.18	3,044.90
CERCU (note 2)	191.34	3,936.79	4,128.13
Liturgical forms	3,313.72	-	3,313.72
Missions	4,230.90	417.79	4,648.69
Songbook	3,659.31	-	3,659.31
Dues			
ICRC	2,066.99		2,066.99
MNA	245.73	-	245.73
NAPARC	-	286.69	286.69
Missions co-ordinator	32,762.47	13,243.55	46,006.02
Stipends (note 3)	3,568.67	1,189.57	4,758.24
Supplies	21.83		21.83
Acts of Synod	1,546.51		1,546.51
Government filing fee		20.00	20.00
Postage	18.10	11.49	29.59
Treasurer	2,736.57	912.19	3,648.76
Colloquium material	356.44		356.44
Total Expenses	56,366.60	21,432.05	77,798.65
Net Total	18,462.10	(14,828.85)	3,633.25

NOTES

- (1) CECCA - Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
- (2) CERCU - Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
- (3) Represents the Canadian portion of the webmaster, clerk, and JV treasurer stipends. These stipends are paid via the "joint venture" since they are paid to individuals outside of Canada

Balance Sheet (as at December 31, 2015)

Bank (note 4)	39,785.89
Accounts receivable (note 5)	9,695.09
Interest receivable	87.20
Prepays (note 6)	2,233.33
Accounts payable	5,871.38
General fund balance	45,930.13
	-

NOTES

- (4) The bank balance is provided for information purposes. During the year, \$11,000 of the accumulated funds was invested in a short term GIC. The term is 12 months with 1.6% interest.
- (5) Represents the refundable portion of GST/HST to be received from Canada Revenue Agency as well as amount owing from the JVA for committee expenses paid to Canadian committee members
- (6) Represents reimbursement for committee expenses for meetings to be held in 2016.

Hymnal Fund

	Jan to Sep	Oct to Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Collections	4,165.40	1,327.12	5,492.52
Interest	464.00	229.90	693.90
Total Income	4,629.40	1,557.02	6,186.42
Expenses			
Total Expenses	-	-	-
Net Total	4,629.40	1,557.02	6,186.42

Balance Sheet

Bank (note 1)	36,943.59
Interest receivable	229.90
Hymnal fund balance	37,173.49

NOTES

- (1) During the year, \$29,000 of the accumulated funds designated for the Hymnal Fund was invested in a short term GIC. The term is 12 months with 1.6% interest.
- (2) At Synod 2001 (Escondido, CA), it was approved that each church would have free-will offerings that would be put aside in this fund to finance the cost of the new psalter hymnal.

Web Fund

	Jan to Sep	Oct to Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Classis	100.00	200.00	300.00
Total Income	<u>100.00</u>	<u>200.00</u>	<u>300.00</u>
Expenses	-	398.45	398.45
Total Expenses	<u>-</u>	<u>398.45</u>	<u>398.45</u>
Net Total	<u>100.00</u>	<u>(198.45)</u>	<u>(98.45)</u>

Balance Sheet

Bank	3,039.66
Deferred revenue (note 1)	100.00
Web fund balance	2,939.66
	-

NOTES

- (1) One of the classis paid the web fund amount for 2015 and 2016. The 2016 amount has recorded as deferred revenue and will be included in the 2016 revenues.

URCNA - Joint

Pam Hessels, Joint URCNA Treasurer

2014 End of Year Report (not audited) In US\$

General Fund	Budget	Actual
INCOME		
URCNA - Canada ¹	24,299	24,542.27
URCNA – United States ²	45,126	45,578.47
Interest		1.07
TOTAL INCOME	69,425	70,121.81
EXPENSES		
Acts of Synod	250	-
Clerk expenses		68.85
Committee Expenses		
CECCA	13,000	12,931.35
CERCU	6,500	7,453.13
Emeritation	4,000	-
Joint Church Order	6,000	-
Liturgical Forms	6,000	6,767.20
Missions Committee	7,000	4,562.08
PRJC (Chaplains travel)	500	-
Psalter Hymnal	11,450	18,383.19
Dues		
ICRC	1,800	-
MNA	500	500.00
NAPARC	500	500.00
Missions Coordinator		
Office supplies		533.62
Travel		847.48
Professional fees ³		5,000.00
Stipends		
Clerk	4,000	4,000.00
Treasurer	3,000	3,118.20
Web Master	4,500	4,500.00
Bank service charges	25	35.96
Postage	400	32.77
Web Master Expenses		887.98
TOTAL EXPENSES	69,425	70,121.81
NET TOTAL		0.00

Balance Sheet

Bank	1,432.07
Accounts Receivable⁴	7,199.77
Accounts Payable⁵	8,631.84
General Fund Balance	0.00

NOTES

1. Represents the Canadian share (35%) of expenses for the period of January to December, 2014
2. Represents the US share (65%) of expenses for January to December, 2014
3. The URCNA has been named in a lawsuit and legal counsel has been obtained. The amount represents the legal fees paid to the lawyer.
4. Represents advances made to JVA for 2015 expenses and amount owing from US URCNA for 4th quarter Canadian expenses billed to JVA
5. Represents 4th quarter expenses owing to URCNA Canada and unpaid committee expenses

URCNA - Joint

Pam Hessels, Joint URCNA Treasurer
74025 Wellandport Road, Wellandport, ON, L0R 2J0

2015 Year End Report (not audited) - In USD

General Fund

	Jan to Sep YTD TOTAL	Oct to Dec	YTD TOTAL	YTD Budget
Income				
URCNA - Canada	45,151.56	15,251.00	60,402.56	70,537.25
URCNA - US	83,852.90	28,323.26	112,176.16	130,997.75
Interest	2.94	0.62	3.56	-
Sundry - presentations / speeches	250.00		250.00	-
Total Income	129,257.40	43,574.88	172,832.28	201,535.00
Expenses				
Bank charges	26.83	12.40	39.23	25.00
Committee expenses				
CECCA (note 1)	3,994.84	2,911.84	6,906.68	15,500.00
CERCU (note 2)	621.47	8,234.53	8,856.00	7,500.00
Liturgical forms	8,076.15	-	8,076.15	9,000.00
Membership departure	-	-	-	3,000.00
Missions	10,938.87	1,665.31	12,604.18	9,000.00
Retirement	-	-	-	5,000.00
Songbook	8,653.64	-	8,653.64	11,450.00
Dues				
ICRC (note 3)	4,976.72	-	4,976.72	1,800.00
MNA	600.00	-	600.00	800.00
NAPARC	-	700.00	700.00	500.00
Missions co-ordinator				
Office supplies / telephone	1,433.41	441.16	1,874.57	6,000.00
Salary and benefits	70,308.99	23,084.14	93,393.13	98,785.00
Travel and mileage	7,627.75	2,756.45	10,384.20	20,000.00
PRCC	-	-	-	500.00
Stipends (note 4)				
Clerk	3,000.00	1,000.00	4,000.00	4,000.00
Treasurer	2,338.65	779.55	3,118.20	3,000.00
Webmaster	3,375.00	1,125.00	4,500.00	4,500.00
Supplies	53.04	-	53.04	50.00
Synod	-	-	-	1,000.00
Acts of Synod	3,232.04	-	3,232.04	125.00
Website	-	864.50	864.50	-
Total Expenses	129,257.40	43,574.88	172,832.28	201,535.00
Net Total	-	-	-	-

Balance Sheet (as at December 31, 2015)

Bank (note 5)	243.81
Accounts receivable (note 6)	8,249.64
Accounts payable (note 7)	8,493.45
General fund balance	-
	-

NOTES

- (1) CECCA - Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
- (2) CERCU - Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
- (3) The 2014 and 2015 dues were paid in 2015.
- (4) Represents the webmaster, clerk, and JV treasurer stipends. The stipends paid to the Canadian and US Treasurers are represented on the financial report from the Canadian and US operations.
- (5) The bank balance is provided for information purposes.
- (6) Represents the amount owing from the Canadian and US treasurers to the JVA for committee expenses.
- (7) Represents the amount owing to the US committee members for travel expenses as well as amounts owing to the Canadian URCNA for expenses incurred by Canadian committee members.

Overture #1

OVERTURE TO SYNOD 2016 REGARDING CERCU MANDATE

BACKGROUND:

Synod 1999 Hudsonville adopted the Mandate and Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. The Guidelines were divided into three phases, summarized as follows:

Phase One - Corresponding Relations “*..one of exploration..*”;

Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship “*. . and in preparation for and commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity . .*” ;

Phase Three - Church Union “*. . and where contiguous geography permits, shall proceed to complete church unity, that is, ecclesiastical union.*”

(Acts of Synod 1999, Minutes Article 36.B.1.b, Pages 16-17; Acts of Synod 1999, CERCU Report Pages 49-50)

Synod 2007 Schererville adopted changes to the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity. The major changes are summarized as follows:

Phase Two - “*. . in preparation for and commitment to . .*” was replaced with “*. . in acknowledgement of the desirability of . .*”

Phase Three – This phase was divided into two components: (Step A) Develop the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union which includes “*make preparation for and a commitment to eventual integrated federative church unity*”; (Step B) Implementation of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union

(Acts of Synod 2007, Minutes Article 92.1, Pages 51-54)

The changes adopted by Synod 2007 Schererville acknowledge that entering Phase Two could be all the further ecumenicity proceeds.

“*c. The addition of the notion of desirability to this phase allows us to consider the biblical hope of unity as true churches, as well as to recognize that, due to sin both in ourselves and others, unity is not always attainable.*”

(Acts of Synod 2007 Minutes, Article 92, *Summary of Changes to Overture*, Change 2, Grounds c., Page 53)

OVERTURE:

Classis Central U.S. overtures the next URCNA Synod to make the following revision to the Mandate of CERCU: (**Bold** = additions; ~~Strikethrough~~ = removal)

With a desire to pursue a broader unity with churches that share a common confession and faith, and acknowledging the desirability of union with churches of like faith and practice, where feasible ~~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.

FOUNDATIONS:

- 1) The Mandate needs to reflect what the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity spell out: spiritual unity is based on a common faith and confession; organic unity is based on a like faith, practice and feasibility, while desirable is not always attainable.

URCNA Church Order, Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government:

4. *“The universal church possesses a spiritual unity in Christ and in the Holy Scriptures.*

10. *“In order to manifest our spiritual unity, local churches should seek the broadest possible contacts with other like-minded churches for their mutual edification and as an effective witness to the world.”*

Acts of Synod 2007 Minutes, Article 92, *Summary of Changes to Overture*, Change 2, Grounds c., Page 53

- c. *The addition of the notion of desirability to this phase allows us to consider the biblical hope of unity as true churches, as well as to recognize that, due to sin both in ourselves and others, unity is not always attainable.”*

- 2) Organic (federative) unity need not be held out as the essential visible expression of the church.

From the URCNA Church Order, Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government:

7. *“Federative relationships do not belong to the essence or being of the church; rather, they serve the well-being of the church . . . “*

- 3) Organic (federative) unity is an expression of unity which is based on: a like-faith which would include the translation and application of the Bible and confessions; on a like-practice which would include liturgies and liturgical forms, songs for worship, church polity and order, and might include such things as common history, or the level of tolerance for local traditions as local consistories oversee the church.

URCNA Church Order, Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government:

7. *“. . . However, even though churches stand distinctly next to one another, they do not thereby stand disconnectedly alongside one another. Entrance into and departure from a federative relationship is strictly a voluntary matter.”*

5. *“. . . Reformed Church government is presbyterial, since the church is governed by elders, not broader assemblies.”*

- 4) The language “**acknowledging the desirability of union with churches of like faith and practice**” is similar to the language used in the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity.
- 5) The feasibility of organic union is noted in Phase 3 of the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity when it states “. . .where contiguous geography permits. . .” This implies there are limitations of feasibility when it comes to organic (federative) union.
- 6) The current terminology “*With a view toward complete church unity*,. . . “appears to be used by the committee in a way which seems to keep driving toward organic union with the Canadian Reformed Churches without recognizing differences in like-faith, like-

practice and the desire of churches in our federation to acknowledge them as a true church but not proceed further at this point. Quoted from the Classis Ontario-East Minutes, Sept 25, 2014 Article 16.2: “. . .The CERCU committee continues to struggle together on how to best continue their work in growing closer together with our sister churches. (CERCU member) raised the continued desire to see our federation continue their work towards eventual merger with the Canadian Reformed Churches as their mandate expresses.”

- 7) The URCNA joint committees which worked with the Canadian Reformed Churches on a common song book, Theological Education and a common Church Order have served their purpose and have not resulted in a unified document or position. Any further advancement to Phase 3 with the Canadian Reformed Churches should therefore begin anew, according to the current guidelines.

Done in Classis
April 14, 2015

Overture #2

REGARDING THE REGULATIONS FOR SYNODICAL PROCEDURE

BACKGROUND:

Synod 2014 received a report from the Stated Clerk which included several proposed updates to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure. These were recorded in the Acts of Synod “as the subject of possible overtures.” This is one of those overtures.

These proposed updates seek to bring our Regulations in line with our current practice.

OVERTURE:

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to adopt the following proposed updates to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

4.5.2 Term of the Stated Clerk

Current wording:

Term: Synod shall elect a stated clerk to serve from that synod until the conclusion of the next synod. An alternate shall be elected for the same term, who shall serve should the stated clerk be unable to do so. The stated clerk shall serve no more than three three-year terms consecutively. Synod shall stipulate his honorarium in the currency of his respective country.

Recommended wording:

Term: Synod shall elect a stated clerk to serve from that synod until the conclusion of the next synod. An alternate shall be elected for the same term, who shall serve should the stated clerk be unable to do so. The stated clerk shall serve no more than three terms consecutively. Synod shall stipulate his honorarium in the currency of his respective country.

Ground:

The synod does not necessarily convene every three years. This language will reflect that reality.

4.6.2 Term of the Treasurers of the Board of Directors

Current wording:

Term: Each Corporation shall appoint its treasurer to serve from one synod until the conclusion of the next synod. Each Corporation shall appoint an alternate treasurer for the same term, who shall serve if the treasurer is unable to serve. All appointees shall be approved by synod. A treasurer shall serve no more than three three-year terms consecutively. Each Corporation shall stipulate its treasurer’s honorarium subject to the approval of synod.

Recommended wording:

Term: Each Corporation shall appoint its treasurer to serve from one synod until the conclusion of the next synod. Each Corporation shall appoint an alternate treasurer for the same term, who shall serve if the treasurer is unable to serve. All appointees shall be approved by synod. A treasurer shall serve no more than three terms consecutively. Each Corporation shall stipulate its treasurer's honorarium subject to the approval of synod.

Ground:

The synod does not necessarily convene every three years. This language will reflect that reality.

5.2.2 Advisory Committee Reports

Current wording:

Advisory committee reports shall be signed by the chairman and the reporter of the committee. Where a minority report is presented, both the majority and minority report must be signed by the members who favor them.

Recommended wording:

Advisory committee reports shall list the chairman and the reporter of the committee. Where a minority report is presented, both the majority and minority report must list the members who favor them.

Ground:

With our current technology, none of the reports are signed. They simply list the required names.

5.2.4 Advisory Committee Recommendations

Current wording:

When the recommendation of an advisory committee is substantially different from that proposed by an overture, an appeal, or the report of a committee of synod, the reporter for such proposed material shall have the privilege to present and defend the proposal prior to synodical deliberation of the advisory committee's recommendation.

Recommended wording:

When the recommendation of an advisory committee is substantially different from that proposed by an overture, or the report of a committee of synod, the reporter for such proposed material shall have the privilege to present and defend the proposal prior to synodical deliberation of the advisory committee's recommendation.

Ground:

Past synods have affirmed that an appeal is a *written* request (Regulations of Procedure Appendix B). The appellant is to submit all materials in writing and does not have the privilege to *verbally* present and defend their position before the synod.

5.3.2.a Standing Committee Description

Current wording:

Description. A standing committee serves the synod under synodical regulations on a continuing basis. Its members are chosen by synod for specified terms and are given a particular mandate. The committee and its mandate continue even though the members of the committee serve only until their terms are completed.

Recommended wording:

Description. A standing committee serves the synod under synodical regulations on a continuing basis. Its members are chosen by synod or classis for specified terms and are given a particular mandate. The committee and its mandate continue even though the members of the committee serve only until their terms are completed.

Ground:

Several standing committees (CERCU, CECCA, WOC, Missions) have members appointed by each of the classes, not only by the synod. This language will reflect that reality.

5.3.2.c Standing Committee Terms

Current wording:

Terms. The members of a standing committee shall serve no more than three three-year terms consecutively, each term commencing at the time of synodical appointment. Members who have completed three consecutive terms are eligible for reappointment after one year.

Recommended wording:

Terms. The synodically-appointed members of a standing committee shall serve no more than three three-year terms consecutively, each term commencing at the time of synodical appointment. Members who have completed three consecutive terms are eligible for reappointment after one year. When the term of a member-at-large ends in a year that synod does not meet, the synod preceding the end of the term shall appoint or re-appoint a member to that at-large position to a term commencing on July 1 in the year the current term ends. The matter of term limits

for classically-appointed members shall be left to the discretion of each individual classis.

Grounds:

1. Several standing committees (CERCU, CECCA, WOC, Missions) have members appointed by each of the classes, not only by the synod. This language will reflect that reality.
2. This reflects the decision of Synod London to give each classis discretion regarding term limits of its representatives (Acts of Synod 2010, Article 68.3).
3. This is in keeping with the decision of Synod 2012 regarding terms ending in a non-synod year. (Acts of Synod 2012, Article 54.3)

6.2.4.c All motions may be amended except the following

Current wording:

to table temporarily, or to place again a temporarily tabled motion before the body.

Recommended wording:

to table temporarily or indefinitely, or to place again a temporarily tabled motion before the body.

Ground:

This makes explicit that either motion to table (temporarily or indefinitely) is not amendable and puts this article in conformity with 6.3.3.b.

Appendix A. 6. Guidelines for Overtures

Current wording:

Judgments of the broader assemblies shall be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proven that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order (See *Church Order*, Article 29).

Recommended wording:

Decisions of the broader assemblies shall be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proven that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order (See *Church Order*, Article 29).

Ground:

Synod 2012 adopted “Definitions and Authority of Synodical Actions” (Acts of Synod 2012, Article 45). In doing so, “Judgments” took on a particular meaning.

It refers to a decision with regard to an appeal. However, the Church Order article referenced uses the language, “All decisions of a broader assembly”. The recommended language reflects the broader language of the Church Order.

Appendix B. Guidelines for Appeals

Recommendation:

That a new number 7 be added and that the subsequent bullet points be renumbered accordingly.

7. If a delegate is a party to an appeal (appellant or respondent), the following shall apply:
 - a. The delegate may be assigned to the Advisory Committee dealing with the appeal. However, in the Advisory Committee, he may not make motions or vote on them. He may state points of fact for clarification.
 - b. In the plenary session dealing with the appeal, the delegate may not make motions or vote on them. If the appeal is from the decision of a classis, this shall apply to all the delegates from that classis.

Ground:

While it may be useful to have facts clarified by a delegate who is a party to an appeal, it undermines the appeal process for that delegate to sit in judgment on a decision which he himself has already made.

Overture #3
OVERTURE TO SYNOD 2016
FROM CLASSIS CENTRAL U.S.
TO ADOPT AN
“APPEAL & GOSPEL TESTIMONY TO GOVERNING AUTHORITIES”

BACKGROUND:

Our Church Order provides a simple biblical statement on the nature of marriage and while marriage is not an ecclesiastical ordinance, yet such marriages are within the general spiritual purview of the consistory and are to be regulated by the Word of God (Church Order Article 48). This article is a clear guide to the churches as they instruct their members and provide oversight of their Ministers in their solemnization of Christian marriages.

The Form for the Solemnization of Marriage found in the 1976 Blue Psalter Hymnal, which the URCNA recognizes as “the appropriate liturgical form” for solemnizing marriage, likewise contains a clear biblical testimony on the God-ordained nature of marriage. There we see the description of marriage as the union of one man and one woman and its purpose in the furtherance of a healthy society and the advancement of God’s kingdom.

In the years following the founding of our federation, we have witnessed Western culture’s increasing abandonment of the Biblical definition of marriage in favor of an individualistic, man-centered, autonomous definition based on the individual’s chosen form of “love” which, according to militant secularists, must necessarily include homosexual attraction. The movement to normalize conduct which the Bible condemns began to manifest itself in various judicial, legislative and administrative actions. For example, secularists sought approval in various state legislatures for “civil unions” so as to provide all the incidents of marriage, but without giving it the name “marriage.” However, it was evident to clear thinking Christians that such “civil unions” were only an intermediate compromise step toward the ultimate goal of re-defining marriage itself to include same-sex relationships.

In 2010, the URCNA saw the danger the homosexual movement posed to the religious liberty of our military chaplains. Synod London approved sending a letter of Concern and Appeal to the U.S. Department of Defense regarding its consideration of repealing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, a policy which forbade homosexuals from serving openly in the military. The URCNA’s letter is reproduced in full below in order to remind us of the concern we had over that threat to the religious liberty of our chaplains:

FROM: The United Reformed Churches in North America

SUBJECT: Possible repeal of the current policy regarding homosexual individuals in military.

1. Concern: The URCNA is gravely concerned over the potential repeal of the current policy governing homosexual individuals in the military. Should this repeal occur we fear that the free exercise of the faith of our chaplains will be jeopardized. This repeal may go so far as to force the resignation of our currently serving chaplains from the military as well as the service of military members from this federation.

2. *Consequences: The potential change increases the likelihood of the following:*

- *Chaplains may be open to the charge of discrimination or command reprimand when they preach or teach in accordance with the passages in the Bible which directly speak to the sin of homosexual practice.*
- *Bibles in military chapels and on military bases may be under the threat of excision of all passages which speak very directly to the sin of homosexual practice. Whether it will be under the guise of “hate speech” or speech contrary to the policy of the Department of Defense, the effort may be made soon after the removal of the policy.*
- *Marriage retreats conducted by chaplains intended to strengthen marriage may have to include homosexual couples which will violate our chaplains’ faith tenets and negatively impact the voluntary participation of married heterosexual couples.*
- *Homosexual couples may seek union ceremonies or marriages, which are in violation of the beliefs and ordination vows of a large percentage of military chaplains, not just those from our federation. Refusal may invite the charge of discrimination and command reprimand.*
- *The “free exercise” and free speech rights of chaplains and military members may be violated.*

3. *Appeal: For the above and many other reasons affecting chaplains and military members in the ranks we humbly recommend that you consider the ramifications for religious freedom that legislation in this regard may have. It is of utmost importance that you take all necessary measures to ensure that our chaplains are free, without censure, to preach, teach, and practice in accordance with the beliefs of our federation. We plead for this on behalf of the chaplains who serve our churches and country.*

Stated Clerk, URCNA

(Acts of Synod London, 2010, Articles 128, 132, p.82).

As we know, the Department of Defense did not heed our appeal. Since then, our concerns have proved to be well founded, as reports of restrictions on Christian chaplains’ freedom to counsel or teach the Biblical view of sexuality and marriage have often surfaced.

But a more momentous legal change occurred on June 26, 2015, when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that same sex couples must be afforded the right to the institution of “marriage”. (*OBERGEFELL V. HODGES, No. 14-556 [U.S. Jun 26, 2015]*). The High Court’s re-definition of marriage now ends any democratic debate on the *nature of marriage* by enshrining homosexual practice as a constitutionally protected right nationwide.

As we saw, Synod London expressed its concern to government officials about the threat to religious liberty that was directed narrowly at our chaplains. Without question, the present threat to religious liberty posed by the *Obergefell* ruling now extends to all churches, individual Christians, Christian organizations, seminaries, and Christian schools. The *Obergefell* dissenting Justices explain:

“It will be used to vilify Americans who are unwilling to assent to the new orthodoxy. In the course of its opinion, the majority compares traditional marriage laws to laws that denied equal treatment for African-Americans and women. E.g., ante, at 11-13. The implications of this analogy will be exploited by those who are determined to stamp out every vestige of dissent Perhaps recognizing how its reasoning may be used, the majority attempts, toward the end of its opinion, to reassure those who oppose same-sex marriage that their rights of conscience will be protected. Ante, at 26-27. We will soon see whether this proves to be true. I assume that those who cling to old beliefs will be able to whisper their thoughts in the recesses of their homes, but if they repeat those views in public, they will risk being labeled as bigots and treated as such by governments, employers, and schools.”

(Justice Clarence Thomas, Dissenting Opinion.)

“Respect for sincere religious conviction has led voters and legislators in every State that has adopted same-sex marriage democratically to include accommodations for religious practice. The majority's decision imposing same-sex marriage cannot, of course, create any such accommodations. The majority graciously suggests that religious believers may continue to "advocate" and "teach" their views of marriage. Ante, at 27. The First Amendment guarantees, however, the freedom to "exercise" religion. Ominously, that is not a word the majority uses. Hard questions arise when people of faith exercise religion in ways that may be seen to conflict with the new right to same-sex marriage—when, for example, a religious college provides married student housing only to opposite-sex married couples, or a religious adoption agency declines to place children with same-sex married couples. Indeed, the Solicitor General candidly acknowledged that the tax exemptions of some religious institutions would be in question if they opposed same-sex marriage. See Tr. of Oral Arg. on Question 1, at 36-38. There is little doubt that these and similar questions will soon be before this Court. Unfortunately, people of faith can take no comfort in the treatment they receive from the majority today.”

(Chief Justice John Roberts, Dissenting Opinion).

Just as the dissenting Justices warned, following the issuance of the Supreme Court’s decision public calls for the government to take actions against Christians have already begun.¹

OVERTURE:

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to take the following actions as a gospel testimony regarding marriage and religious liberty:

1. Adopt the following “Appeal & Gospel Testimony to Governing Authorities”:

Appeal and Gospel Testimony to Governing Authorities:

Whereas, various legislative, judicial, and administrative actions have enacted policies that recognize same-sex conduct as a legitimate practice protected by force of law;

¹ <http://christiannews.net/2015/07/06/homosexual-advocates-call-for-churches-to-lose-tax-exempt-status-following-gay-marriage-ruling/>; <http://time.com/3939143/nows-the-time-to-end-tax-exemptions-for-religious-institutions/>

Whereas on June 26, 2015 the Supreme Court of the United States of America decided by a vote of 5-4 to declare “same-sex marriage” as a fundamental constitutional right in our country;

Whereas, these prior legal actions and this Supreme Court decision contravene nature and nature’s God and set this nation on a course of societal upheaval in its rejection of the God-ordained institution of marriage as a foundation of a healthy society;

Whereas, this decision and others like it may set the nation on a course of conflict with the religious liberties of its citizens guaranteed by the very Constitution our governing authorities have sworn to uphold, thereby making it imperative that our testimony to our religious convictions be made clear;

Whereas, in reality God created man male and female with the call to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:22), giving the woman to the man as a helper in marriage for all the days of their lives (Genesis 2:18);

Whereas, our Lord Jesus declared that the one-flesh union of one man and one woman in marriage is rooted in creation (Matthew 19:4-6) and reflected in the mystery of the gospel (Ephesians 5:22–33);

Whereas any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography or any attempt to change one’s sex, or disagreement with one’s biological sex, is disobedient to God’s will for humanity (Leviticus 18:22-23; Romans 1:26–27; 1 Timothy 1:10);

Whereas all the aforesaid sins of sexual immorality including homosexuality are sins from which Scripture mercifully calls those who practice it to repent; and from which, by God's grace, they can repent and be renewed to a new life of obedience by the power of the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11);

Whereas, since governing authorities are appointed as ministers of God, their authority is derivative and must be in subjection to the will of the Lord God Almighty who created the heavens, the earth, and the institution of marriage (Genesis 1-2, Romans 13; Belgic Confession Article 36);

Whereas, even as all citizens are to honor governing authorities, such governing authorities cannot compel Christians, religious organizations, or churches to obey commands, rules, rulings, or statutes that are repugnant to the Word of God, since the church is the Bride of Christ, bought and redeemed by His blood on the cross, and as members of His precious Church, we must remain faithful to Him and His Word even if illegitimately commanded by secular powers to disobey Him and His Word (1 Peter 2:17; Belgic Confession Article 36);

IT IS THEREFORE RESOLVED, that We, the United Reformed Churches in North America, in the name of the One and Only True and Living God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate King, Governor, Judge and Savior of all nations, as revealed in the 66 Books of the Holy Scriptures consisting of the Old and New Testaments, do call upon all State and Federal legislators, governors, congress, judges, courts, and the President of the United States to repent, repeal, overturn, and cease any legalizing of “same-sex marriage” or any related policies which would infringe upon our Christian conscience to obey the Word of God. This moral evil

can bring the temporal judgment of God Almighty both upon individuals and the nation now and will certainly bring God’s final judgment on individuals on Judgment Day.

Let all be assured that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is a God “merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:6–7).

Let all also be assured that God does not desire that any should perish, but that all would repent and come to a knowledge of the truth (1Timothy 2:4). And so we speak to the world not as those who are without sin, but rather we speak as fellow sinners who were lost and ruined by our original parent Adam’s fall and by our own sins and sinfulness. We confess with sorrow that too often the Christian church has muted and marred its witness to this glorious gospel by our own failure to uphold marriage vows, by embracing worldliness, and by moral compromise. In these failings, we have not provided a clear Christian witness to our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, thereby inciting God’s displeasure with both us and the world.

Yet, as repentant sinners, we can testify that the only true and everlasting joy and freedom is found in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit all persons, including our governing authorities, can experience repentance, the forgiveness of sin, and the delight of walking with our God in the beauty of holiness, which includes upholding the only natural marriage ordinance created by God.

_____ (Federation signatory)

FOUNDATIONS:

- a. The church exercises the keys of the kingdom by witnessing to the Gospel Truth to the world, calling all men everywhere to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. In certain circumstances, this witness includes the use of spiritual means to exhort and rebuke our rulers where they may contravene God’s moral law which binds them (Heidelberg Catechism Q. 83, 84; URCNA Church Order Articles 2, 47; Synod 2010 Letter of Concern; Calvin’s Commentary on Jeremiah 1:9-10).
- b. The church exercises the keys of the kingdom through Christian discipline, which includes calling its members and officers to repent of sin, which would include the sin of homosexual practice (Heidelberg Catechism Q 85; Foundation Principles of Reformed Church Government #16; URCNA Church Order Articles 55, 59, 61, and 62).
- c. The Supreme Court decision threatens the religious liberty of the Church in the exercise of the keys of the kingdom, as well as the right of individual Christians and associations to declare and practice the Truth of God, which includes respect for God’s institution of marriage and not countenancing sexual immorality among us.
- d. This Appeal and Gospel Testimony is an opportunity for the churches to witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ by way of the confession of sin and the joy found by living in the beauty of holiness, as well as to pray that our civil rulers fulfill their task in a manner that God may rule over them and us and that they contribute to the advancement of a society

pleasing to God (Romans 13; Belgic Confession Article 36; URCNA “Prayer for the Needs of Christendom”).

- e. While we pray this Appeal and Testimony would be heeded, it may be disregarded and coercive actions against our religious convictions may be a future cross to bear. In that case, this Appeal and Testimony can serve to strengthen, comfort, and guide the flocks entrusted to our care even amid persecution, and can remain a witness to the Truth regardless of whether the world will hear it (1 Peter 4:12).
- f. This Appeal and Testimony answers the call to join our voice with other Christians against this transgression against the will of Almighty God. (Resolution on Same-Sex Marriage, Reformed Presbyterian Church U.S., April 19, 2013).

2. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the “Appeal and Gospel Testimony” to the President of the United States, the United States Supreme Court, the United States Senate Majority Leader, and Speaker of the House of Representatives.

FOUNDATIONS:

- a. These offices are the highest executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the national government to whom our federation’s broadest assembly can most appropriately communicate.
- b. These federal offices are significantly involved on a national level with the policy matters addressed in the “Appeal and Gospel Testimony.”

3. Encourage the churches of the federation to send the “Appeal and Gospel Testimony” to federal, state, and local governing authorities within a local church’s jurisdiction as each church deems appropriate.

FOUNDATIONS:

- a. In the various states, there are varying degrees of involvement by the lower federal, state, and local authorities with the policy matters addressed in the “Appeal and Gospel Testimony.”
- b. The local churches can best assess the most effective means of communicating the “Appeal and Gospel Testimony” to the lower governing authorities in each church’s jurisdiction.

4. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the “Appeal & Gospel Testimony” to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) for the member churches’ consideration and edification.

FOUNDATIONS:

- a. The URCNA is a member of NAPARC.
- b. One purpose of NAPARC is to “[f]acilitate discussion, consultation, and the sharing of insights among Member Churches on those issues and problems which divide them as well as on those which they face in common”(NAPARC Constitution, Article IV, 1.).
- c. Sending the “Appeal & Gospel Testimony” to NAPARC advances the purpose of sharing our insights on these issues which we face in common with NAPARC churches.

Overture #4
OVERTURE TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016
FROM CLASSIS CENTRAL U.S.
TO AMEND THE REGULATIONS FOR SYNODICAL PROCEDURE

BACKGROUND:

At Synod Visalia 2014, the Stated Clerk presented recommended changes to the Regulations of Synodical Procedure (the “Regulations”). Such changes were simply intended to bring the Regulations into conformity with prior Synodical decisions and practices. However, Synod declined to consider those conforming changes because the current Regulations did not specifically authorize the Stated Clerk to bring such recommendations to the floor of Synod. Therefore, Synod directed that those particular updates be brought to Synod through the overture process.

At the September 2015 meeting of Classis Central U.S., an overture was passed requesting Synod 2016 adopt the identical conforming changes to the Regulations which were first proposed by the Stated Clerk at Synod 2014.

OVERTURE:

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 that the following changes be made to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure:

4.5.4 (l) General Responsibilities:

Current wording:

Submit a written report of his work to Synod, as part of the written report of the convening consistory.

Recommended wording:

Submit a written report of his work to Synod, as part of the written report of the convening consistory. This report may include proposed changes to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure to bring them into conformity with prior synodical decisions and practices and shall be included in the Provisional Agenda. Any such proposed conforming changes must be supported by citation to the prior decision or practice.

GROUNDS:

1. This is a timelier and more efficient method to present conforming changes for the churches’ consideration.

2. The Stated Clerk's recommendations would only reflect decisions and practices already made by the churches. Therefore, making necessary conforming changes to the Regulations by way of overture is cumbersome and redundant.
3. Requiring the Stated Clerk to provide citation to prior decisions or practices assures objective accountability and assists review by the churches
4. Requiring the recommended changes be included in the Provisional Agenda provides ample opportunity for the churches to review them prior to Synod.
5. This task is administrative and is best suited to the duties of the Stated Clerk.

Overture #5
OVERTURE TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016
FROM CLASSIS CENTRAL U.S.
TO APPOINT A REVISED CHURCH ORDER COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND:

Our current Church Order has gone through several amendments since the URCNA's first synod in 1996. Those churches which had seen the need to leave the CRCNA still needed a standard of applying God's Word and the confessions to the governing of their newly formed federation. We used the 1934 CRC Church Order as an initial church order (Article 7, Minutes of the Meeting of the Independent Reformed Churches held November 15-16, 1995), but later we formed an original URCNA Church Order (Acts of Synod Lynwood 1996, Art. 24). As such, several areas of this new church order were deliberately changed from the CRCNA church order, specifically sections that could be abused by so-called "higher authorities" like Classis and Synod.

We can be thankful to our God for preserving us these past twenty years using our current Church Order to apply Scriptural principles. By God's grace the Church Order has served us well. It is apparent, however, that in some areas our current Church Order has: 1) sparse and ambiguous content, 2) grammatical inconsistencies, and 3) diverged from historic reformed polity.

JOINT CHURCH ORDER COMMITTEE

Five years later, Synod Escondido 2001 appointed the Joint Church Order (JCO) Committee to work with the Canadian Reformed Churches, assigning the following mandate (Acts of Synod 2001, Art. 45, B.1):

- a. That the current Church Orders of the two federations be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of church government of the Church Order of Dort.
- b. That the CO committee work together with a Canadian Reformed CO committee to develop suitable and agreeable adaptations of the Church Order of Dort, retaining and maintaining its principles, structure, and essential provisions.

The JCO committee has invested much time and effort in examining our Church Order in light of Scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of church government flowing from the standard established by the Church Order of Dort (specifically 1914 CRC Church Order), producing the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO). In our study of this document, we've seen how the concentrated consistency of a committee—called by the consistories of our federation—can produce a work fulsome in content, consistent in grammar, and rich in historical reformed polity.

After years of work, Synod London 2010 accepted "for continued study the PJCO 2010 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches" (Acts of Synod 2010, Art. 41).

And Synod Visalia 2014, the churches suspended the work of the PJCO Committee until such time the URCNA and CanRC enter into the next phase of ecumenical relationship (Acts of Synod 2014, Art. 69, p.57). Given that there is no explicit timeframe for this occur, and given that there is an ongoing present need for revisions of our current Church Order, we propose that

Synod Wyoming appoint a committee with a mandate to develop a recommendation for a Revised Church Order (RCO) to serve the churches of the URCNA.

A REVISED URCNA CHURCH ORDER

A substantial amount of concern has been raised among URC consistories with the PJCO, even though the process of merger has been significantly slowed. The question arises: Why can't we revise our Church Order without an immediate view toward organic union with the Canadian Reformed Churches (or any other ecclesiastical body)? This would be not unlike the direction Synod gave to the Songbook Committee (i.e., effectively discontinuing a joint URC-CanRC songbook, and calling for one to use sooner than any merger)?

We believe that the United Reformed and Canadian Reformed federations have much to offer one another, but we also believe the churches of both federations would be better served *at this time* by removing the pressure created by developing and proposing a *joint* church order.

We've worked well over a decade for a Church Order (i.e., PJCO) we won't be using any time soon, why not take those labors and focus them on our current federation. In other words, why not take the original agreed-upon mandate a committee has had for nearly fifteen years (i.e., the JCO for nearly 75% of our federations existence) and take out any reference to a merger?

We do see wisdom in improving our current URCNA Church Order with some fruit of the PJCO Committee's work. Therefore, we propose that a new committee with the mandate to create a recommendation of a revision for our current Church Order for the Consistories to review. This committee would have a mandate that is similar to Synod Escondido's mandate, but without any particular merger in view

OVERTURE:

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod Wyoming 2016:

1. To appoint a Revised Church Order Committee, with seven nominations from the synodical advisory committee assigned to this overture.
2. To mandate the RCO Committee to focus on revising the current URCNA Church Order for immediate use within our federation, namely:
 - a. That the current Church Order of the URCNA continue to be evaluated in the light of the Scriptural and confessional principles and patterns of church government expressed in the Church Order of Dort;
 - b. That the RCO Committee develop a suitable and agreeable adaptation of the Church Order of Dort, retaining and maintaining its principles, structure, and essential provisions; and
 - c. That the RCO Committee present a recommendation for a Revised Church Order to serve the churches of the URCNA.
3. To mandate the RCO Committee to prepare its recommendation for a Revised Church Order for the URCNA – with a view to presenting the final recommendation to a future synod for consideration of adoption – using the following protocol provisions:
 - a. That the RCO Committee be authorized to receive, collate, and evaluate all official communications regarding its work in developing an RCO recommendation, and use that communication also in formulating its recommendation of the RCO.
 - b. That the RCO Committee inform the churches soon that official communications regarding the development of its RCO recommendation proceed from and through consistories to the RCO Committee. After a first draft of the proposed Revised Church

Order is released, then official communications will be received from consistories via classical overture (cf. our practice of changes to proposed hymnal).

- c. That the RCO Committee be directed to distribute to the churches its recommendation for the Revised Church Order; along with a 3-column comparison incorporating the Church Order of Dort, the current URCNA Church Order, and its recommendation for a Revised Church Order.
- d. That the RCO Committee be directed to compile a list of all official communications received after Synod 2016, together with a summary of the content of each communication and an explanation of Committee action relating to the communication; which report is to be sent to the churches in the committee's synodical report.

FOUNDATIONS:

1. The Need for Revision: It is apparent from a perusal of classical and synodical minutes that much time is expended on making changes to our Church Order – a fact that demonstrates our Church Order's need of revision.

There are areas where improvement is needed, as the PJCO Committee has ably shown—yet with unneeded concessions. For instance, our churches are convinced that “the church is governed by elders, not by broader assemblies” (URCNA Church Order, Foundational Principle #5). Therefore, there has been a good deal of concern regarding provisions of the PJCO which would seem to require consistories to cede to broader assemblies authority which now is exercised by elders at the local level (e.g., the determination of which hymns may be sung in worship). Moreover, a Revised Church Order would necessarily neither inhibit progress toward a merger with the CanRC (or any other ecclesiastical body), nor accelerate the process.

2. Sparse and Ambiguous Content: Understandably our Church Order does not address everything, but there are areas that could use attention. What about specifically working together in church planting? What about credentials for pulpit supply (e.g., nothing prohibits a Methodist minister from preaching in our pulpits, but we cannot allow a Reformed man [even URC] to obtain a license to exhort if he is not perusing ordination)? Are we satisfied with the sparse due process provisions that give scant guidance to individuals and churches in preparing for, and adjudicating, appeals? Years ago, a revised discipline section was overtured to Classis Central, but denied in order to wait on the PJCO. Synod Visalia acted on overtures seeking guidance with membership issues that are unaddressed by our current Church Order. These and other examples demonstrate that we have a need for more specificity.

3. Excellence in English: There are several inconsistencies which could be eliminated by a committee digesting the material and making recommendations. For instance, the use of titles: sometimes we read "Minister of the Word" and merely "minister" other times (cf. CO Article 6 (2X), 7 (2X), 8, 10, 11 (2X), 14, 27 (2X), 32, 40, 48, 61, 63 [which should say "minister(s)"], and appendix 5.2.d renders the variation "minister of the Word and sacraments"). Additionally, consider CO Article 24: congregations do not meet together in broader assemblies.

Some other inconsistencies and concerns in the present Church Order:

- i. Article 27: contains a run-on sentence.
- ii. Article 38: fails to mention sacraments.

- iii. Article 42: fails to mention announcement to congregation and time frame of such announcement for adult baptism.
- iv. Article 43: fails to mention time frame of announcement for profession.
- v. Article 44: mentions "lawful" objections when "valid" objections are in view.
- vi. Article 48: understands that weddings are a family matter, but this is not mentioned.
- vii. Article 50: fails to mention date of birth.
- viii. Article 57: mentions neighboring churches when consistories meant.
- ix. Article 58: fails to mention a timespan.
- x. Article 62: fosters questions: Is there private schism? What is simony? Is there desertion of office that is not faithless?

A brief perusal of the PJCO will demonstrate how these matters of grammar and consistency (even formatting) can be improved.

4. Historic Reformed Polity: Understandably, as a young federation stinging from abuse, we removed and altered provisions from the original Church Order of Dort that seemed to permit hierarchical abuses. Have we unwittingly excised items out of the historic CRC church orders (e.g., 1914 and 1934), which our Reformed forefathers (and other confessionally Reformed bodies of NAPARC) see as part of the well-being of a Reformed federation? We should compare our Church Order to the standards of Scripture, the confessions, and historic Reformed polity in the spirit of *semper reformanda* (always reforming).

5. Saving Time and Energy: In creating a Revised Church Order for the URCNA we would be better stewards of time – time spent already in the fruitful labors of the committee, and time that will be saved by the Consistories passing an agreed upon revision of our current Church Order, instead of making many obvious and singular changes. This overture would allow us to adopt some improvements suggested by the PJCO, while allowing us to reject other suggestions that are presently foreign to the life of our federation.

Moreover, a Revised Church Order committee—mandated by our Consistories could consistently make one recommendation, directed by the communications of the Consistories, to discuss as Consistories. This unified proposal would be preferable to the multiple unrelated overtures making their way through the classes. It should be understood, of course, that any Church Order recommendation would need to be passed by the Consistories, and could at any time, be overtured for change.

Overture #6
OVERTURE TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016
FROM CLASSIS CENTRAL U.S.
TO ADOPT REVISIONS OF THE PROPOSED LITURGICAL FORMS

BACKGROUND:

In November of 2015, the Liturgical Forms Committee distributed a report of its work to the churches, along with electronic copies of the liturgical forms it has prepared for use in a new songbook for the United Reformed Churches in North America.

We appreciate the work the committee has completed to date. This committee was entrusted with a substantial task, and it has tackled that task with faithfulness. Of course, it would be astounding for such a committee to complete its work without at least a few disagreements arising with regard to its decisions and conclusions. Therefore we want to assert clearly, from the start, that our proposal is not intended as a rebuke of the members of this committee. To the contrary, we thank them for the hard work they have undertaken and the good faith that has marked their work.

However, we do have a few concerns with the liturgical forms proposal that was distributed in November. We believe it would be most fitting for these matters to be addressed by our broader assemblies, rather than asking a committee to make final decisions on contested questions concerning our liturgical forms.

We have divided the overture, below, into four sections, each addressing a distinct concern regarding a form or forms in the committee's proposal. We would encourage the broader assemblies to discuss and vote on these portions of the overture *seriatim* (individually).

OVERTURE:

Classis Central US overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to adopt the following revisions to the Liturgical Forms Proposal which was submitted to the churches in November 2015.

REVISION 1 – ALL FORMS

We ask Synod Wyoming 2016 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to revise all of the forms to ensure that pronouns referring to God in our liturgical forms are always capitalized.

GROUNDS:

1. The Liturgical Forms Committee notes in its November 2015 report that it has wrestled with this request and has had dialogue with consistories concerning it. Given that fact, it would be wise for the churches to decide this editorial detail together, at their broadest assembly.
2. In capitalizing the pronouns referring to God, we demonstrate an explicit desire to honor God, even in the way we print words that refer to Him.
3. The liturgical forms currently in use among our churches, contained within the 1976 Psalter Hymnal, employ pronouns that are capitalized. Maintaining as much continuity as possible with our current songbook is desirable, in order to promote a warm welcome for our new songbook.

REVISION 2 – INFANT BAPTISM, FORMS 1 AND 2

We ask Synod Wyoming 2016 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to amend *Form Number 1 – Baptism of Infants* and *Form 2 – Baptism of Children* by changing the second question to the parents to read: “Do you acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarized in the articles of the Christian faith and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?” (This replaces “summarized in the Apostles’ Creed” with “summarized in the articles of the Christian faith.”)

FOUNDATIONS:

1. Even though the Apostles’ Creed is a wonderful and true summary of our faith, it is not the “complete doctrine of salvation” – as is evidenced by the subscription of our churches to two other creeds and three confessions alongside of the Apostles’ Creed.
2. As the parents teach their children about the Christian faith, it is necessary to go far beyond the limits of the Apostles’ Creed to prepare them for full participation in the church through profession of faith.
3. When these children seek to profess their faith before the church, they will be asked: “Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, *and in the articles of the Christian faith*, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God to continue steadfastly in this profession?” (This is quoted from the proposed forms for Profession of Faith.) We should call on the parents to prepare them for the fullness of what they will be expected to confess.
4. This change would provide uniformity in all of the forms. As submitted to the churches in November 2015, the two Forms for Profession of Faith, the Form for Household Baptism, and the Form for Reception of Families all ask: “Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, *and in the articles of the Christian faith*, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?”
5. Since the parents have publicly professed their faith by attesting to the fact that they believe the doctrines summarized by *the articles of the Christian faith* – which we take to include the Three Forms of Unity – it seems unwise and inconsistent to now to limit their promise to instructing their children in the truths of *the Apostles’ Creed*.

REVISION 3 – SHORT FORM FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER, FORM 1

We ask Synod Wyoming 2016 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to revise the instruction for partaking of the wine to read: “The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.”

FOUNDATIONS:

1. This instruction – in the form of: “take, drink, remember, and believe” – is used in both of the long proposed forms for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, as well as in our existing Form 2 and Form 3.
2. The addition of the phrase, “drink all of it,” seems to have been an attempt to more fully echo the words of Jesus. However, it seems to be an attempted modernization of the

rendering found in our existing Form 1 – “Take, drink ye all of it, remember, and believe” – which itself reflects the KJV and ASV Bible translations of Matt. 26:27. However, “drink ye all of it” is properly modernized to, “drink of it, all of you” (ESV). In other words, “all” (Grk.: *παντες*) refers to those to whom the drink was given – not to the object that is consumed. In no Bible passage or church form are the disciples instructed to “drink all of it,” as though it would be wrong to leave some of the wine in the glass.

REVISION 4 – FORM FOR READMISSION, FORM 1 AND FORM 2

We ask Synod Wyoming 2016 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to revise the “Declaration” section of the form by replacing “only” (in the phrase, “through his only Son Jesus Christ”) with “only-begotten.”

GROUND:

This revision accords with what we confess in Lord’s Day 13, QA 33, of our Catechism:

Q. Why is He called God’s “only begotten Son” when we also are God’s children?

A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God. We, however, are adopted children of God – adopted by grace through Christ.

Overture #7

OVERTURE TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016 FOR STUDY COMMITTEE ON CULTURE OF PEACE

BACKGROUND:

In recent years an increasing number of members within our beloved federation have either witnessed or personally experienced visible conflicts of varying types between clergy and consistory, consistory and congregation, pulpit and pew, pastor and parishioner, and between members. Numerous Article 11 separations are just one of the evidences of these unresolved conflicts. Although the reasons underlying the conflicts are varied, the manner in which members of the body of Christ handle conflict must be consistent if God is to be glorified and damage to individuals, families, congregations, and the federation is to be prevented. The consistent manner in which we handle conflict must come from learning the principles derived from Scripture to attain the understanding and the wisdom necessary to apply them to each specific situation encountered. Through the divinely inspired medium of Special Revelation, God not only communicates with us, but also provides for us **the principles of communication** which are necessary to live in harmonious communion with Him and each other.

OVERTURE:

Therefore, Classis Michigan overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to establish a study committee with a mandate to study how to promote a 'culture of peace' within the URCNA Federation based on applicable Bible based resources for conflict resolution.

GROUNDS:

- 1) Our URCNA federation is experiencing a growing problem with unresolved conflict as evident in the nature and tone of the various appeals, Article 11 separations and church divisions.
- 2) God will be more fully glorified and the URCNA federation will benefit greatly from training its pastors, elders, other church leaders, and the general membership on how to prevent and resolve conflict in a biblical manner as well as promote genuine reconciliation.
- 3) The leadership of our churches is called to lead those God has placed under their care, which includes being and setting an example of seeking to resolve conflict in a humble and God-glorifying manner.
- 4) In the midst of conflict there is a temptation for everyone in their various positions and roles within family, church and the federation to either neglect or make improper (short-sided) applications of the instruction given in Matthew 5:23-24, Matthew 18:15-16, etc., along with associated scriptural principles incorporated in the URCNA Church Order.

Overture #8
FROM CLASSIS ONTARIO EAST
TO AMEND ARTICLES 17 & 19 OF PJCO TO EMPHASIZE THE CENTRALITY OF
PRAYER IN AN OFFICE-BEARER'S WORK

BACKGROUND

These articles describe the duties of elders and deacons. Articles 2, 14 & 15 of our current Church Order places the continuation in prayer as the first responsibility of ministers, elders and deacons. Articles 17 & 19 of the PJCO list persistent prayer as one of the duties belonging to the elders and deacons but do not accord it the same prominence as the first duty to be listed.

It seems that we would do well to amend these two articles in order to highlight the central importance of prayer in the carrying out of this work. All the other tasks are important but they must be undertaken with continual prayer. The ordering of duties has important pedagogical outcomes and giving prominence to prayer is an excellent way to bring to mind this central duty of elders and deacons.

The Church Order of Dort (1619)

Article 3 of the PJCO follows Article 16 of the Church Order of Dort (1619) in its placement of continuation in prayer as the first duty of a minister of the Word. Elders are reminded in Article 23 of the Church Order of Dort that they too share this responsibility to continue in prayer and deacons are instructed to prayerfully transact the business pertaining to their office.

The URCNA Church Order (6th Edition)

Drawing on the wisdom of our forefathers in the faith, Articles 2, 14 & 15 make clear that every office-bearer is to continue in prayer. This is repeated at the beginning of each Article in order to emphasize its centrality to the faithful carrying out of the duties of an office-bearer.

The Canadian Reformed Church Order

The duties of the minister include the responsibility “publicly to call upon the Name of God in behalf of the whole congregation”. The duties of elders and deacons described in Articles 22 & 23 do not refer to prayer.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario East overtures Synod to amend Articles 17 & 19 by:

- beginning each article with the phrase “The duties belonging to the office of [elder/deacon] consist of continuing in prayer and ...”
- removing the phrase “persist in praying for the congregation” from Article 17 and “continuing in prayer” from Article 19

GROUNDS:

1. The amended articles will make it clear that the first duty of every office-bearer is to continue in prayer (Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:5-7; Colossians 4:2; James 5:14-16).
2. Article 3 provides precedent for this prioritization of prayer in the description of the duties of the Minister of the Word.
3. A focus on prayer at the head of the list of duties of office-bearers is useful for instruction and consistent with our understanding of the nature of exercising one's office in humble reliance upon the Spirit of God as servants of the Son of God doing the will of the Father.

Adopted at Classis Ontario East on March 26, 2015

Overture #9

CLASSIS ONTARIO EAST OVERTURES SYNOD TO CHANGE PJCO ARTICLE 32(A)

BACKGROUND:

We are currently bound by Article 34 of the URCNA Church Order (6th edition). This article deals with ecumenical relations with Reformed congregations outside of the federation at the local level. Its equivalent in the PJCO is Article 32(A).

PJCO Article 32(A) introduces the obligation to receive the “approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations [with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship] progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper”.

The requirement of classical approbation is introduced in Article 32 with a purpose clause: “Since local ecumenical relations aim at federative unity...” This clause speaks to a basic inconsistency: if the aim is federative unity, is it not necessary to have federational approbation? Why is the classis authorized to exercise oversight of this if the aim is federative unity?

The introduction of this purpose clause is a telling sign that the procedure outlined in Article 32 requires a defense. In our current church order, very few articles have purpose clauses. The purpose clause in Article 32 must be assessed to determine if it is a legitimate ground for the expectation of classical approbation of local ecumenical activities which progress to preaching exchanges and fellowship at the Lord's Supper. In our assessment, the path to federative unity is already well defined in our CERCU guidelines and other articles in the PJCO. We do not need to add requirements of approval-seeking as further safeguards or fail safes for our churches.

Our current Church Order specifically mentions “occasional pulpit exchanges, table fellowship, as well as other means of manifesting unity” as activities which “need not be reported to classis”.

The requirement to seek the approbation of classis for preaching exchanges and fellowship at the Lord's Table in PJCO Article 32 (A) represents a very real change in the structure of authority in our federation. The responsibility and authority of the local consistory, as articulated in our Principles of Reformed Church Government, is at stake here. Preaching and the Lord's Supper are matters which are properly under the oversight of the local consistory.

In 2001, a recommendation was made by CERCU to suspend this portion of our Church Order in order to facilitate the unity process with the Canadian Reformed Churches. At that time, in an overture by Classis Southern Ontario, the churches were asked not to adopt the recommendation. Pertinent as background of this overture is the 4th ground which stated:

“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.”
(*Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 173, cf. p. 14)

Requiring the approbation of classis for activities which rightly fall under the oversight of the consistory is an unnecessary binding of the local consistory. We recognize that we voluntarily bind ourselves together in federative unity (c.f. *Bound Yet Free* by Dr. Jack DeJong). As a result, the specific form of that binding is a judgement call for us to make and the question of the necessity of this clause in Article 32(A) emerges as the key factor in discussion here. There doesn't appear to be a compelling reason to bind ourselves in this way.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario East overtures Synod to change Article 32(A) of the PJCO to strike the sentence which states:

“Since local ecumenical relations aim at federative unity, each church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper”.

GROUNDS:

1. Article 32(A) introduces a change in our expectations of one another concerning oversight of the pulpit and the Lord's Table and this is an unnecessary limitation of the authority of the local consistory.
2. The purpose clause and its focus on *federative* unity is inconsistent with the requirement of *classical* approbation. Local expressions of local unity logically fall under the authority of the local consistory. This is a principle that our current Church Order recognizes in its Article 34.
3. Article 32(A) is overly prescriptive on a matter that the consistory is competent and able to handle at the local level. The URCNA Church Order (6th edition) makes it clear that the local consistory is free to take these actions without the requirement to report on it, let alone seek the approbation of classis.
4. The proposed language introduces a requirement (without a strong rationale) that is in conflict with the 5th, 6th, 10th, and 14th Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government.
5. The consistory exercises its authority over the calling and structuring of worship services (including special services) without the requirement of classical approbation (PJCO Articles 34 & 35). Arguably the oversight of the pulpit and the table fellowship is a matter of equal importance and sensitivity. The PJCO upholds the authority of the local consistory over the worship service but limits the authority of the local consistory over who may preach and who may commune at the Lord's Table.
6. The main point of Article 32 governing local ecumenical relations is still addressed in the changed Article 32(A) and suitably explained even after the clause in question is excised.
7. There doesn't appear to be a compelling reason to bind ourselves in this way.

PJCO Article 32 (A)

Ecumenical Relations

A. Local ecumenical relations

The churches of the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Reformed Confessions. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. ~~Since local ecumenical relations aim at federative unity, each church must receive the approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.~~

For Reference and comparison:

URCNA Church Order (6th Edition) Article 34

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

Overture #10
CLASSIS ONTARIO EAST
OVERTURES SYNOD
TO CHANGE ARTICLE 36 OF PJCO

BACKGROUND:

PCJO Article 36 deals with the psalms and hymns that are to be sung in our corporate worship services. PJCO Article 36 permits the singing of "hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the TFU, provided they are approved by general synod." This is a change from our current practice that says hymns may be sung "provided they are approved by the consistory" (URCNA C.O. Article 39).

This overture proposes 'new' language for PJCO Article 36 in an effort to find common ground between two different perspectives on the question of approving and using hymns in the corporate worship of our churches. This language was recommended by two members of the Joint Church Order Committee in 2007 in the Minority Report of the Joint Church Order Committee received by Synod Schererville (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 34).

Synod 2007

The Joint Church Order Committee submitted a JCO that spelled out the requirement for synodical approval of the hymns which may be sung. However, there was a minority report that accompanied the committee's report arguing against this requirement and for the approval of consistories rather than synod.

As the Joint Church Order Committee explained in their report to Synod 2007, "It was the question of Psalms and Hymns, however, on which we could not come to unanimous consent – though we tried diligently to do just that. It was the last clause: 'provided they are approved by general synod' that proved to be the stumbling block. A minority report on that issue is attached." (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 227) The Minority Report explained that the difficulty with PJCO Article 36 arises from "a difference of perspective on a very specific matter." (p. 284)

Synod 2007 – Action Taken

The Acts of Synod 2007 offer an insight into the will of the assembly at that time. A motion to "present to the churches without prejudice both the majority and minority reports regarding Article 35 (sic)" was defeated. Instead, a motion to "express its strong preference for the minority report regarding Article 35 (sic) of the PJCO" was adopted (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 34).

It is worth noting, however, that the Majority Report was not a part of the Agenda or Acts of Synod and it wasn't until Synod 2010 that the Majority Report was submitted to Synod. As the PJCO Report explained, "The joint committee regrets that the general synods of 2007 received a "minority report" without also receiving a "majority report" that would have explained the rationale for the majority position. The joint committee therefore decided to ensure that in the submissions to the general synods of 2010 the majority report would be included and the minority report would once again also be submitted." They also summarized the matter by saying "While not entirely consistent, many Canadian Reformed Churches expressed strong

support for the provision that the lyrical renditions of the Psalms and hymns be “approved by general synod,” and many United Reformed Churches expressed strong disagreement.” (*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 319)

Synod 2010 – No Action Taken

At Synod 2010, the delegates took no further action on the recommendations of the Majority and Minority Reports because “the PJCO 2010 has been received and accepted for continued study.” Delegates were reminded that “it is still subject to change by way of overture.” (*Acts of Synod 2010*, Art 45, p. 27)

Synod 2012 – Leaving “PJCO 36 As Is”

In its report to Synod 2012, the PJCO Committee (URCNA) explained that the Canadian Reformed Churches had directed the committee to uphold the Majority Report view which requires synodical approval of hymns which may be sung. The comments on Article 36 offer a few observations and then state by way of conclusion, “we decided to leave PJCO 36 as is.” The churches were again reminded that changes to the PJCO should come by way of overture.

As a result, the view that Synod 2007 expressed a “strong preference” for has never been included in the PJCO. In fact, the Committee Comments on PJCO 2012 state that “Synod Burlington 2010 agrees with the current wording of PJCO 36, and therefore may have hoped that with this directive the minority report would be taken off the table.” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 304) To date there have not been any overtures (that we know of) that have specifically addressed Article 36 in favour of or opposition to either view. Thus, PJCO Article 36 remains as is.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario East overtures Synod to change Article 36 of the PJCO to read:

“The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. In the worship services, the congregation shall sing faithful lyrical renderings of the Psalms, and hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of Scripture in harmony with the Three Forms of Unity, provided they are approved by the consistory in accord with a synodically adopted standard.”

GROUNDS:

1. “We disagree that the general synod needs to approve all music sung in the churches. Rather, we are convinced that our singing ought to contribute to the unity of the newly formed federation by the use of a synodically approved set of standards for music which shall be applied on the local level by the wise decision of the consistory of each church.” (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 286)
2. The requirement of approval of psalms and hymns by General Synod has a long history in the Reformed churches that we stand in line with. We accept that this is a part of our history and yet we argue that the requirement is not sacrosanct or biblically required. As

we discuss the mechanics of our voluntary binding together in a federation of churches, we are at liberty to propose alternatives to the past ways of regulating the churches. On this matter, the URCNA has done this, without harm or outcry, since her inception.

3. The URCNA has been well served by the Church Order's recognition of consistorial oversight and approval of the hymns which may be sung in the worship services. We find no evidence that this is being abused (ie. no citations in church visitor reports, no disputes or overtures on this subject).
4. "To mandate the general synod, rather than the local consistory, to approve of all music used in the worship of the churches is rather inconsistent with what we expect of our consistories. In Article 33: The Regular Worship Services, the Proposed Church Order states that the "consistory shall regulate the worship services," one item of which is the singing of the congregation." "Removing the task of approving music from the consistory's responsibility, as is indicated in the Proposed Church Order, conveys the idea that the local consistory cannot and should not be entrusted with this responsibility." (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 287)
5. "To remove from the local consistory the responsibility of approving the churches' music, and to place this in the hands of the general synod, effectively denies the churches any opportunity to use any other music than that which is contained in the current song book of the federation." (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 287) This is not to say that there will never be other hymns which are approved by General Synod but it does suggest that the process will be onerous, time consuming, and rarely attempted. Synod is unlikely to approve the *Book of Psalms for Singing*, the *Trinity Hymnal*, or the various supplements that our churches have produced and this would present a new (and arguably unnecessary) restriction on the consistories in the URCNA that currently make use of these resources.
6. "A number of our churches are located in areas where people do not all speak English, or who communicate better in another language. To mandate that the local church cannot use any other songs than those approved in the English language hymnal, effectively and sadly conveys an attitude that we are not interested in having any other than English speaking Reformed Christians as part of our federation. To suggest that the federation will produce a hymnal in various languages is impractical and costly. It is much more practical to permit each local consistory, which is sensitive to the local needs of other cultures, to approve of songs appropriate for these congregations." (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p.286-287) This is much more than an exception that proves the rule – it is a reality for quite a number of our churches and mission works and ought to be a matter that we address by recognizing the suitability of local consistories for this task.
7. The synodically adopted standards for the work of the Psalter Hymnal Committee provided the Committee and our consistories with a clear and accessible summary of what we believe is fitting for songs sung in the worship service. We have these standards in place already and they have aided the discussion about the hymn proposal. Many churches used these standards to evaluate and provide feedback on the inclusion and exclusion of certain hymns. This is good evidence that the slight modification of our present URCNA Church Order Article 39 to include the words "in accord with a synodically adopted standard" will help the local consistory in its task of approving psalms and hymns for the worship services.

Overture #11
CLASSIS ONTARIO EAST
OVERTURES SYNOD
TO AMEND ARTICLE 40 OF PJCO

BACKGROUND:

This article deals with public profession of faith. Article 40 has undergone a substantial revision between the 2010 PJCO and the 2012 PJCO.

The PJCO Committee Comments on PJCO 2012 explained that Article 40 was changed in light of the fact that

“A number of churches properly expressed weaknesses with the PJCO 2010 version of this article that needed addressing:

- It does not have the character of a Church Order article but rather the nuance of an explanatory paragraph;
- The terminology of “appropriate liturgical form” should be replaced with “synodically adopted form” for the sake of consistency;
- “Those who wish to profess their faith” is not the best terminology;
- Specifying the Three Forms of Unity here would fit with other PJCO articles;

While considering these matters we also questioned the terminology of “those who wish to profess their faith shall be examined by the consistory...” Especially in the context of the Church Order, the word reminds of ecclesiastical examinations for entering the ministry. This all contributed to the new wording of PJCO 40.” (*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp 304-305)

A number of key phrases were removed from Article 40. The phrases “come to years of understanding”, “shall be encouraged”, “public profession of faith in Jesus Christ”, “accepted into full communion in the congregation”, and “shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper” were all removed. Article 40 has been stripped down and a fairly considerable amount of material has been taken away.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario East overtures Synod to change Article 40 of the PJCO to read:

“Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who desire to profess their faith shall be evaluated by the consistory regarding their motives, their knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity, and their walk of life. Their

public profession of faith shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcement to the congregation and with the use of the adopted liturgical form. Thereby baptized members are accepted into full communion in the congregation and shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.”

GROUNDINGS:

1. The PJCO Committee's changes to Article 40 have removed valuable parts of the Church Order's instructions concerning profession of faith. These phrases give necessary guidance to the consistory about who is to be encouraged to make profession of faith and what the consequences of that profession of faith are. This overture seeks to return these phrases to Article 40 so that the churches have a more thorough understanding of our duties and responsibilities in this regard.
2. Consistories in the URCNA have benefitted from the guidance and instruction contained in our current Church Order and it would be a loss to have it stricken from the Church Order.
3. The instruction to encourage baptized members to make public profession of faith is very fitting in a church order article and it is not a 'nuance' or explanation.
4. The description of those 'who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to years of understanding' is consistent with Belgic Confession Art. 35 and it provides necessary guidance to consistories who are evaluating those who come before them. This type of instruction is consistent with the purpose of our Church Order to order and rule our activities as churches in light of God's Word and our Confessions.
5. The description of the privileges and responsibilities of members (full communion and the obligation to persevere in the fellowship of the church) are not a 'nuance' or mere explanation but are rather an essential part of profession of faith in its full sense. This type of guidance is valuable to consistories and it gives elders another way to exhort members who are delinquent in their responsibilities as we show the close connection between profession of faith and its ensuing privileges and responsibilities.
6. While it may be that churches commented that Article 40 “does not have the character of a Church Order article”, this is more a judgment of tone and style and less a judgement of content. We believe the *content* of this Article is necessary and therefore it should be included in the Church Order in Article 40.
7. The improvements that the PJCO identified in its correspondence with the churches as it pertains to the 'appropriate' vs. 'approved' liturgical forms, 'wishing' vs. 'desiring' to make profession of faith, and 'doctrine' vs. 'knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity' are an improvement on the language that was used in PJCO 2010 and therefore are upheld in this proposed revision to Article 40.

<p><i>PJCO 2010 Article 40</i></p> <p><i>(URCNA Church Order (6th edition): Article 43)</i></p> <p>Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life, and their public profession of faith shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcement to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby baptized members are accepted into full communion in the congregation and shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.</p>	<p><i>PJCO 2012 Article 40</i></p> <p>Those who desire to profess their faith and thereby be admitted to the Lord's Supper shall be evaluated by the consistory regarding their motives, their knowledge of the Three Forms of Unity, and their walk of life. This profession of faith shall occur after proper announcements to the congregation and with the use of the adopted liturgical form.</p>
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Overture #12
OVERTURE TO SYNOD
FROM CLASSIS ONTARIO EAST
TO AMEND THE TITLE OF ARTICLE 54 OF PJCO TO READ
“EQUALITY OF OFFICE-BEARERS”

BACKGROUND

Article 54 deals with parity among the churches and office bearers. It has the title "No Lording it Over". This title lacks grammatical balance and it is unlike the other titles in its style and tone. The title appears to be derived from 1 Peter 5:3 or possibly from 2 Corinthians 1:24 or Mark 10:42-44.

Van Dellen and Monsma give the title “Equality of Office-Bearers” to Article 17 of the CRC Church Order (1914) and this sums up well the contents of Article 54 of the PJCO as well.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario East overtures Synod to amend Article 54 by replacing the title “No Lording it Over” with “Equality of Office-bearers”.

GROUNDS:

1. The current title is grammatically incomplete because it lacks a subject (ie. “No Lording it Over *Others*”) and it is stylistically awkward.
2. The proposed title expresses with greater clarity what Article 54 is about.
3. The proposed title conforms to the naming pattern of all of the other articles (ie. brief, explanatory)
4. The proposed title adequately covers both concerns in the Article, namely the equality of churches (represented by their office-bearers) and the equality of office-bearers within each church.
5. No other article in the PJCO makes use of a partial citation of Scripture as its title.

Adopted at Classis Ontario East on March 26, 2015.

Overture #13

OVERTURE ON UNION WITH THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

BACKGROUND:

1. URCNA was formed as a separate denomination in 1996; only 18 years ago and we are thus a very young federation.
2. From very early in the existence of the URCNA there have been efforts to pursue both unity and union with the Canadian Reformed Churches.
3. The URCNA presently enjoys Phase II Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.
4. Efforts to move forward to full unity have been met with hesitancy and resistance by a significant majority of members and consistories in the URCNA (CERCU Report to Synod Visalia 2014, Provisional Agenda p. 77.)
5. Notwithstanding this resistance CERCU has continued to pursue full unification with the Canadian Reformed Churches culminating in a CERCU's proposal to Synod Visalia 2014 that Synod Visalia encourage CERCU in its plans to recommend to Synod Wyoming 2016 that the URCNA proceed to Phase Three Step A of church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches.
6. Synod Visalia 2014 voted to table indefinitely CERCU's proposal.

OVERTURE:

Classis Pacific Northwest overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to direct CERCU to discontinue all further action, advancement, processes, efforts or steps towards unification with the Canadian Reformed Churches and specifically advancement to Phase Three, Step A.

FOUNDATIONS:

1. This Overture is appropriate because this matter cannot be settled in any narrower assembly, Church Order, Article 25.
2. By CERCU's own advice, two-thirds of the federation does not approve of unification with the Canadian Reformed Churches and is resistant to CERCU's proceedings. Provisional Agenda, Page 77, Synod Visalia 2014
3. The URCNA's current Phase II status of unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches is altogether satisfactory and effective and no compelling need to proceed to total union is presented.
4. No cogent affirmative case for pursuing union has been made by CERCU.
5. The process of pursuing union with the Canadian Reformed churches has been significantly distracting and has drawn important attention and resources from other critical matters such as missions, evangelism and the very unity that we now do share and appreciate with the Canadian Reformed Churches
6. Phase II Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches presently satisfies biblical requirements for pursuing Christian unity.
7. The URCNA federation is still very young and continues to finish and perfect within its own broader assemblies the processes of complete and effective union in matters such as improvement of the current church order, liturgical forms and the songbook among other issues.

8. The current status of unity, i.e. Phase II that the URCNA has with federations such as the OPC and RPCNA is sufficient and satisfactory for all present needs and concerns and remaining in Phase II with Canadian Reformed Churches is workable, practicable and efficient and has heretofore had entirely satisfactory results.

9. Staying in Phase II for the foreseeable future will in no way prejudice later initiatives to advance unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Overture #14

OVERTURE ON SPEECHES BY FRATERNAL DELEGATES

BACKGROUND:

At nearly every meeting of our Synod there arises an element of frustration over fraternal delegates who give overly long and unhelpful speeches to our delegates. At Synod 2014, for example, one of these delegates spoke for over 30 minutes.

OVERTURE:

Classis Pacific Northwest overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to ask our United Reformed Churches of North America Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) and our Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) to:

1. Draw up clear, well-defined, and appropriate guidelines for speeches given by these fraternal delegates.
2. Present those guidelines to each fraternal delegate who wishes to verbally address our Synod, explaining to them how much time they have for their speech and how they will be notified when that time is up.

At minimum these guidelines will include an appropriate time limit for such talks (five to, at most, ten minutes), appropriate topics on which to speak, and any other guidelines deemed helpful by our ecumenical relations committees.

GROUNDS:

1. While many fraternal delegates do well in their talks, regularly at Synod someone abuses their privilege of addressing the body thereby hurting their cause more than helping it; therefore, such guidelines will help to prevent these abuses.
2. Our own fraternal delegates are given such guidelines by other church federations when they address their meetings; therefore, such guidelines are not unreasonable.
3. The limited time together that Synod has is very valuable; therefore, such guidelines will help to protect this resource.

Overture #15

OVERTURE ON PROPOSED JOINT CHURCH ORDER

BACKGROUND:

The Proposed Joint Church Order, (hereafter referred to as the PJCO), was submitted to Synod London 2010 by the PJCO Committee for comment and evaluation. Article 41 of the Acts of Synod 2010 includes the following decision: "That Synod accept for continued study the PJCO 2010 as the Church Order for a united federation of the United Reformed Churches in North America and the Canadian Reformed Churches."

At Synod 2012, refinements to the original documents were received and referred to the churches for evaluation. Special note was made at Synod 2012 that no comments had been received from the churches in the intervening time.

During the meeting of Classis Pacific Northwest at Lynden on October 16-17, 2012, a committee was appointed to evaluate the PJCO and propose such changes as are necessary so that the PJCO, so modified, could replace our current Church Order. At the meeting of Classis Pacific Northwest at Ripon on February 25, 2014 a report was received from this committee asking that the work be discontinued and declaring that the committee had fulfilled its mandate. In requesting dissolution, this committee found "... that one of the principles of church government that is especially dear to the churches of our federation is that "the church is governed by elders, not by broader assemblies" (Foundational Principles, 5). Yet, in going through the PJCO we discovered, again and again, that our particular expressions of this principle are consistently being violated". To substantiate this finding the committee noted the following instances:

- Article 4A - the churches shall maintain a seminary
- Article 4B - Licensure by classis
- Article 4C - Candidacy by the classis with concurring advice from deputies
- Article 5 - advice of counselor appointed by classis
- Article 6 - classis shall ensure the good order of the calling process
- Article 9 - concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod
- Article 12 - classis may extend his eligibility for call
- Article 5, 6, 14, 38, 52, 53 - synodically approved liturgical form (rather than "appropriate liturgical form")
- Article 25E - delegation to Regional Synod & Synod
- Article 27 - Counselors
- Article 28-29 - Regional Synods
- Article 36 - songs need to be approved by General Synod
- Article 37 - admission to the pulpit

OVERTURE:

Classis Pacific Northwest overtures the Synod Wyoming 2016 of the United Reformed Churches to declare that the Proposed Joint Church Order (a church order proposed for use in the prospective union of the United Reformed Churches with the Canadian Reformed Churches) is unusable for that purpose.

FOUNDATIONS:

The church order we currently use or any future church order which we might adopt, cannot so thoroughly vacate a principle (principle #5) that we hold dear, a principle which we find thoroughly scriptural in its foundation. We note specifically:

1. The Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government of the URCNA are derived from Holy Scripture.
2. The church order that is currently in use by the URCNA closely follows these Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government.
3. Any future church order which we might adopt, either within the United Reformed Churches or in a proposed federation with other orthodox reformed churches must also closely follow these Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government.
4. The Proposed Joint Church Order with the Canadian Reformed Church does not closely follow these Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government.

For greater certainty, Principle #5 is quoted below:

5. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national or regional offices to His church. The office of elder (presbyter/episkopos) is clearly local in authority and function; thus, Reformed church government is presbyterial, since the church is governed by elders, not by broader assemblies. Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Titus 1:5.

Overture #16

RE: SHORTENED FORM FOR LORD'S SUPPER

Background:

In preparation for our new Trinity Psalter Hymnal, our liturgical forms committee has been working on updating forms for use in the churches. One of these forms is the shortened form intended for use by churches practicing frequent communion.

These forms are set for approval at Synod 2016. At Synod we will not be able to raise concerns for corrections or improvements from the floor without great confusion and difficulty. Because of that we believe that it is to the best profit of the churches for potential changes to come to Synod by way of overture, so they are handled thoroughly and carefully.

Overture:

Classis Southwestern Ontario (URCNA) overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to amend the shortened form of the Lord's Supper in the first paragraph of the preparation by adding the words, "through faith" as follows:

While remaining bread and wine, through faith these sacred elements nevertheless become so united to the reality they signify...

Grounds:

1. The addition of these words clarifies the teaching of God's word and our confessions on the Lord's Supper both in its efficacy and its operation.
2. Although the form itself in other areas is excellent, this particular line without these added words could be taken to lean towards an *ex opera operato* view of the Lord's Supper. The elements are not united to the reality except for those who receive the Supper by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This simple addition of two words grants clarity and avoids potential misunderstandings in a form designed to teach clearly the meaning of the Lord's Supper to those in our churches.

Adopted at Classis Southwestern Ontario, March 23, 2016
Ralph De Boer, Clerk

Overture #17

CLASSIS SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO OVERTURE TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016:

Background:

When the churches meet as Synod we discuss items of common interest to the churches, as well as deal with appeals that may call us to render a decision on the actions of one of our member churches or even the actions of a classis. Our ordinary pattern for dealing with appeals has been to create a committee of pre-advice at Synod which meets during the Synod meeting to review the appeals, investigate them as they are able, and bring to Synod a recommendation for action.

When appeals are made by individuals against the actions of a Consistory or Classis, these appeals tend to be very weighty in nature. Synod strives to deal carefully with both sides of the issue, as does the committee for pre-advice assigned to review the appeal. However due to the weightiness of these appeals and the significant paperwork that can accompany them, pre-advice committees working on appeals can require significant time before presenting their recommendation to Synod. Unfortunately, this often means that recommendations from this committee of pre-advice do not come onto the floor until the last or second last day of Synod. This can result in situations where Synod does not have time to recommit recommendations back to the committee or for Synod to further investigate matters that may stand behind the original appeal.

As a federation we have not yet developed a procedure to help the Synod in working through these appeals in a fair, timely, and consistent manner. For this reason our practice of handling appeals has relied greatly upon the memory of those who were at previous Synods, rather than upon a written set of guidelines. This has resulted, at times, in inconsistencies in the adjudication process and in a lack of clarity being given to appellants as to what they can expect the Synod to do in ruling upon their appeal. (For example, we have had situations in which appellants address pre-advice committees directly about their appeal, and situations in which appellants were not given this opportunity.) To help in all these things we propose the following overture.

Overture:

That Synod create a study committee on the appeals process to recommend to the next Synod of the URCNA a set of clear, consistent guidelines for adjudicating appeals that can be added to our Synodical Rules.

The study committee's recommendation will:

- a. Take into account the wisdom and experience of our fellow NAPARC churches in handling appeals, with particular focus upon appeals from individuals against the actions of a Consistory, Classis or Synod (or their equivalent).
- b. Ensure that Synod's method of handling personal appeals will be consistent for every appellant.
- c. Help Synod reach just, wise, and timely verdicts on all cases of appeal.

- d. Include how the decisions of Synod are best communicated to both the appellant and those whose decision is being appealed for the well being and edification of both parties.

Grounds:

1. Our current synodical rules do not outline a clear or consistent process by which appeals are adjudicated by Synod. (Appendix B of our rules of Synod informs us that our guidelines, “serve as the standard for *admissibility* of an appeal.” They do not give guidelines on how to adjudicate an appeal.)
2. Clear guidelines outlining how Synod will adjudicate appeals will help Synod move forward confidently and consistently in their judgments.
3. Clear guidelines outlining how Synod will adjudicate appeals will help those appealing better submit to the decision of Synod regarding their appeal, since clear, public guidelines will allow appellants to know what they can expect from Synod and help appellants in knowing that Synod has dealt with their appeal fairly and judicially.
4. Even a brief survey of procedure from our sister churches reveals many areas we could benefit from in this area as a federation (for example: is there a limit on how long a member has to register an appeal? Can a non-ordained appellant speak in defense of their appeal at the Synodical level, either before the committee of advice or Synod itself? Can an ordained appellant speak in defense of their appeal before Synod? Are there any limits on how much those whose decision is being appealed may speak before Synod in their own defense? Etc.)
5. The appeal process is worth taking time to improve and strengthen, as it is closely related to upholding a righteous and Biblical standard among the churches of Christ represented within our federation and as our decisions as a church reflects our only Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Adopted by Classis Southwestern Ontario, March 23, 2016
Ralph De Boer, Clerk

Overture #18

TO ADOPT A REVISION OF THE PROPOSED BELGIC CONFESSION, ARTICLE 4.

BACKGROUND

In November of 2015, the Liturgical Forms Committee distributed a report of its work to the churches, along with electronic copies of the translations of the Reformed Confessions it has prepared for use in a new songbook for the United Reformed Churches in North America. We greatly appreciate the work this committee has done in service to our churches in providing faithful and accurate translations of the Three Forms of Unity in contemporary English.

Given the fact that we are now considering a proposal to adopt a new translation of the Belgic Confession of Faith, we believe that this is the right time to make a slight revision to Article 4 of the Belgic Confession of Faith in order to state its truth more accurately. Since the Three Forms of Unity are summaries of the teachings of Scripture which are required to be taught and believed in our churches, we should not raise statements about the authorship of Hebrews and Ecclesiastes to the level of confessional truth. In addition, since the 66 books of the Bible alone are holy and divine Scriptures against which nothing we can be alleged, we should not place our Reformed Confessions on par with the Scriptures and view them as unalterable documents.

In all our preaching and teaching from Article 4 of the Belgic Confession of Faith we find ourselves compelled to tweak and correct our current edition of this article because of its inaccuracy. The translation proposed by our Liturgical Committee does nothing to change this situation.

OVERTURE

Classis Southwestern Ontario (URCNA) overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to adopt the following revision of the wording of Belgic Confession Article 4 proposed by our Liturgical Forms Committee: (Please note: additions to the Committee's proposed wording are underlined; deletions are crossed out)

Article 4: The Canonical Books

We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes of the Old and New Testaments. They are canonical books with which there can be no quarrel at all. In the church of God the list is as follows:

In the Old Testament,

the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;

the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth;

the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings; the two books of Chronicles, ~~called~~
Paralipomenon;

~~the first book of~~ Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job;

the Psalms ~~of David~~;

~~the three books of Solomon~~— the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon;

the books of the four major prophets— Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel; and then the books of the other twelve minor prophets— Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

In the New Testament,

the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles; the ~~fourteen~~ thirteen letters of Paul—to the Romans; the two letters to the Corinthians; to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians; the two letters to the Thessalonians; the two letters to Timothy; to Titus, and Philemon; ~~and to the letter to the~~ Hebrews; the seven letters of the other apostles— one of James; two of Peter; three of John; one of Jude; and the Revelation of the apostle John.

Grounds

1. This revision corrects inaccurate titles for ‘Ezra’ and ‘the Psalms’. “The Psalms of David” does not agree with the titles for the collection used in the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint and the Vulgate; nor is it named such in the Scripture itself. Not all the Psalms were written by David. “The first of Ezra” is a designation used in the Vulgate which names “Nehemiah” “The second of Ezra.” Since we adopt the title “Nehemiah” for the book that follows “Ezra,” the title “The first of Ezra” is at best unclear and could be confused with the apocryphal book of a similar name (“I Esdras”).
2. This revision removes from Article 4 the uncertain claims that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes and Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrews.
3. This revision includes specific mention of the book of Lamentations which is currently missing from the list. In doing so, the revision also accomplishes what Article 4 promises to do in the opening title and sentence, namely, list the canonical *books*, not just the prophets.
4. This revision, while seeking to remove inaccuracies, follows as closely as possible the faithful translation proposed by our Liturgical Forms committee. The translations adopted by the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Church in the United States do not do this as well.

Additional Note

Below is the revised wording of the proposed Article 4 *without strikethrough and underline*:

Article 4: The Canonical Books

We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes of the Old and New Testaments. They are canonical books with which there can be no quarrel at all. In the church of God the list is as follows:

In the Old Testament,

the five books of Moses—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;
the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth;
the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings; the two books of Chronicles;
Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, the Psalms, the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon;
the books of the four major prophets— Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel;
and then the books of the other twelve minor prophets— Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

In the New Testament,

the four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John; the Acts of the Apostles;
the thirteen letters of Paul—to the Romans; the two letters to the Corinthians; to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians; the two letters to the Thessalonians;
the two letters to Timothy; to Titus, and Philemon;
the letter to the Hebrews;
the seven letters of the other apostles— one of James; two of Peter; three of John; one of Jude;
and the Revelation of the apostle John.

Adopted by Classis Southwestern Ontario on March 23, 2016

Ralph De Boer, Clerk

Overture #19

OVERTURE TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016 TO INCLUDE TITLES WITH THE ARTICLES OF THE CHURCH ORDER

BACKGROUND:

At Synod 1997 there was an overture (Overture #3) to add “headings/titles” to each article and a “table of contents” to the church order. In its observations concerning the overtures to Synod the Church Order committee stated, “The stated clerk has already prepared something along these lines.” The Acts of Synod 1997 record that the following recommendation was adopted in Art. 45.B: “That synod accede to this overture and hand this matter over to the Church Order Committee.” It does not appear that Synod 1999 received a report from the Church Order Committee, and no article titles were ever officially added to the Church Order.

OVERTURE:

Classis Southwest U.S. overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to add the article titles below to each of the articles of our Church Order.

GROUNDS:

1. It appears it was an oversight that article titles weren’t added in our Church Order as Synod 1997 wished.
2. Having titles included with the articles allows for quick reference to relevant articles especially for those not familiar with the church order.
3. As applicable the article titles proposed below are those included in the 2012 Proposed Church Order already vetted by our churches. Titles in italics depart from the PJCO largely due to the difference in article numbering and structuring, but also upon occasion using different language more conducive to titles.
4. These article titles are in the spirit of the work done by Rev. Julien and his work was referenced in this proposal.

Proposed Church Order Article Titles

Ecclesiastical Offices

Article 1 – The Three Offices

Article 2 – The Duties of the Minister

Article 3 – Preparation for the Ministry

Article 4 – The Candidacy Examination

Article 5 – *Candidacy from Outside the Federation*

Article 6 – Calling a Candidate

Article 7 – Calling a Minister within the Federation

Article 8 – Calling a Minister from Outside the Federation

Article 9 – *A Life-Time of Service* (PJCO: “Bound for Life”)

Article 10 – Support and Emeritation of Ministers

Article 11 – Exceptional Release of a Minister

Article 12 – The Nomination of Elders and Deacons

Article 13 – The Election, Term, and Ordination / *Installation* of Elders and Deacons

Article 14 – The Duties of Elders

Article 15 – The Duties of Deacons

Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Article 16 – *The Three Assemblies*

Article 17 – *The Matters and Manner of Assemblies*

Article 18 – *Prayer in Assemblies*

Article 19 – *The Officers and Order of Assemblies*

Article 20 – *The Duties and Supervision of Clerks*

Article 21 – The Consistory

Article 22 – *Instituting a New Church*

Article 23 – *The Council*

Article 24 – *Equality and Unity of Congregations*

Article 25 – *Delegates and Matters of Broader Assemblies*

Article 26 – Classis

Article 27 – Church Visitors

Article 28 – *Synod* (PJCO: “General Synod”)

Article 29 – *Appeals by Assemblies*

Article 30 – *Withdrawing From the Federation*

Article 31 – *Appeals by Church Members*

Article 32 – Admitting a Church
Article 33 – Property

Article 34 – Ecumenical Relations *on a Church Level*
Article 35 – Ecumenical Relations *on a Classical Level*
Article 36 – Ecumenical Relations *on a Federation Level*

Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks

Article 37 – *Corporate Worship and Special Services*
Article 38 – *Regulation and Nature of the Worship Service*
Article 39 – Psalms and Hymns
Article 40 – *Catechetical Preaching*

Article 41 – Baptism of Covenant Children
Article 42 – Baptism of Adults

Article 43 – Public Profession of Faith
Article 44 – Reception *from Outside the Federation*

Article 45 – Admission to the Lord’s Supper
Article 46 – Administration of the Lord’s Supper

Article 47 – The Church’s Mission Calling
Article 48 – Marriage
Article 49 – Funerals
Article 50 – The Church Records

Ecclesiastical Discipline

Article 51 – The Nature and Purpose of Discipline
Article 52 – *Addressing Private Sins*
Article 53 – *Private Repentance*
Article 54 – Consistory Involvement
Article 55 – The Discipline of a Member
Article 56 – Excommunication of a Member
Article 57 – The Reconciliation of a Member
Article 58 – The Readmission of an Excommunicated Person
Article 59 – Exclusion of a Mature Baptized Member
Article 60 – *Reception of an Excluded Person*
Article 61 – The Suspension and Deposition of an Office-bearer
Article 62 – *Gross Sins*
Article 63 – Mutual Censure
Article 64 – Departure of Members
Article 65 – *Equality of Churches and Office-bearers* (PJCO: “No Lording it Over”)
Article 66 – The Observance and Revision of the Church Order

Overture #20

REGARDING MINISTER'S INFORMATION ON THE WEBSITE

May 26, 2015

OVERTURE:

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to instruct the federation website committee to include on the federation website a section detailing important church news relating to Ministers of the Word. This shall include the calling of pastors, the declining of calls, availability for call, the sustaining of candidacy exams, receiving a license to exhort, etc., that take place in our federation. Each consistory who takes an action concerning a minister will be responsible (or encouraged) to inform our webmaster.

BACKGROUND:

The URCNA does not have a fruitful way of disseminating information concerning the movement of ministers. Though there are some periodicals that will mention the accepting and declining of calls, none of these periodicals are overseen by our federation of churches. Also, many of these periodicals do not find out about a call. In order to build unity, cooperation, and prayer in our federation this information will be valuable. With the simple use of this modern medium of www.urna.org information can get out to the churches quickly and effectively, not merely to clerks and pastors, but to the whole congregation.

GROUNDS:

1. This will help build the unity of our federation. (Eph. 4:3-6)
2. This will aid calling committees and vacant churches in the search for a new pastor.
3. This will help our local churches be better equipped to pray for the churches at large in our federation. Consistories may therefore be better equipped to help out vacant churches with pulpit supply.

Overture #21

OVERTURE TO SYNOD WYOMING TO CAPITALIZE PRONOUNS RELATING TO GOD IN THE CREEDS, CONFESSIONS, LITURGICAL FORMS AND PRAYERS.

BACKGROUND:

The latest submissions of the creeds, confessions, liturgical forms, and prayers by the Liturgical Forms Committee do not capitalize pronouns referring to God (he, him, you, etc). This marks a departure from the creeds, confessions, liturgical forms, and prayers published in the 1959/1976 Blue Psalter-Hymnal and used in the vast majority of our churches. In response to communications from a number of churches regarding this change, the Liturgical Forms Committee wrote the following in its latest report (November 6, 2014):

One of the issues we have wrestled with regularly in our correspondence with the churches concerns the capitalization of the pronouns relating to God (he, him). We have received communications from the churches both for and against this change. We are familiar with this printing style. The New King James Bible employs it, though intriguingly the King James Bible does not. The 1976 Blue Psalter version of the Creeds, Confessions, and Liturgical Forms capitalizes these pronouns except in the Heidelberg Catechism. Despite our familiarity with this printing style, we are not convinced of its necessity. Our reasoning is as follows: this stylistic print is not universally adopted, it is not found in the Bibles we commonly use (NIV and ESV), it is not found in the original languages, and it is not intrinsically more glorifying to God. We believe, for these reasons, that is more consistent for our forms to reflect the broadly accepted style of using the lower case for the pronouns that refer to God.

It is our position that these reasons do not constitute convincing grounds for changing what has become a well-established practice in our churches for the past century or more. Although this stylistic print is not universally adopted, it is still widely accepted and used. For example, both the US and Canadian governments still adopt this practice as their official print style. The NIV and ESV do not capitalize pronouns referring to God, but another version that we commonly use (NKJV) does. The original languages do not capitalize pronouns relating to God, but this does not mean that we should not. For instance, we don't apply this argument when our English versions capitalize names like "Son of God" and "Spirit", words which are not capitalized in the original languages. Finally, it is not our interest to claim that capitalizing pronouns relating to God is intrinsically more glorifying to God. Our concern is pastoral. For many of the members in our churches, capitalizing pronouns referring to God is a way of expressing reverence for God.

OVERTURE:

The Classis of Western Canada overtures Synod Wyoming 2016 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to capitalize the definite pronouns relating to God in all the liturgical forms, creeds, confessions, and prayers.

FOUNDATIONS:

1. This would be in continuity with the creeds, confessions, liturgical forms, and prayers found in the Psalter-Hymnal (1959/1976) used in the vast majority of our churches.
2. Changing what is a familiar and widely-used practice in our churches will unnecessarily trouble many of God's people.

Appeal #1

APPEAL TO SYNOD FROM WELLANDPORT UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

APPEAL:

This appeal is to broadly reverse or nullify decisions by Synod providing direction and recommendations to consistories as to ministerial pensions and compensation.

Specifically:

- Synod 2004 Calgary: Article 99 Part A,
- Synod Nyack: Article 93 Committee Recommendation 2,
- Synod Visalia: Article 46 Part 4 & 5; Article 55 Part 6 & 8; Mandate for Adhoc Retirement and Ministerial Compensation Committee - Point 2 under Considerations.
(attached as appendices)

Such decisions inappropriately interfere with the rights and responsibilities of consistories.

Included with this appeal are aspects of the mandate of Adhoc Compensation and Retirement Assessment Committee, specifically:

- d) any other management issues relative to compensation and retirement concerns deemed appropriate by synod so as to put this question to rest and establish a workable framework for many years into the future.
- e) clarifying the meaning of the first sentence of the first paragraph of the Church Order Article 10, either by way of explanation or by amendment of Article 10.

BACKGROUND:

This appeal is that decisions of Synod with respect to providing recommendations and direction with respect to ministerial compensation and retirement contributions be rescinded. This includes:

Synod 2004 Calgary: Article 99 Part A,

Synod Nyack: Article 93 Committee Recommendation 2,

Synod Visalia: Article 46 Part 4 & 5; Article 55 Part 6 & 8; Mandate for Adhoc Retirement and Ministerial Compensation Committee - Point 2 under Considerations.

(attached as Appendices)

We continue to promote that Ministers of the Word are to be honourably supported.

The responsibility to ensure ministers are honourably supported rests solely with the consistory. Those consistories that fail to diligently ensure that ministers serving their congregation are honourably and appropriately supported, fail in carrying out their office.

Those consistories that are unable to honourably support ministers serving their congregations can and should request assistance of sister congregations.

In all instances as brothers in Christ, honest conversations need to take place to follow Paul's direction to the churches.

It is not appropriate for Synod or Classis to take on the role of defining what honourable or adequate support means, or by their direction and recommendations becoming a surrogate for the honest conversations that should be occurring.

Over the course of the last few synods (notably Visalia 2014 and Nyack 2012), Synod has made decisions that interfere in the rights, obligations and the responsibilities of consistories as it relates to ministerial compensation. The mandate requested and approved by the Adhoc Retirement and Ministerial Compensation Committee directly asserts by presumption, the ability of synod to determine and instruct consistories as to minister pensions and compensation. The most recent decisions of Synod Visalia with respect to ministerial pension contributions, clearly demonstrate how Synod is now asserting an inappropriate authority in ministerial compensation matters.

The decisions of Synod Visalia 2014 clearly seek to direct consistories how much they should contribute to minister pension plans. This is a direct abrogation of the rights of consistories to determine for themselves together with the minister, honourable and adequate compensation.

The specific decisions of Synod Visalia being appealed are:

ARTICLE 46

4. "That Synod recommend an increase in the minimum annual retirement contribution for ministers who live in a parsonage. Churches should ensure that ministers in this category are at the 15% to 20% range of the guidelines established by Synod."

5. "That Synod recommend that all churches, as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister(s) and in consultation with professional financial planners, contribute to a tax advantageous retirement plan in an amount ranging from 10% to 20% of gross remuneration, which will be determined by the specific circumstances of the pastor. This remuneration includes any housing allowance or the equivalent thereof. This percentage amount should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent thereof."

ARTICLE 55

6. That the following questions (see below, after the grounds) be included for both the church visitors and on the Classical Credentials.

- 1) As part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for your minister(s) and in consultation with professional financial planners, are you contributing to a tax advantageous retirement plan in an amount ranging from 10% to 20% of gross remuneration?
- 2) Are you currently providing disability insurance for your minister, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration, which remuneration includes any housing allowance or equivalent value thereof, and medical benefits?
- 3) Does your minister have adequate life insurance coverage to provide for his dependents?
- 4) Does your church provide honorably for retired pastors, a pastor's widow, and/or their dependents?
- 5) Does your church need assistance to comply with Synod's retirement provision guidelines (Acts of Synod 2004, Art. 99).
- 6) Does your church need assistance to support a retired pastor, a pastor's widow, and/or their dependents?

Lastly the justification used in support of the recommendations to Synod Visalia, namely the survey of the ministers, was not in anyway objective or appropriate.

FOUNDATIONS:

1) Decisions of Synod with respect to ministerial compensation and retirement contributions are not in keeping with the Word of God specifically: Acts 14:23;20:17,28; Titus 1:5 and articulated in the Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government point 5, as follows:

“The Lord gave no permanent universal, national or regional offices to His church. The office of elder (presbyter/episkopos) is clearly local in authority and function; thus, Reformed church government is presbyterial, since the church is governed by elders, not by broader assemblies.”

2) Decisions of Synod with respect to ministerial compensation and retirement contributions are not in keeping with the Word of God specifically: Mathew 16:19;Acts 20:28-32;Titus 1:3 and articulated in the Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government point 6, as follows:

“In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the local church is governed by Christ from heaven, by means of his Word and Spirit, with the keys of the kingdom which He has given it for that purpose; and it is not subject to rule by sister churches who, with it, are subject to the one Christ”

3) Decisions of Synod with respect to ministerial compensation and retirement contributions are not in keeping with the Word of God specifically: Acts 15:1-35; Romans 15:25-27; Colossians 4:16;Titus 1:5;Revelation 1:11,20 and articulated in the Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government point 7, as follows:

“Federative relationships do not belong to the essence or being of the church; rather, they serve the well-being of the church. However, even though churches stand distinctly

*next to one another, they do not thereby stand disconnectedly alongside one another.
Entrance into and departure from a federative relationship is strictly a voluntary matter”*

4) All matters with respect to ministerial compensation are outside the jurisdiction of Synod and are not in keeping with the Church Order specifically Article 33

Article 33

“Whereas it is the sole right of a congregation to hold title to its property, the ownership of all property, real and personal, held by a congregation of this federation is vested exclusively in that congregation, and title shall be taken in its name alone. **Each congregation shall have exclusive control over all of its temporalities, nor shall the exercise of it’s property rights, through the decisions of its consistory be subject to the supervision of the broader assemblies, nor shall the broader assemblies have the right to revise those decisions.** The broader assemblies of the federation shall not attempt to secure possession of the property of any congregation, whether or not such congregation remains within, chooses to withdrawn from, or is removed from the federation.

5) Scripture does not support that the necessary financial support for the promotion of the Gospel should be compelled, but rather should be gracious gifts from willing thankful hearts. Note: Acts 20:32-35, 2 Corinthians 9:1-15, Mathew 10:8-11, Luke 9:3, Mark 6:7, 2 Corinthians 9:5

6) The survey results provided as grounds for the recommendations represent the opinions and views of ministers and are therefore self-serving and inherently biased.

7) The survey results have no objective comparator or analysis, providing only subjective conclusions based on a collection of opinions from the survey. Basing decisions and recommendations on such results is inappropriate. By way of example:

Quote from 401khelpcenter.com:

“Employer Contributions

The average company contribution in 401k plans is 2.7% of pay.”

Quote from MW Marketwatch:

“...A separate study by Vanguard Group found that employers offered an average match of 4.1% in 2013, the same average match offered eight years earlier, in 2005. The same report said the median match was 3% in 2013 and hovered between 3% and 3.5% from 2005 through 2013.”

8) Where in excess of 50% of the delegates to Synod are in a Conflict of Interest with these decisions, such decisions are not in good order (1 Corinthians 14:40).

9) Since in excess of 50% of delegates to Synod are ministers, such decisions have the effect of the worker dictating their compensation.

10) While the language of the decisions are “recommendations”, it is clear the intent is to require consistories to comply with these decisions, as evidenced by Article 55 both the grounds and

the substance whereby Church visitors are required to ask consistories whether or not they are adhering to the recommendations and that such questions be included in Classis credentials.

11) All matters regarding ministerial compensation are matters to be resolved between ministers and the consistories of the churches. Open and honest discussion about these issues should be occurring amongst Christian men. Where unresolved issues remain or there is an impasse, the church visitors can provide assistance.

12) Requiring churches to consult with financial planners in determining how to provide for their minister is not respectful of consistories.

13) Laying out recommendations for how and how much funds are to be provided, is very contrary to the principles of the Faith, namely; cheerful giving without compulsion in thankfulness, willing service, trust in God.

Appendix 1 Synod Visalia

ARTICLE 42

4. That Synod approve an increase in the minimum annual retirement contribution for ministers who live in a parsonage. Churches should ensure that ministers in this category are at the 15% to 20% range of the guidelines established by Synod.

Ground:

Ministers who live in a parsonage are essentially left without a permanent residence upon retirement and will require a greater amount of money to retire; either to purchase or rent a home.

a. Motion is made and supported to amend the recommendation to read:

“That Synod recommend for consideration an increase in the minimum annual retirement contribution for ministers who live in a parsonage. Churches should ensure that ministers in this category are at the 15% to 20% range of the guidelines established by Synod.”

b. After a time of debate, Synod adjourns for a lunch break and a time of committee work.

ARTICLE 46

Recommendations:

4. That Synod approve an increase in the minimum annual retirement contribution for ministers who live in a parsonage. Churches should ensure that ministers in this category are at the 15% to 20% range of the guidelines established by Synod.

Ground:

Ministers who live in a parsonage are essentially left without a permanent residence upon retirement and will require a greater amount of money to retire; either to purchase or rent a home.

a. Motion has been made and supported to amend the recommendation by replacing the word “approve” with the phrase “recommend for consideration.”

b. Motion is made and supported to amend the amendment, striking the words “for consideration.”

Adopted

c. The recommendation as amended reads:

“That Synod recommend an increase in the minimum annual retirement contribution for ministers who live in a parsonage. Churches should ensure that ministers in this category are at the 15% to 20% range of the guidelines established by Synod.”

Adopted

5. That all churches should, as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister(s) and in consultation with professional financial planners, contribute to a tax deferred retirement plan in an amount ranging from 10% to 20% of gross remuneration, which will be determined by the specific circumstances of the pastor. This remuneration includes any housing allowance or the equivalent thereof. This percentage amount should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent thereof.

Grounds:

- a. The survey results suggest that the current percentage for church contribution appears insufficient to provide honorably for the retirement needs of ministers.
- b. The survey results suggest churches need to consider that the retirement provision should be an addition to base salary, and not seen as something which would ask the minister to take away from his current base salary.
- c. The survey results suggest that retired ministers will be inadequately prepared for the significant costs of potential nursing home care, which will vary depending upon location and level of service.

a. Motion is made and supported to amend the first clause of the recommendation, replacing the first four words ("That all churches should") with the phrase: "That Synod recommend that all churches. ..."

Adopted

b. Motion is made and supported to amend the recommendation by replacing the word "deferred" with the word "advantageous."

Adopted

c. The recommendation, as amended, reads:

"That Synod recommend that all churches, as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister(s) and in consultation with professional financial planners, contribute to a tax advantageous retirement plan in an amount ranging from 10% to 20% of gross remuneration, which will be determined by the specific circumstances of the pastor. This remuneration includes any housing allowance or the equivalent thereof. This percentage amount should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent thereof."

Adopted

(Advisory Committee 8 continued in Art. 55.)

ARTICLE 55

Advisory Committee 8 – Retirement (continued from Art. 46)

Materials: Report of the Ad-Hoc Compensation and Retirement Assessment Committee

Recommendations:

6. That the following questions (see below, after the grounds) be included for both the church visitors and on the Classical Credentials.

Grounds:

- a. Our current survey of ministers indicates that far too many churches are not in compliance with providing the Synodically required retirement contributions (Acts of Synod 2004, Art. 99).
- b. Our current survey of retired pastors indicates that they are experiencing difficulties in meeting their financial obligations.
- c. It is consistent with the recommendation of Synod 2004 (Art. 99) that there be greater accountability among the churches regarding our financial obligations.

The chairman rules that the assembly will debate and vote on the questions individually.

1) As part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for your minister(s) and in consultation with professional financial planners, are you contributing to a tax advantageous retirement plan in an amount ranging from 10% to 20% of gross remuneration?

Adopted

2) Are you currently providing disability insurance for your minister, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration, which remuneration includes any housing allowance or equivalent value thereof, and medical benefits?

Motion is made and supported to suspend the rules of Synod to consider questions 2 through 6 without debate.

Adopted

The chairman rules that all five remaining questions will be voted on as one, since no further debate is allowable.

3) Does your minister have adequate life insurance coverage to provide for his dependents?

4) Does your church provide honorably for retired pastors, a pastor's widow, and/or their dependents?

5) Does your church need assistance to comply with Synod's retirement provision guidelines (Acts of Synod 2004, Art. 99).

6) Does your church need assistance to support a retired pastor, a pastor's widow, and/or their dependents?

The assembly votes on the recommendation to include questions 2 through 6:

Adopted

8. That the current ad-hoc committee be re-appointed to study and make recommendations on specific feasible retirement plan options so the churches may consider whether to establish a federation-wide retirement fund/plan.

The chairman notes that this recommendation includes the adoption of the mandate which is recorded below, after the grounds.

Grounds:

- a. Our survey results indicate an interest in and need for a federation retirement plan (cf. Agenda pp.355, 357).
- b. A federation retirement plan could bring more uniformity in practice among the churches in making honorable provision for ministerial retirement needs.
- c. Similarly situated sister denominations have found such denomination-wide plans feasible. (cf. Agenda pp.359-360).
- d. Providing specific recommendations for a particular type of plan, with its attendant costs, benefits, contribution levels, etc., was viewed to be beyond the ad-hoc committee's mandate.

Adopted

Mandate:

That the Ad-Hoc committee investigate and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of a federation wide retirement plan for pastors in Canada and the United States.

That the committee explore what options are available and recommend to the next synod the feasibility and potential implementation of such a plan.

That consideration should include but not be limited to:

1. "Projecting the future needs of URCNA ministers relative to their retirement needs (25-40 years)" (Agenda p. 344).
2. "Any other financial issue relative to compensation and retirement concerns deemed appropriate by Synod so as to put this question to rest and establish a workable framework for many years into the future" (Agenda p. 344).

The committee is to consider factors such as:

- ✓ Voluntary or mandatory participation
- ✓ Feasibility
- ✓ Cost effectiveness
- ✓ Portability and Vesting
- ✓ Tax deferability
- ✓ Accessibility

Due to the complexity of these matters, we recommend that Synod reappoint the present Ad-Hoc committee (Regulations for Synodical Procedure 5.3.1.a) to:

1. Engage several professional consultants who can advise the Ad-Hoc committee on these matters.
2. Oversee the fulfillment of this mandate, and
3. Recommend a course of action regarding the implementation of this mandate.

APPENDIX 2 - SYNOD NYACK 2012

Article 93

Advisory Committee 5 – Emeritation & Web Oversight (continued from Art. 88)

Materials: Report of the Emeritation Study Committee 68

Recommendations:

...

2. That Synod accede to Recommendation 2 of the study committee report, which reads:

That Synod establish a new ad hoc committee mandated to give advice concerning the compensation and retirement concerns faced by URCNA ministers, to determine if the present course of action of the URCNA churches sufficiently addresses these matters without undue hardship on either the congregations or its ministers. This mandate ought to include, but not be limited to:

- a. Outlining Biblical principles relative to ministerial compensation, addressing the question of benevolence or merit-based payment.
- b. Consideration of all past synodical decisions relative to compensation and retirement and the effectiveness of those decisions.
- c. Projecting the future needs of URCNA ministers relative to their retirement needs (25-40 years).
- d. Any other financial issue relative to compensation and retirement concerns deemed appropriate by Synod so as to put this question to rest and establish a workable framework for many years into the future.
- e. Clarifying the meaning of the first sentence of the first paragraph of Church Order Article 10, either by way of explanation or by amendment of Article 10.

The committee is to serve until the next Synod, and their report is due by the deadline for the next synodical agenda.

Adopted

APPENDIX 3 - Synod 2004 Calgary

ARTICLE 99

Advisory Committee 4

Reporter: Rev. Daryl Kats

Materials: Co-operative Savings Fund Report (pp. 132-134).

The Pre-advice committee recommends that Synod adopt the following recommendations and recommended guidelines, with regard to the establishment of a Classical Ministers Assistance Fund, as gleaned from Report # 3.

A. Each Classis be responsible for overseeing that each church in the Classis is contributing to their pastor's retirement plan.

Grounds:

1. Because each Classis meets at least every 12 months it will allow Classis to respond better to the needs of a local church.
2. Churches in the same Classis are typically more aware of each others needs.
3. There will be more flexibility within each Classis to address the needs of a particular church.

Recommended Guidelines:

1. The church visitors be instructed to ask the following questions.
 - a. As part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for your minister, are you including an allowance for a contribution to a government approved retirement plan or equivalent in amount ranging from 5% to 10% of gross remuneration, including any housing allowance or equivalent value thereof? This contribution should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent.
 - b. Are you currently providing disability insurance for your minister, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration? (Including any housing allowance or the equivalent value thereof.).
 - c. Does your church need assistance?
 2. If there is a financial need in the local congregation to meet requirements A1 or A2 the Council should request the assistance from Classis.
- Adopted

Appeal #2

APPEAL TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016 FROM MR. PETER KOK

Peter Kok
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(559)301-8600

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I am asking this body to overturn the decision of Classis Pacific Northwest on the following grounds:

1: The position I am arguing for is biblically justified. In the old covenant, persons from outside the nation of Israel were required to undergo circumcision prior to partaking of the Passover. As we confess, and as Scripture teaches us, baptism has replaced circumcision as a sign and seal of God's promises. The early Church fathers, in their wisdom, established that prior to partaking of Communion, an individual must publicly profess his/her faith before God, His Church and the congregation. Thus, our history, based on Scripture and confessions, points to a public profession of faith. Circumcision, though probably done behind closed doors, was nonetheless done with the full knowledge and consent of the people. Infants born to Israel were circumcised without their knowledge and consent, since they were born within the covenant community. Where am I wrong scripturally? I have been told I am wrong, but it has never been explained.

2: The position I am arguing for is confessional. Article 29 of the B.C. defines for us the true Church. This is not to say that salvation is limited only to those in the Reformed Church. That would limit the saving power of Christ's work, and thus place salvation in the hand of man rather than God. By denying communion to those not reformed, all we are saying is that since your understanding of covenant differs from ours, we cannot have communion this side of glory. The Church is called to judge by its standards, not the standards of another denomination, regardless of what that denomination is. Our standards are outlined in the three forms of unity, unless the URC's have functionally denied article 29B.C. If this is the case, then what does the URC view as biblical Church membership? Are we then admitting to communion all who profess Christ, regardless of their theology? Or, do we admit flawed theology up to a certain point and then deny the sacrament? How does the URC merge article 45 of the Church Order with article 29 of the B.C.? Either the Church order is poorly worded, or the URC's have functionally denied article 29 of the Belgic Confession. Once again, I have been told I am wrong, but have never been given an explanation as to how.

3: The position I am arguing for is not in line with article 45 of the Church Order. As I explained in point 2, perhaps the wording of this article is ambiguous, and needs to be revisited by this body. But the question remains; what is meant by biblical Church membership? Many churches, roman catholic included, are biblical churches. It is the interpretation of Scripture which is how we view them. So, once again, how far may a Church misinterpret Scripture based on our understanding before we deny Communion?

I have also understood that I am to provide a brief background as to my appeal. In the spring of 2015, I went to meet with Rev. Inks to express my concerns as to how consistory admitted persons to Communion. We discussed it, and I felt assured that my concerns would be dealt with by consistory. Shortly after this, a family from a Baptist Church came to worship with us, and were admitted to communion. This caused me much anguish, and I again went to meet with Rev. Inks regarding admission of persons outside the Reformed faith to communion. During this time, after consulting with a couple of Brothers outside of Fresno, I withheld myself from communion in order to give myself time to process what was happening, and my response to it. I was able to reconcile what was happening with my conscience, and was prepared to return to communion. However, Consistory sent me their response to my concerns, in which they portrayed my position as unreformed and unbiblical. This caused me much pain, for while I have been disagreed with, I have never been called unreformed or unbiblical. To me, this is tantamount to labeling me a heretic. I continued to withhold myself, and I was then instructed to meet with consistory and Rev. Dieleman and Brother G. Leyendekker from Trinity URC in Visalia. We were able to reach an agreement, though I was advised against appeal. Rev. Dieleman also indicated that he wanted me to delete the letter I received from consistory regarding their position on Communion, which I refused to do, as I understand all communication is to be part of the adjudication process at a broader assembly. I eventually acquiesced to the decision of consistory, but made it plain that I would be appealing to Classis, which I did. Classis denied my appeal on the grounds which I have attached, and after much prayer and thought, I determined to present this matter to Synod, which is not only my right, but what I view as my duty under article 31 of the Church Order.

In conclusion, Brothers, I commit this to you. I pray that our Heavenly Father would guide you as you deliberate and reach a conclusion.

In Christ,

Peter Kok

Dear Pete,

March 7, 2015

This letter is an official communication from your consistory in response to concerns you have raised over the administration of the Lord's Supper and the grounds for welcoming visitors to it. It is our hope that by clarifying our beliefs, and by challenging your own it might prove to be persuasive to you and helpful to you.

We would wish to caution you regarding your "passion" for your position. Careful and clear thought is easily clouded by passion. Passion tends to incite resistance from those on the receiving end. Passion can be blinding, handicapping the passionate from detecting flaws in one's own thought and overlooking cogent arguments in others' thought. Passion can easily function as a replacement for solid argument. As the famous story goes of a minister's marginal notes, "Argument weak, Shout here". May we all heed James' admonition to be "slow to speak, slow to anger...quick to listen", and avoid Paul's observation that "they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge", That being said, we now move on to the key points we wish to draw to submit for your careful consideration.

First, we wish to draw attention to the fork in the road between the CanRC and the URC on requirements for the admission of visitors to the Lord's Supper. CanRC church order Article 43 states, "the consistory may admit visitors who profess the Reformed faith, provided it secures from them a satisfactory testimony". URC church order Article 45 is different, "... biblical church membership..." is what is satisfactory to the elders. All confusion and competing interpretations could have simply been resolved by the URC if what they wanted to say was what the CanRC does say. They did not. The difference is not mere oversight or a matter of indifferent nomenclature, all adding up to the same thing. In this, you are mistaken. This particular question is informed and answered before it is even proposed by the competing formulations regarding the doctrine of the church which shows up here. The CanRC has adopted a kind of Reformed sectarianism which identifies the true visible church with Reformed confessionalism. This posture is not representative of the genius of historic Reformed reflection on the doctrine of the visible church nor does it harmonize with our ecumenical confessions. The standard Reformed doctrine of the visible church, informed by our ecumenical creeds and Scripture is clearly set forth in the Westminster Confession chapter 25 "On the Church". (We would wish to insist that this explicit view is implicit, and cut from the same cloth, in our own standards as well.) Paragraphs IV. And V. are especially pertinent.

IV. The Catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

V. 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.

The Revised Church Order Commentary, 1967 heartily agrees with this on page 234: "...we believe with all our hearts that there is a holy Catholic Church and that the Christian Church is by no means limited to the Christian Reformed denominations...we thus give expression to our unity with the entire Christian church, especially in regard to the sacraments". This same commentary affirms the validity of non-Reformed baptisms even stating on page 230 that: "The baptism of Anabaptists was recognized, if baptism had taken place in the name of the Triune God." It only stands to reason that if the baptism is valid so is the profession of faith which preceded it was valid as well, and the resultant church membership, or they would have to deny the prior affirmation above regarding their broad unity with the "holy Catholic Church".

The upshot of this is the true visible church retains its Christian identity without subscribing to the details of our Reformed confessions. They are not therefore mere posers who are "synagogues of Satan", and/or false churches. There are many non-Reformed (confessionally speaking) ecclesial environments where the Gospel is sufficiently preached and the saints are growing in Christ. The views you are championing denies the reality of the broader visible church which our standards teach and our church order recognizes along with historic Reformed thought. We do not deny that some, with the CanRC as representative, have taken this strict course in the Reformed tradition out of a misguided passion for purity. But it is a defect and a blemish in the tradition that is inimical to the true genius of the Reformed doctrine of the visible church and inimical to the Lord of the church as well. (Pastor Inks, being new to the URC, has verified with four representative pastors, that our understanding of "biblical church membership" in Article 45 of our church order is indeed correct).

Consequently, this consistory's admittance to the Table is informed by not only our own standards, and the historic doctrine of the visible church, but also by our Lord's standards for a credible profession of faith as found in Matthew 16:13-26. The bottom line is, this question of admittance, when it comes to visitors who are members of a true, yet non-Reformed church, will be answered either based on the evidences of being a true Christian in good standing as stated in Article 45, or based on having membership in a Reformed church. One answer is informed by a kind of Reformed sectarianism, the other by the historic Reformed doctrine of the visible church. It should be noted that the Commentary, previously cited, does not address this particular question at all. Rather it leaves the matter completely up to the discretion of the consistory when it says on page 232: "...not nearly all questions of a church governmental nature pertaining to the Lord's Supper are covered...does not aim to dictate all manner of details...the Church Order safeguards our liberties...". These liberties are enjoyed by the consistories of the URC, as they are in other Reformed bodies. Consequently, the kinds of tight restrictions you are desirous to see imposed will find little support in this federation.

Please know, that we are pained that you are pained and "in torment" over these matters. It is not beneficial to you or to others to be so agitated. But there is a way out, if you will take it, and it is our heart's desire that you do. The simplest and best is to recognize that you have adopted an unbiblical and unreformed perspective and forsake it. It is neither true nor does it enflame

love for the saints, but rather leads to an unhealthy exclusivism and judgmentalism. Please do consider Paul's admonition to the Corinthian church. Their unworthy celebration was due to dividing up the body by crowding out their brothers and sisters in Christ from the Lord's Table, and judging them unworthy of inclusion. This profaning of the Table (11:20), of excluding the Lord's people, is where the CanRC's position is leading them. Their position tears apart what Christ has joined together and fails to "discern the body". Sacraments mark our "Christian" unity and bonds of love, belonging to the same eternal family and church. They do not mark our "Reformed" unity. As Ed Clowney, former President of Westminster Seminary used to say, "It's the Lord's Table not the OPC's table!" (For our purposes you may replace OPC with URC). Biblically speaking, profaning the Lord's Table is primarily due to two things: 1-tolerating serious public sin (I Cor.5), not for failing to adopt later detailed 16th century doctrinal formulations. 2-not "discerning the Lord's body", which equates to two things; eating without faith and repentance (which would entail visible church membership), and failing to love and welcome the lambs who belong to the Shepherd (the case in point of I Cor.11). It is our hope that you would see the theological snare you are in and walk out free into the fresh air of truth and love. If "active concurrence" to our convictions is something you are unable to give, remaining unpersuaded, then you might consider a second route.

The second route to peace is to "passively submit". (Of course, you may begin the frustrating process of letter writing to the classis and then the synod. But we do not recommend this drawn out costly exercise. At the end of the day it will only serve to bring to everyone's attention a glaring point of incompatibility between the CanRC and the URC.) By passively submitting means that you put aside the difference and seek the higher good of loving the saints and living in peace, focusing on the larger issues of life in the Gospel of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Please know that though we believe you are in error, we love and care for you and pray that this moment of difficulty will prove to work by God's grace toward your advancement in the truth and love that are in Christ Jesus our Lord in the peace and unity of His visible church.

Finally, we will dutifully answer clearly the request you put to Elder Cotta last Sunday, after he asked you, "Pete, what can we do to help relieve you of your torment?" You answered him, saying "Do not allow the Baptist family to partake of the Supper." Our answer to your request is, "No. We cannot and will not do that; to do so would (as pointed out above) excluded the lambs that belong to the Shepherd." That would be profaning the Lord's Table.

Your Consistory

Pastor David Inks

Elder Stan Cotta

Elder Vladimir Mikulesku

Peter Kok
Fresno CA
kok.pete@gmail.com
(559) 301-8600

Dear Brothers in Christ,

What I am asking of this body is the following:

- 1) That Classis judge that the Consistory of Covenant URC erred by requesting of me that I forsake my view of Communion, which they have viewed as being Unbiblical and Unreformed.
- 2) That Classis judge that the Consistory of Covenant URC erred by allowing those of a different doctrine to participate in Communion.
- 3) That Classis judge that the Consistory of Covenant URC erred by violating their own requirements for admission to Communion.
- 4) That Classis judge that the Consistory of Covenant URC erred in maintaining a double standard for participation in Communion
- 5) That Classis establish a committee to further study the issue of who should be admitted and who should not be admitted.

Grounds:

In recent months, a disagreement has occurred between myself and the Consistory of Covenant URC in Fresno as to who shall be admitted to Communion. Consistory has adopted a broad position, while I maintain the narrower view, which is closer to the confessional standards adopted by the URC, is more in line with Church Order, and has been the historic practice of the Reformed Churches in general. Consistory sent me a letter, which I have attached, outlining their view, and urging me to “recognize that I have adopted an unbiblical and unreformed perspective and forsake it.” I was also urged not to pursue an appeal, as it would be both time-consuming and divisive to the Church. Article 31 of the URCNA Church order, however, instructs members to seek resolution of such issues by appealing to a broader assembly. As I am presently going to school, and have family obligations, I am unable to appear at Classis. Thus I must present my appeal in this document. I would also let this body know that I am a communicant member in good standing at Covenant URC. I must state that it is not my intent or desire to embarrass Consistory, but rather to present facts and let this body arrive at its conclusion based on the facts presented. What I have argued for is a "close" or fenced communion, as explained by Nymeyer/Bezuyen in the *Life in Christ* series. Earlier this year, I met with Rev. Inks regarding Communion. After I explained my concerns and my position as to who should and who should not be admitted, he told me that he didn't see my position, but nevertheless, I felt reassured that it would be taken seriously and discussed in Consistory. Some of my concerns were:

1) We have a number of persons who regularly attend the worship services as guests, and who participate in Communion. When does one go from being a guest to something more? These individuals have not as yet made public profession of faith.

2) At what point should an individual who regularly attends worship be required to make profession of faith, or not be admitted the table until profession of faith is made?

3) There is a double standard being applied as to the requirements for participation in the sacrament. Requirements for guests include that they must be baptized members of a Bible believing Church as noted in our bulletin which I have attached. The children of such guests are permitted to partake of communion, while my own children, who are baptized members of a Bible believing Church, are required to make public profession of their faith prior to participating in Communion. So, is public profession of faith a requirement for participation in Communion, or is being baptized enough to participate? I hope the double standard is evident.

Article 43 of the Church Order requires public profession of faith prior to admittance to Communion, while Article 44 states that individuals coming from denominations with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to communicant fellowship after being examined by Consistory, who then will decide whether or not a public profession of faith is required. Article 45 states that members of Churches with which we have no ties may be admitted to communion after being examined by consistory and consistory being assured of their biblical church membership and of a proper profession of faith. The question is...what is proper? Is a believer's baptism considered a profession of faith? Is the recitation of the creeds in corporate worship a proper profession of faith? The Reformed Churches have long maintained that an individual must make public profession of the Reformed faith prior to being admitted to Communion.

As I mentioned earlier, I felt reassured that Consistory would deal with my concerns appropriately, and I was prepared to put the matter to rest. Shortly thereafter, a Baptist family came to our worship services and were promptly admitted to Communion. I again went to meet with Rev. Inks, and once again outlined my position, using the Church Order, the liturgical forms adopted by the URC, as well as the confessional standards which have been adopted. Consistory erred by violating their own requirement for participation as outlined in the back of the bulletin. It states that an individual must be a member of a Reformed or confessional Protestant Church, which would imply a church which subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity or to the Westminster Standards. So my question to this body is what is defined as a confessional, protestant church?

Since we can only judge the visible church, and not the invisible, persons must be examined prior to admission to the Lord's Table. Since article 45 of the Church Order is ambiguous in its wording, we should turn to the Belgic Confession Article 29, which outlines for us the marks of the true church, namely the pure preaching of the Gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and church discipline. A church that does not meet these criteria cannot be judged to be a true church, though to be fair, it also mentions sects, which are defined by P. Y.DeJong in *The Church's Witness To The World* to signify any and all who purport to be Christian, but bring in false doctrine. So, by refusing communion to those who

hold to a doctrine contrary to what we teach and confess, we do no injustice or harm to them. For the Lord's Supper, in this life, is for those who hold to a common Doctrine and belief. By admitting to communion those who come from a church with a Doctrine contrary to what we confess, do we not minimize doctrine? Or do we compromise the sacraments? One of these is true if we admit to communion those from a church with a contrary view, until they have been catechized, and have then made public profession of faith. Any practice contrary is a form of open communion, which has never been a Reformed practice.

Monsma's Revised Commentary on the Church Order is also helpful here:

No Church can reasonably expect to remain pure and loyal which admits to membership such as are at odds with the Church on one or more vital Doctrines. And this consistent position of our Churches does not spell injustice toward any child of God. They who do not agree with us should simply seek and join a Church with which they are agreed. Let one who is methodistic in doctrine join a Methodist Church. Let one who is baptistic in Doctrine affiliate with a Baptist Church, etc.

Lastly, I appeal to the Church Order. Article 45 of the URCNA Church Order:

The Consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Table. No member shall be admitted to the Lord's Table who has not first made public profession of faith and is not living a godly life. Visitors may be admitted provided that, as much as possible, the Consistory is assured of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk.

The original Church Order of Dort states in Article 61 “Only those shall be admitted to the Lord’s supper who, according to the usage of the churches which they join, have made confession of the Reformed religion, together with having testimony of a godly walk, without which also those who come from other churches shall not be admitted.” This is taken from Richard R. DeRidder, ed., *The Church Orders of the Sixteenth Century Reformed Churches of the Netherlands Together with Their Social, Political, and Ecclesiastical Context*. Trans. Richard R. DeRidder with the assistance of Peter H. Jonker and Rev. Leonard Verduin (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1987), 546–57.

The Church Order should not be read in isolation from the Confession. It is subject to the confessional standards of the church, of which we all agreed are true summations of God's word. So where Church Order is ambiguous, we must use our confessional standards as a guide, as well as what has been historically practiced. How do we interpret The URC Church Order in light of Article 29 BC as to Biblical Church membership?

Brothers, I thank you for the time discussing this matter. I wish you the Lord's Blessings as you deliberate and arrive at a conclusion. May God bless your work, to His Glory and to the edification of His Church.

In Christ,

Peter Kok

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Consistory has approved starting Aug.2 to begin using the Synod approved 2nd short form for celebrating the Lord's Supper and alternating each month with the 1st short form thereafter.
- The John Calvin Reading Group will be discussing the relationship between the Testaments on July 28. 7 pm. Be sure to do your reading. There is much to glean from the Word of God on this engaging topic.
- Womens' Study on hiatus
- Men's Prayer Meeting is Thursday. 7pm
- Listen to "Abounding Grace Radio" with Pastor Chris Gordon Monday thru Friday at 4pm on channel 1130 AM
- If you should listen to one of Pastor Inks' sermons electronically be sure to: share, like, write a review, give it 5 stars, etc. in both Facebook and iTunes. Thank-you.

About the Reformed Understanding of the Lord's Supper/Communion

Before you join us at the Lord's Table we would ask you to consider the following. In the historic Reformed tradition, those invited to the Lord's Table must...

- ***Have the permission of the elders.***
- ***Believe all the articles of the Apostles' Creed.***
- ***Be a baptized member in good-standing at a Reformed, or confessional Protestant church.***
- ***Affirm the real presence of Christ in the sacrament.***
- ***Not be under present church discipline.***
- ***Children must be communicant members through public profession.***

If you can affirm all of the above, you are cordially invited to join us at the Lord's Table. If not, please refrain. The elders and pastor would be happy to speak with you before the next service or after this service.

Classis of the Pacific Northwest of the United Reformed Church
Twin Falls, ID, October 20, 2015

Covenant United Reformed Church Consistory
1715 Minnewawa Ave. #102
Clovis, CA 93612

Dear Fathers and Brothers in Christ,

You have received a communication from Pete Kok, a member of our church, asking you to judge our consistory with error on 4 items related to the administration of the Lord's Supper. Before rendering any judgment, our consistory requests that you give consideration to the following clarification of our practice, reasons for it and the inadequacies we believe are reflected in a strict reading of the Church Order of Dort Article #61.

Clarification of CURC Practice

Despite some semantic problems involved in our perspective and the one Mr. Kok champions, our differences, at the end of the day, are substantive. We have different views on the following question: What are the grounds for admitting a visiting non-Reformed professing Christian to the Lord's Table? Mr. Kok insists that there are no legitimate grounds for such admission. Only those who are professing members of a confessional Reformed church should be admitted.

Our consistory, believes, upon elder examination, (any other practice is not condoned by our consistory) if a person is found to be a professing member in good standing of a Bible believing church which preaches the basic Gospel and that he is seeking to live this out in his life, thereby evidencing that he is a Christian, we welcome him.

Two points of further clarification are in order.

First, Mr. Kok's claim that we have admitted "children of such guests" who have not made a profession of faith is not factual. Granted, we do not narrowly define a legitimate "profession of faith" as of the Reformed variety only. Non-Reformed churches inevitably process these steps differently from us. Generally they look for some reasonable articulation of one's Gospel faith before baptism and church membership. We do not dismiss all this because it doesn't follow lock 'n step with us. With this in mind we hope the Classis understands that Mr. Kok's charge that we operate with a double standard is therefore contrary to fact, unless of course, you grant him his premise of the invalidity of a non-Reformed profession of faith.

Second, Mr. Kok's charge that we have violated our own requirements for admission to the Table is not factual, but based on a misunderstanding of the meaning of "a Reformed, or confessional Protestant church". We simply mean by "or confessional Protestant", as "other than" the range of historic Reformed Christianity which is nonetheless, committed to orthodox doctrine of the Protestant, not Roman Catholic, variety. We do not intend "or confessional Protestant" to be explanatory or redundant of "Reformed", or that "Reformed" is concerned with the continent and "confessional Protestant" is a reference to English/Scottish Reformed. He has imported his own meaning into the phrase in order to then infer that we have violated our requirements. We have violated only his misinterpretation of our requirements and not our actual requirements.

The Reasons for Our Practice

The reasons for our practice are:

- 1- it's Biblical justification
- 2-it's confessional grounding
- 3-it's compliance with URC Church Order Article #45.

It's Biblical Justification Matthew 16:13-28; 18:15-21

Jesus said he came to build his church upon a confessional/professional foundation rooted in apostolic revelation. He gave the keys of the kingdom to the church's officers to establish the doctrinal and life-style boundaries of his church in the world. We believe that a coherent picture of the visible church is to be discovered here. Entrance into the church by way of the application of the keys identifies a **professing** believer and dismissal is by way of identifying incongruity between profession and practice or doctrinal belief. The text outlines Christ's content for identifying a member of the visible church. Along with Peter he must rightly identify the person of Christ. In opposition to Peter he must rightly understand the work of Christ and the consequential role of faith. And last he must evidence his commitment to "taking up his cross and following Jesus" which entails the self-denial of holy living and the self-denial of seeking to build the church vs. living for the world. (Our path reflects Jesus' path of building the church through cross bearing.) If a non-Reformed church has admitted someone into membership based on this simple formula of articulating the gospel, as outlined by the church's Lord, and demonstrating a sincerity of living it out, that church has properly exercised the keys of the kingdom and that church stands to be recognized as a true visible church of Jesus Christ despite it's doctrinal and practical departures from full-orbed Reformed theology. Again, they may not be lock 'n step with us of the Reformed persuasion. Yet, what are we to make of them? The Belgic Confession says the true church is "easy to recognize from the false church", (Art.#29). The only other category is a sect "who claim the name church", but as implied, the claim is false. (Art.#29). Is the Reformed church the only true church and all others are either false or a sect? Given that the true visible church and its members are recognized as citizens of the kingdom of God, is that adequate grounds to welcome them as guests to our celebration of the Lord's Table? When Christ returns we believe that he will perfect us in both doctrine and life and that entails his true visible church and its membership. There will be pastors, elders and members sitting at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb not incongruously plucked out of apostate environments and neither confessionally Reformed, but active members of the larger visible church where Christ was preached and loved. In the meantime, shall we exclude from the Lord's Supper as guests those whom we expect to be seated by Christ at the Marriage Supper? Whose Supper is it? Is it not clearly identified as "the Lord's" Table? It is a visible meal for his visible church to mark it's boundaries and feed its members. It is not a meal "for Reformed Christians only". Van Dellen/Monsma scorns this argument as "childish". (p.245). Yet, how can they coherently claim, "we intend to bar no one except unbelievers" and at the same

time restrict it only to Reformed Christians? Identifying and smugly dismissing an argument is not the same as dealing with its force.

Its Confessional Grounding

Mr. Kok believes that his position arises out of an interlocking of confessions and church order. This has been stated often, but demonstrated never. It is our belief that any Reformed church order that insists on restricting the Lord's Supper to only Reformed Christians is out of step with the historic Reformed doctrine of the visible church as found in its confessions. We will now, not merely insist on this, but seek to demonstrate it from the sources.

Our confessional standards, as seen in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession (hereafter identified as HC and BC) equate the kingdom of God, its opening and closing by way of the keys of gospel preaching and discipline and visibly designated by the sacraments, with the visible church. In other words, the kingdom of God is not narrowly identified with the Reformed church but with the visible church wherein the Gospel is preached and by way of the exercise of the keys believers are distinguished from unbelievers. This was seen in Matthew 16 and 18 above regarding the keys. Having read HC #81 thru #85 (which is largely an application of these texts along with I Cor. 11) what do we find? The concern is to differentiate between believers and unbelievers, “by the official use of the keys of the kingdom” to “exclude such people” (those “who show by what they say and do that they are unbelieving and ungodly”) and to welcome those who “are displeased with themselves...trust that their sins are pardoned...desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life”. This welcoming and excluding is an act of the keys exercised by the officers, wherein “by withholding the sacraments from them...God himself excludes them from the kingdom of Christ”. It is very important to notice, contrary to all Baptist efforts to achieve a regenerate membership, the universally received Reformed belief regarding the visible church, is that professors of the faith are of two breeds, true believers and hypocrites. “Hypocrites...eat and drink judgment on themselves” (they profess adequately but don't possess actually). On the basis of these HC questions and answers we can easily draw a coherent picture of the visible church, the keys of the kingdom as the preaching of the Gospel and discipline, along with the sacraments wherein they are offered or withheld by the officers as visible boundaries of not only the visible church but the kingdom's earthly constituency. This is why church membership is an absolute necessity for sharing in the sacraments. The sacraments are for the visible church, not just anyone wondering around claiming to be a believer. This is the very point of differentiation Van Dellen/Monsma make between “open” and “close” communion: “the difference...is a question of...the authority of the...office-bearers...Let no one desire to set aside the office-bearers which Christ has placed as guardians over his Table”(p.245). With this we are in hearty agreement. We do not practice “open” communion which bypasses the “permission of the elders”. We practice “close” communion. However, there remains this question of what exactly is the requirement the elders use in granting permission. What does the HC teach above? The dividing line is not between Reformed vs. non-Reformed. The dividing line is clear here. It is the dividing line between believer and

unbeliever, between a faithful member of the visible church and those who are not. Between those who show by doctrine and life that they are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and those who do not. Thus, requiring adherence to the Reformed faith as a requirement for visitors wishing to be admitted to the Table is both contrary to Christ's word (Matthew 16 and 18 above) and contrary to the HC which we believe is the faithful teaching of that word. It is our conviction that the only way such a requirement can fit with the HC is to adopt the position that the Reformed church alone is Christ's visible church and has the keys to the kingdom and all other non-Reformed churches are no churches at all. Yet, such a notion, as we have argued, not only stands against the Reformed doctrine of the visible church, but reflects a spirit of sectarianism.

Moving on now, we find the BC to be seamlessly joined with the HC. To avoid an unduly long text here, we request the readers to consider the first paragraphs of Articles #27, #28, #33, #35 and the entirety of #29 The Marks of the True Church. We are immediately faced with a fork in the road and with how everything else is read in light of Article #29 paragraph one: "We believe and confess one single catholic or universal church—a holy congregation and gathering of true Christian believers". The "catholic/universal church" can be viewed as the entirety of the elect or as here, the church visible, "a holy congregation of true Christian believers". Is this a reference to the "Reformed church"? Or is subscribing to the Reformed confessions the litmus test of the true visible church? Is the BC's repeated use of "true" regarding the church and its professors a veiled way to refer to "Reformed"? We sincerely hope that these questions are received as rhetorical and that the answer given is "no".

Article #29 identifies three churches: the true, the false and sects. It tells us that we can, "by the word of God discern the true church" from sects. Sects "claim for themselves the name church". They are not the true church which is recognized by "pure preaching of the Gospel", "pure administration of the sacraments" and "church discipline". "By these marks one can be assured of recognizing the true church". "The false church", though not stated, is the Roman Catholic Church (at least) and "easy to recognize" and "distinguish" from the true church. What is meant by the "true church and sects"? It is our persuasion that the Reformed confessional churches are true, even the truest of the true. Does that mean all others are sects which merely "claim...the name of church?" We do not believe this is the correct way to read this. To deny the fact that many non-Reformed churches are true churches is to do the very thing that sects do, claim they are the true church. We do not deny the high water mark of the Reformed church. But there are many churches who "believe the Bible alone is the Word of God" and seek to base their beliefs on this who are not Reformed and yet retain enough residual Reformed teaching and Gospel of grace preaching, enough proper administration of the sacraments and church discipline to qualify as true churches. This has been the historic Reformed doctrine of the visible church. The doctrine we find embedded here in the BC, the HC and the Westminster Confession. As such, it stands in an inimical relation to the position which seeks to identify the "true church" as the Reformed church. Mr. Kok has insisted that his position on the Lord's Supper is the historic position on the matter. We do not deny its historic rooting and favor in some streams of the Reformed faith. But what we wish to point out is that it is not a proper trajectory from the HC or BC. And the rigorous adoption of it, as some have done has the unfortunate outcome of not only contradicting our standards but of turning the Reformed church toward a sectarian mindset. Theologically this will paint us into a

corner of ecumenical isolationism and will plant in our ranks the seeds of Phraiseism. It will not beautify our graces and appearance but turn us inward in self-protection instead of outward in warmly welcoming those who are Christ's. This is the direction of the Supper pointed to by the BC, that it is for the faith of those born again and not limited to those of the Reformed faith. As Article #35 states, "We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain those who are already born again and ingrafted into his family: his church".

Arguing for an exclusive admittance of only Reformed Christians to the Table, is in our view, a clubhouse abuse of the keys that stands against our standards as noted. Such a posture approaches, if not embraces, the flip side of profaning the Table, from failing to *exclude the ungodly*, to *excluding the godly* who possess the same faith as us, and are indwelt by the same Spirit as us. It was for excluding God's people from the Table that provoked Paul to write his rebuke in I Cor. 11, and issue his warning of unworthy partaking, and of the need to "discern the body" rightly. That rebuke needs to be thoughtfully entertained by those excluding Christ's lambs from the Shepherd's feeding in the setting of the Reformed church.

At the end of the day, the question of who are to be admitted to the Lord's Table is preceded by the question of "what is the true church?" Certainly we are agreed that the Reformed confessional churches, at least on paper, are true churches. From this full-orbed high point, what are we then to make of typical non-Reformed churches of a conservative, Bible believing, Gospel preaching sort? Are they sects? Or can we recognize/discern in them adequate, though defective, marks of the true church and their membership as brothers and sisters in Christ? (We hope that it is self-evident that this question is entirely different, of a different ilk, from asking if there are anomalously true Christians in a patently false or sectarian environment, and is thus, beside the point.)

When Pastor Inks initially read the Revised Church Order Commentary by Van Dellen and Monsma he concluded that they came down on the side of the historic Reformed doctrine of the visible church. (This is reflected in the communication to Mr. Kok from our consistory). But this is not the whole story, and further re-readings have yielded a different understanding. On the one hand, we find these statements: "We believe with all our hearts that there is a holy Catholic Church and that the Christian Church is by no means limited to the Christian Reformed denomination together with some other loyal Reformed organizations...We thus give expression to our unity with the entire Christian Church, especially in regard to the sacraments." (p.235) "Essentially we bar no one, except unbelievers, from the Lord's Table. The greatest of sinners are welcome, if only they will confess their sins and manifest faith and sincerity. Let those who desire to celebrate Holy Communion take the proper steps to gain permission to share this great blessing." (p.245) Here we see a generous spirit supplied by the Reformed doctrine of the visible church, which is resistant to the spirit of sectarianism. But on the other hand, this is essentially overthrown by the following: "And if one be a sincere believer but not in agreement with the doctrinal or practical position of our churches, we have neither the desire nor the

power to restrain him from going to the Lord's Table. Only let him celebrate the Lord's Supper with those with whom he agrees." (p.245) In the judgment of our consistory this kind of granting with the right hand what you then take away with the left hand is double-speak and is confusingly contradictory. It is not congruent to "believe with all our hearts" in the "holy Catholic church" and "give expression of our unity...especially in regard to the sacraments" while at the same time denying this by forbidding the sacrament to non-Reformed believers in good standing of another Bible believing church, which in our confessions means that "God himself excludes them from the kingdom of Christ" (HC #85). Is that what we wish to communicate to our non-Reformed brothers and sisters in Christ? We believe that this is a failure to follow through on, our confessions ("the true church" and those Christians "who belong to the church" , "we can recognize", "we ought to discern", "are easy to recognize" [BC #29]) and our Bibles where we are called to "discern the body" and "examine ourselves" lest we exclude from the body and its sacramental celebration those who are members of that body.

Our Compliance with URC Church Order

Article #61 of Dort's Church Order requires those seeking admittance to the Lord's Table to "have made a confession of the Reformed religion". Rev. Daniel Hyde, in his fine essay "Table Manners: Whom We Welcome to the Lord's Supper" seems to massage this requirement to encompass conservative Protestant churches. That seems to be a pretty elastic **stretch** from a company of men who were **recently** heated up from the fight over the Canons of Dort! The Canadian Reformed Church, **however**, has adopted, straight up, this requirement of **Dort**, for welcoming guests to the Table in their Church Order, **Article #43**. This position, as much as we might admire the conviction and zeal for the Reformed faith that lie behind it, does not mesh with the HC and BC, which preceded Dort.

It seems to us that the URC has judiciously mapped out a different course by not employing the restrictive word "Reformed" but replacing it with "biblical" church membership in her Church Order Article #45 as grounds for admitting visitors to the Table. We believe that this is an improvement over the other church orders in that it meshes with the historic Reformed doctrine of the visible church, fits the Bible's requirements better, is a straight trajectory from her confessional standards, and avoids running the church's officers afoul of Paul's warnings of violating the unity of the Table by excluding from the Table those who evidence in their profession and lives that they are true Christians. Mr. Kok expresses doubt over the **significance or range** of this term "biblical", suggesting that it is ambiguous. Our consistory takes it at face value, and in light of the history of Reformed Church Orders on this very point, identify it as strategic and intentional, and not as an oversight or stumble into ambiguity. We are all certainly interested in the Classis' answer to this question that Mr. Kok has raised.

Our Requests

First, we request in response to Mr. Kok's appeal and our follow up letter, that Classis would judge that our consistory has not erred in our convictions and practices in administering the Lord's Table as charged but is in fact in accord with URC church order and doctrine.

Second, that **Classis would judge, that** we have not erred in violating our own requirements for administering the Lord's Table as Mr. Kok has claimed. But that Mr. Kok has, in fact, misinterpreted our standards and then inappropriately applied his misinterpretation to us.

Third, that **Classis would judge, that** we have not operated with a double standard in admitting guests to the Table as Mr. Kok has claimed, but that Mr. Kok's accusation is in fact, false.

Thank-you for walking through this with us. We welcome your feedback, guidance and correction.

Serving with You in Christ's Church,
The Consistory of Covenant United Reformed Church, Clovis, CA

Hi Pete:

Your appeal generated lots of discussion among the consistories of Classis.

Included is Article 6 of our minutes.

ARTICLE 6

A motion is made and supported to deny the appeal. Adopted

Grounds:

- 1-it's Biblical justification
- 2-it's confessional grounding
- 3-it's compliance with URC Church Order Article #45

Yours In Christ
Adrian Dieleman
Clerk, Classis PNW of the URCNA

Appeal #3
TO SYNOD WYOMING 2016 FROM WYBREN OORD

This Appeal contains the names of individuals, as well as complaints against a consistory in our federation. In order to protect the parties involved, the Convening Consistory and the Stated Clerk agreed not to publish the Appeal in the agenda, which is a public document. It will be sent to the Advisory Committee to which it is assigned, as well as to any delegate who requests it by e-mail from the Stated Clerk.

Communication #1

FROM MR. PETER KOK

Synod Wyoming

Dear Brothers in Christ,

I recently had the privilege of observing Classis Pacific Northwest in Salem Oregon. While it was a rewarding and enriching experience, a decision was made which I believe is neither God pleasing nor edifying to the Churches. Classis passed an overture to request Synod 2016 to direct CERCU to "discontinue all further action, advancement, processes or steps toward unification with the Canadian Reformed Churches". I believe this to be a wrong decision on the following grounds:

1) Only the Canadian Reformed Church is mentioned. I not only find this personally insulting, I find it to be also insulting to the work of Cercu. Their stated mission is Church union and ecumenical relations. How do we at the very least maintain ecumenical relations with a like minded federation when the committee is to stop all further interaction with it? The more logical decision would have been to disband Cercu in its entirety.

2) Psalm 133 speaks of how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. My question, or statement is how can we dwell in unity or union with brothers we don't want to have discussions with? This overture is more divisive to the body of Christ than restorative. At the very least, discussions should be ongoing in order to promote union and unity. We confess the Church to be the Bride of Christ, yet the Bride is seeking to be at war with herself by not wishing to discover all of her.

3) The issues which divide the two federations are not doctrinal in nature. If they are not doctrinal, they are based on manmade tradition, based on Scripture interpretation. The comment has been made that "we don't know these people". So, how do we get to know each other's traditions, history etc, by stopping the discussion? Even if Federative Unity is not in God's plans, it will never be in the realm of possibility without their being radical changes in the thought processes of both Federations. With further discussion and understanding, we get to know each other, and the result can be left to God's plan in history.

4) Belgic Confession Article 28 speaks of man being duty bound to join himself to the true Church. It can be argued that this applies in a broader sense as well. It states "but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, maintaining the unity of the Church, submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them." I ask Brothers, how can this unity be maintained if we refuse to at the very least continue our discussion with our Brothers, with whom we share a rich heritage? I suggest it is not possible.

So, in conclusion, I respectfully ask that Synod Wyoming not accede to the overture brought by Classis Pacific Northwest and that discussions between the two Federations be continued, to the Glory of God and the mutual edification of both Federations.

In Christ,
Peter Kok

Communication #2

FROM ADORATION UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, VINELAND, ONTARIO

Synod Wyoming 2016 of the United Reformed Churches in North America
c/o The Convening Consistory

***Communication to Synod 2016 Regarding Unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches**

March 1, 2016

Esteemed Brothers,

Our desire in this communication to Synod Wyoming 2016 is to make plain our desire for our churches to persist in the pursuit of full organic unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches. We are certain that such a unity can be accomplished in our lifetimes. We believe that our shared history as Reformed churches, common confessional commitments to the Three Forms of Unity, and broad agreement in matters of piety and practice are key ingredients of a successful union. An outside observer would be hard-pressed to identify any substantial differences between our respective federations of churches. Thus, it is our desire that we continue to find ways to come to terms with our brothers and sisters in the Lord who are part of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

We recognize that there are certain terms of this proposed union that are still in need of refinement and discussion. We have taken actions to address this by proposing specific changes that we would like to see made to the PJCO in preparation for full organic unity. We would encourage other churches to do the same!

This pursuit of unity between URC and CanRC churches has roots that predate the formation of the URCNA. Some may interpret that as a sign that the passage of time has given us reason to question the viability of full organic unity. We believe that the passage of time since the discussions which took place in 1992 and following have given us even more time to see the value of and desirability of this union. Where our churches overlap, there have been nearly two decades in which we have drawn closer together by means of pulpit exchanges, joint conferences and office bearer training, involvement in CanRC schools and URC affiliated schools, etc. This is most evident in southern Ontario because of the greater number of URC and CanRC churches in close proximity. It is also evident in southern British Columbia.

Speaking in 1992 at a conference dedicated to the topic of unity among Reformed churches, Dr. Ted Plantinga asked an insightful question, “will our American brothers and sisters discourage a union that will be of benefit mainly to the churches in Canada?”

We recognize, as a Canadian church, that we will see many benefits of full organic unity that will be of less immediate impact upon our American brothers and sisters. One great benefit to our churches will be the evangelistic benefit of no longer having to explain to curious observers why our churches agree on virtually everything and yet belong to separate

denominations. Another benefit will be the closer contact that will develop among our churches as we are increasingly knit together through our assemblies, exchanges, and various missions undertakings. We recognize that these benefits will be enjoyed mainly by the Canadian churches and we plead for our American brothers and sisters to consider these seemingly unseen and un-felt benefits as those which belong to the whole Church.

We have received reports from various classes in our federation who have been dealing with the question of uniting with the Canadian Reformed Churches. If the concerns were summarized, it would be that change is being proposed and that change is either unnecessary or too drastic. We anticipate that we will have a meaningful discussion at Synod when our delegates gather to take up the various overtures arising from our assemblies. Our hope, in presenting this communication to you, is to give voice to the real desire our churches have to arrive at unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Let us work out the details and even bring forward new terms and conditions that are in keeping with our foundational principles; only let there be a continued desire to pursue unity with like-minded churches.

Finally, dear brothers, we want to reiterate the many ways that we have been blessed in growing fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. We regularly have their ministers on our pulpits and they bring us the Word of God with the truth and conviction that we also hear in the ministers in our federation. We attend conferences put on by CanRC churches and the CanRC seminary. We have received their members at the Lord's Supper and been welcomed in their churches. Our ministers have a close fellowship together and we regularly exchange fraternal delegates at our classis meetings. This is evidence of the close bond of fellowship that we have with the CanRC churches that we encounter.

We thank you for this opportunity to address you in this way and pray that the Lord will bless our deliberations on this important topic.

Yours in the Lord,

On behalf of the consistory with the deacons,

Tony Rauwerda
Chairman

Wilf Wikkerink
Clerk

***3.5. Communication.** A communication is a written document from a consistory or an individual expressing opinions or ideas to a synod, or its appointed committees. A communication requires an acknowledgment, but does not require a decision by the synod or committee to which it is addressed.

Communication #3
FROM CLASSIS WESTERN CANADA

This Communication contains the names of individuals, as well as complaints against a consistory in our federation. In order to protect the parties involved, the Convening Consistory and the Stated Clerk agreed not to publish the Communication in the agenda, which is a public document. It will be sent to the Advisory Committee to which it is assigned, as well as to any delegate who requests it by e-mail from the Stated Clerk.

Communication #4

FROM GRACE REFORMED CHURCH, DUNNVILLE, ONTARIO

3.5 Communication. A communication is a written document from a consistory or an individual expressing opinions or ideas to a synod, or its appointed committees. A communication requires an acknowledgement, but does not require a decision by the synod or committee to which it is addressed.

Synod Wyoming 2016 of the United Reformed Churches in North America

c/o The Convening Consistory

Re: Unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches

March 21, 2016

Dear Brothers,

By way of this communication to Synod Wyoming 2016 the Consistory of the Grace Reformed Church of Dunnville Ontario urges the Federation to continue to support the efforts to reach full organic unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches. As most of the CanRC churches are situated in Canada and are often within close proximity to United Reformed Churches, the effort toward unity is one which we frequently encounter and increasingly appreciate.

From its inception the URCNA had recognized that on the North American continent, faithful Reformed Churches did already exist and consequently sought to maintain the beauty of the scriptural and confessional imperative to seek full organic unity with these our brothers. This awareness is reflected not only within the periphery of the URCNA¹ but also within the broader Reformed and Presbyterian milieu.²

It was therefore fitting that our two federations seek each other out and begin contact and regular communication. Owing to the fact that we have been blessed with a Reformed understanding of Scripture, it was natural that we would find so much in common with our CanRC brothers. And indeed there is much. We both whole-heartedly subscribe to the Three Forms Unity, we share a similar history, and for the most part stem from a common federation of churches. Our church orders are based on the C.O. of Dort and our orders of worship are in any

¹ *Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship.* The intent of this phase is to recognize and accept each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord Jesus, and in acknowledgment of the desirability of eventual integrated federative church unity

² *NAPARC Constitution - Purpose.* We regard this basis of fellowship as warrant for the establishment of a formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the Member Churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another; and to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.

ways similar. At the past Synod in Visalia the Colloquium helped clarify for us the mutual understanding we share with regards to Covenant.

Over the years, as noted above, there has been much progress in understanding each other better where the geographical proximity easily permitted; we understand that this has been primarily with many of the Canadian churches. Joint Council Meetings are held with mutual benefit, Bible conferences are often shared and youth conferences are hosted jointly by both churches as well. Those with special needs are cared for by both federations by providing housing and Christian care for these members. Pulpit exchanges are held regularly and enjoyed with profit, and memberships are transferred seamlessly in both directions. At the education level there are many schools which are blended by both federations and even on the level of theological training we have had the opportunity for men to train within each other's seminaries.

To speak from our own experience, the Dunnville Council and Congregation were blessed to have an emeritus CanRC minister on our pulpit for almost the entire duration (1 year) of our ministerial vacancy and he was warmly welcomed and much appreciated. He provided not only preaching but administered the sacraments and offered advice and assistance for the Council and the membership alike.

Nevertheless, despite these positive mutual steps the process of union has had its struggles; issues which many feel to be fundamental to the faithful continuance of either federation. These concerns are of no small consequence for it is upon these points that we have struggled in the past. To go into each point in great detail is outside the scope of this communication. However we mention briefly three familiar elements. From the perspective of the URCNA the PJCO has been met with skepticism due to concerns regarding hierarchy (an unfavorable term for both federations), and progress toward a federative song book has all but ceased. As well, discussions surrounding the instruction of men for the ministry have been met with differences of opinion and are virtually at an impasse.

A cursory overview of these points reveals the level of understanding which needs to continue to develop. Nevertheless we urge the churches not to let these concerns drive us apart but rather have them serve to kindle and foster a desire for a greater understanding of one another in order that we may together avoid falling into extremes and thus mutually work toward gaining a deeper scriptural understanding of God's will for us as His faithful people.

Our desire in submitting this communication is two-fold. First, we seek to demonstrate to Synod that the pursuit of organic unity with the CanRC is actively and eagerly pursued by many of our churches. What has been a hallmark of the Reformed Churches has steadily grown for many of us into a true and living desire and the imagery spoken of in Psalm 133 has in many ways become an increasing reality for us. From this we also wish to urge Synod to continue pursuing ways in which we can dwell together as brothers in organic unity. Seeking one another in the light of God's Word is a task which the psalmist declares to delight the LORD and which results in great blessing. We encourage Synod Wyoming to consider these benefits as it deliberates on this matter.

We appreciate the opportunity to address Synod by way of this communication and pray that the LORD will continue to bless this important pursuit.

On behalf of the Dunnville Consistory;

Chairman
Hindrik de Jong

Clerk
Dan Lindeboom

Communication #5

FROM IMMANUEL UNITED REFORMED CHURCH, JORDAN, ONTARIO

March 17, 2016

Brothers in Christ,

The Consistory of Immanuel URC in Jordan takes this opportunity to express our thankfulness for the blessings we have enjoyed through faithful Reformed ecumenical relations during the last several years. Among many other blessings, we are particularly grateful for what we have enjoyed in pursuing unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

The work has brought forward some challenges but also many blessings as we have moved closer to one another. We realize that we share a precious and like faith with our Canadian Reformed brothers and sisters. We strive to honor our Creator and Saviour through faithful worship and living which God prescribes to us in His Word. We share the same appreciation for our confessions which we believe do fully agree with the Word of God.

Over the years of working together to join fully together as one denomination, our churches have been able to grow to know one another by having ministers do pulpit exchanges and ministers coming together for Bible studies as well as inviting ministers to speak at conferences etc. Joint youth conferences and youth camps have been a blessing as has working together as brothers and sisters in Christian schooling. In this way God has shown to us that we have so very much in common.

We understand that with all the work that we do together there are still some hurdles, such as where our ministers would receive their training or the songs we choose to sing, but we do not see these to be insurmountable.

We believe that we have a responsibility towards one another and as a witness to the world to show that we are one in Christ, recognizing that it is our own sinfulness which impedes our faithful witness and our moving closer than where we have progressed so far.

The consistory of Immanuel URC in Jordan would encourage our United Reformed Churches to continue to keep the doors open for further discussions and not to allow what we have gained in the last years to be lost by placing unity talks on a moratorium. We would also encourage all of our churches to do what they can to build relations with all faithful churches in their area so that we can show the world around us that even though we have some differences, we share a love for Christ and are committed to following Him. Let us not allow these differences to become the reason for a coldness to our fellow brothers and sisters but rather use them for opportunity to continue to dialogue.

In Christ,

For the consistory of Immanuel United Reformed Church of Jordan, ON

John Broekema
Clerk of Consistory

Herb W. Sinke
Chairman of Consistory

Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity

Report to Synod Wyoming 2016

I. Introduction

Esteemed Brothers,

Our committee is privileged to serve the churches in our ecumenical opportunities and responsibilities according to the following mandate adopted by Synod Hudsonville 1999:

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. (1999 Acts, pages 17 & 49)

From our early beginnings as a federation, the pursuit of genuine biblical and confessional ecumenicity has formed a prominent component of our identity as churches. The desire for such growing expressions of unity was expressed already from the outset, with the choosing of our name – *United Reformed*. For the past two decades, we have been richly blessed (and have been of blessing) through our contact and growing fellowship with a number of confessionally faithful Reformed bodies that share with us like and precious faith.

We are also sensitive to the challenge and irony that the pursuit of our ecumenical calling has, at times, been the occasion for some disunity among us. We continue to learn together that true unity cannot be forced. We need much grace and forbearance of one another as we continue to engage a work that requires patient, prayerful persistence. And we need the collective wisdom of the body. Since our last Synod (Visalia 2014), CERCU has made special efforts to listen to input from the churches. As a result, your committee is not bringing recommendations for the formal advancement of relations from one Phase of ecumenicity to the next. As we have reported to the churches previously, CERCU does not intend to recommend moving to a Phase 3a relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches for at least the next 6 years. We have taken note of the will of our churches expressed at Synod Visalia 2014 as well as some other expressions of uncertainty. We will elaborate on the Committee's decision further in the section of this report devoted to our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Despite the absence of formal recommendations to Synod Wyoming 2016, we are certainly grateful that the work of ecumenicity continues to be a blessing at the consistorial, classical and federational levels. Your committee continues to rejoice in and to encourage such organic development of relations in the ways we have committed to as federation in CO Articles 34-36.

Through our ongoing discussions amongst ourselves as URCNA churches, we perceive that differences remain between us in terms of the application of the Biblical injunction toward expressions of greater unity. For the sake of discussion, we can envision two extreme understandings that might typically revolve around discussions of our Savior's high priestly prayer in John 17.

At one extreme there is the bald expectation that wherever and whenever there are (groups of) churches that make the same Biblical confession, there is an immediate need for full organizational unity, where failure to achieve such unity is, therefore, necessarily sin. While there is much about this ideal that is to be commended, at this extreme, practical realities and challenges may either be overlooked or minor differences not of a confessional nature may be elevated, in either case resulting, ironically, in greater disunity and antagonism between two bodies that are actually closely allied.

On the other end of the spectrum would be the assertion that is sometimes heard that Jesus' prayer has nothing to do with organizational unity, that what is in view is *merely* spiritual. The result at this extreme will often be a negligent lack of concern for the pursuit of greater unity between those who share a like confession.

Without being either presumptuous or prejudicial with regard to the pursuit of any particular relationship, we believe that the truth, practically, wisely and patiently applied lies somewhere between these two above mentioned extremes. We also believe this is tantamount to stating the obvious, and that in principle, if not always in practice, there is a large degree of unanimity amongst us as URCNA churches on this.

By the grace of God, we are a federation of churches that is known for its strong commitment to the absolute authority of the Word of God as faithfully summarized by our Three Forms of Unity. Any pursuit of unity that would stand opposed to this commitment to the truth would and should be summarily rejected. Many of us can speak from painful experience of the damages that have been done when unity was promoted at the expense of truth. The unity our Savior envisions and prays for is a unity that must be *governed* by the truth – His Word is truth (John 17:14,17).

We also humbly recognize from the prayer of our Savior with regard to all that the Father has given Him, that the unity He prays and works for is a blessing that must be *given* by the gracious work of His Spirit that, as a result, will come to organic expression among the churches. Unity cannot be forced or manufactured. Prayerfully and patiently recognizing that, we nevertheless also understand from our Savior that greater unity among all those who've been given to Christ remains a *goal* to be pursued. Jesus prays and works for greater expressions of unity, *in order that* the world may know (John 17:21,24). For the sake of our witness, therefore, we too count it a privilege and a responsibility to pray and work for greater expressions of unity. Pitting godly biblical ecumenism against evangelism is clearly a false dilemma. We rejoice that we have experienced much blessing already as churches from the blessed interrelation of the church's missionary calling and her ecumenical calling. As a result of our ecumenical contacts we've learned more about missions, we've been given more opportunities for missions, and have found help and encouragement from those who've been able to come alongside of us in our mission.

Opportunities seized to work together have also enhanced our witness to the world to the blessing of knowing God and the One Whom He has sent.

The question is, does such blessing require organizational unity? Perhaps not always. But certainly the unity we enjoy in the truth within our own federation bears witness to our belief that where such organizational expression of unity is possible, it is a good thing. Jesus prays to the end that our spiritual unity is manifested (see also Foundational Principles of Church Government, number 10). We take organizational unity to be *an* application, a helpful way of bringing the unity Jesus prayed for to expression. We recognize that it would not be proper to assert that this is *the* application, or the only way of bringing this unity to expression. But if, by the grace of God, greater organizational unity can be safely and wisely attained, we believe it does serve the well-being of the church and enhances her mission (Foundational Principle 7).

To one degree or another, greater unity is always something of a goal in all of our relationships. As long as we remain on this side of Christ's return, we will not have "arrived", we must continue to pray and work for greater expressions of unity. How such blessing gets worked out practically in each situation is a matter for which we as churches together will continue to need the peaceable and pure wisdom that is from above. In God's good providence, and by our decisions as churches, moving relations forward with any particular body requires a high degree of unanimity among our own churches. We believe this is wise and that it commits us, again, to patient, prayerful persistence in the work.

To that end, we also continue to rejoice in the privilege of carrying out this work with the following synodical guidelines.

GUIDELINES FOR ECUMENICITY AND CHURCH UNITY United Reformed Churches in North America

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 federations' 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 acknowledgment of the desirability of 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 with an advisory voice

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 phase shall be accomplished in two steps:

Step A – Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union

Having recognized and accepted each other as true and faithful churches, the federations shall make preparation for and a commitment to eventual, integrated federative church unity. They shall construct a plan of ecclesiastical 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

Entering this step of Phase Three requires ratification by the consistories as required in Church Order, Art. 36.

Step B – Implementation of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union

This final step shall only be taken when the broadest assemblies of both federations give their endorsement and approval to a plan of ecclesiastical union.

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

II. Committee Membership, Terms and Budget

a. Committee membership and Terms

The classes are reminded of their continuing responsibility to appoint or reappoint classical representatives (and alternates) to CERCU in the manner the classes deem appropriate.

With regard to the members-at-large, the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* adopted by Synod London stipulate that *the members of a standing committee shall serve no more than three three-year terms consecutively, each term commencing at the time of synodical appointment. Members who have completed three consecutive terms are eligible for reappointment after one year* (Regulations 5.3.2.c.). Synod Nyack 2012 clarified that if the term of a member-at-large expires in a year that synod does not meet, he shall serve the full three years of his term and the term shall expire on July 1. The replacement appointed at the previous synod shall assume the position at that time (Art. 54.3).

The committee is currently comprised of three members-at-large and eight classical representatives, one per classis. These members are as follows:

Classical representatives:

<u>Classis</u>	<u>Delegate</u>	<u>Alternate</u>
1. Central United States	Rev. Dan Donovan	Rev. Todd De Rooy
2. Eastern United States	Rev. Calvin Tuininga	Rev. Aaron Verhoef
3. Michigan	Rev. Casey Freswick	Rev. Jeremy Veldman
4. Ontario East	Rev. John Bouwers	Rev. Martin Overgaauw
5. Pacific Northwest	Elder Douglas Field	Rev. Craig Davis
6. Southwest United States	Rev. Michael Horton	Rev. Bill Godfrey
7. Southwestern Ontario	Rev. William Van Hal	Rev. Fred Folkerts
8. Western Canada	Rev. Ralph Pontier	Rev. James Folkerts

Alternates have been apprised of all committee discussions and have, on occasion represented the churches in place of the primary delegate.

Members-at-large:

1. Rev. Bill Pols – appointed by Synod 2007, 2010, and 2014. His third three-year term expires this year. He is not eligible for reappointment.
2. Rev. Richard Miller – appointed by Synod 2012; term began July 1, 2013. He is eligible for reappointment.
3. Rev. Steve Swets – appointed by Synod 2014 for a three-year term. He is eligible for reappointment.

Alternate member-at-large: There is no alternate member-at-large.

The committee recommends that Rev. Richard Miller and Rev. Steve Swets each be reappointed to another three-year term.

We recommend Rev. William Boekestein for the position of member-at-large to replace Rev. Bill Pols.

We recommend Rev. Chris Gordon to fill the vacant position of alternate member-at-large.

b. Budget

The annual budget for CERCU set by Synod Visalia was \$7,500.00. We have continued to make every effort to be stewardly with the finances allotted to us. When delegating fraternal representatives every attempt is made to do so in the most economical way feasible, also making use of local URC pastors in certain circumstances. We also anticipate holding full committee meetings annually each year in connection with the meetings of NAPARC. During these meetings we take opportunity to continue our ecumenical pursuits and discussions with the ecumenicity committees of many of the bodies represented there as a stewardly use of the churches' finances. Despite these attempts to be stewardly, your committee was not able to stay within its budget, primarily because of fluctuating currency exchange rates. Your committee requests synod to increase the annual budget allowance for CERCU from \$7,500.00 to \$10,000 US.

III. Reports on Churches in Ecumenical Relations

Your committee counts it a privilege to engage in ecumenical dialogue and seeks to promote greater unity among 12 synodically approved bodies of churches in North America. They, along with our respective phase of relations with them, are as follows:

Churches in Phase One – Corresponding Relations

1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)
2. Free Reformed Churches (FRC)
3. Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)
4. Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)
5. Korean Presbyterian Church in America – Kosin (KPCA)
6. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
7. Presbyterian Reformed Church

Churches in Phase Two – Ecclesiastical Fellowship

1. Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)
2. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
3. Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)
4. Reformed Church of Quebec / L'Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ)
5. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

In connection with inviting fraternal observers and delegates to address our Synods we have taken note of the fact that our assemblies have not always been well served by our not having communicated clear guidelines to those we invite to address us. In conjunction with our CECCA committee we are recommending that we begin to function with the following stated guidelines:

Guidelines for speeches of fraternal observers and delegates to our Synod

We welcome you to address our synod at an appropriate time which will be made known to you. In order to best serve the purpose of our broadest assembly (Synod) we ask that you follow the following guidelines with regard to time and content of your speeches.

1. We require speeches to be no longer than 10 minutes. After 10 minutes the chairman of synod will rise, thus indicating to the speaker that they should bring their comments to a close.
2. Suggestions for items to be addressed:
 - a. The history of your denomination/federation if it is relatively unknown to the URCNA.
 - b. Recent decisions or movements in your churches.
 - c. Encouragement and advice to the URCNA, especially in light of their synod meeting.
 - d. Items of prayer that we may remember on your behalf.
 - e. We would request that you refrain from spending a significant amount of time promoting particular seminaries or other particular ministry causes.

We have taken the liberty of instructing the fraternal observers and delegates invited to this upcoming Synod to pay attention to these guidelines, and it is our intention to include these guidelines in our invitations to fraternal delegates and observers to future synods.

A. Churches in Phase One – *Corresponding Relations*

1. Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC)

The ARP was founded in Philadelphia in 1782. It was a combination of the American portions of two Scottish presbyteries that had previously left the Church of Scotland: The Associate Presbytery began in 1733 and the Reformed Presbytery in 1743. It owns Erskine College and Seminary. The churches no longer are required to practice exclusive psalmody, which was its heritage. In the last quarter of the 20th century, they threw off the influence of neo-orthodoxy, which reached the height of its influence among them in the 1960's. As of the December 2015 their 9 presbyteries reported a total membership of 30,511 (down from 34,960 in 2013) 238 congregations (down from 294 in 2013). They held concurrent General Assemblies/Synods in 2015 with the RPCNA at Bonclarken with joint worship times. Though the respective worship practices of these two bodies of churches (pertaining to the allowance for the singing of hymns in the ARP) will preclude the full expression of unity between them at the present time, it is nevertheless deeply encouraging to see this pair of NAPARC churches seeking to grow in communion and fellowship with each other.

The ARPC holds to the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as Larger and Shorter Catechisms. In November 2015 they reported to NAPARC that in addition to these, their standards include. “our recently revised Form of Government, our recently revised Directory of Public Worship, and our Book of Discipline, which is currently under revision.” They are

members of NAPARC and the World Reformed Fellowship. Whereas they were also at one time members of the ICRC, they have reported that stewardship considerations have compelled them to withdraw from that arrangement for a time.

Our meetings with this body have been intermittent. As the Lord allows, our intentions are that over the next years we will be able to continue to pursue the Phase 1 dialogue with this body that we trust will one day allow for a recommendation to our churches that we move to a Phase 2 relationship. Congregations and classes are urged to pursue opportunities for ecumenical fellowship with ARP congregations and Presbyteries.

2. Free Reformed Churches (FRC)

The Free Reformed Churches were established in 1921. As of October 2014 they consisted of 21 congregations with a total membership of 4,914, an increase of two congregations and 514 members since our last reporting. They hold to the Three Forms of Unity. Their churches are scattered across North America, mainly in Canada. The FRC trace their roots to the secession that occurred in the established Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands in 1834. The FRC are the spiritual descendants of the churches in the Netherlands which did not join in the merger of 1892, which formed the GKN. They were then, and are today particularly concerned about the influence of Abraham Kuyper, most specifically in relation to his view of presumptive regeneration in connection with baptism. Although they trace their roots to the Netherlands, they greatly value and appreciate the theology and preaching of the English and Scottish Puritans and those who followed in their footsteps especially the experimental and discriminating character of Puritan preaching, their emphasis on the need for conversion, cultivating a close personal walk with the Lord and eschewing worldliness. They work closely with the Heritage Reformed Churches in the operation of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

A number of our own URC churches have developed very good working relationships with FRC congregations through connections through Christian schooling, conferences and ministries to Migrant Workers, as well as through mutual involvement with Word and Deed and in Redemption Prison Ministries.

On November 11, 2015, at the NAPARC venue, our committee met jointly with representatives of the FRC and the HRC and were pleased to note the progress those two federations are making in drawing closer to one another. We continue to encourage and pray for these two NAPARC bodies in their pursuit of eventual church unity with each other. Their mutual engagement in the work at the Puritan Seminary (PRTS) and their shared emphasis on the importance of experiential preaching have had the fruitful effect of allowing for good progress in their ecumenical pursuits together.

CERCU is also grateful for the opportunity to continue our Phase 1 dialogue with this body. After a few years of lessened contact, we have for the past three or more years enjoyed more regular and more engaged contact. We are grateful that in 2013 the FRC synod instructed their committee to resume dialogue with the United Reformed Churches, a work we have been eager to continue. We remind the churches of the important work done in working together through

the Conclusions of Utrecht (1905/1908) with these brothers and the acknowledgement of Synod Visalia 2014 that these discussions provided a good picture to the Free Reformed of the thinking that lives in our churches on these matters. We were also able, thereby to assure them that the conclusions of Utrecht have no binding status in our churches.

On March 8, 2016 representatives of our committee were able to meet with these brothers at a subcommittee level to have a thorough discussion of three sermons seasoned Free Reformed pastors. (In November, 2014 three URC sermons were discussed). There was a strong experiential emphasis with a consistent challenge against passivism, and a seeking to reach members of the congregation who weren't convinced the gospel could be for them. Each sermon also contained warning in one form or another against covenantal presumption. We assured the brothers that such emphases are also sounded from URC pulpits, but we also asserted that if that was a consistent emphasis in every sermon, it could also serve to cultivate the very doubts they are seeking to address. Generally, there was appreciation for the sermons preached. We have agreed as committees to continue these types of discussions, planning in for early 2017 for two sermons from pastors from each federation on identical texts.

We continue to make our way through the Phase 1 dialogue with the hope that we may, in time, be able to recommend moving to a Phase 2 relationship with these churches as well.

3. Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)

The HRC was established in 1993 and consists of nine organized congregations including two not yet organized. As of September 2015, the total membership consists of 2,207 members. Their ministers may subscribe to either the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster standards. They operate the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which has an enrolment of about 150 students from 20 different countries and 30 denominations.

We have continued bilateral meetings with the representatives of the HRC at NAPARC in every year. The meetings were positive and encouraging.

The HRC has five levels of fellowship, which are as follows:

- Level 1: Informal Contact
- Level 2: Formal Correspondence
- Level 3: Limited Fellowship
- Level 4: Full Fellowship
- Level 5: Full Union

In 2013 the HRC voted to enter into their Level 2 with us which corresponds with our Phase One. As these discussions continue under the blessing of God, perhaps in time further progress into a preliminary level of fellowship may be possible, approaching a Phase Two relationship (in URCNA categories). We have met with their representatives at NAPARC in 2014 and 2015 and have continued to hold before them our desire to work through the prescribed topics for discussion in Phase One with the hope of our being able to move into a Phase Two relationship with them in the Lord's good time. We have enjoyed a growing good will through meeting with these brothers. We have eagerly encouraged them in their growing relationship with the Free

Reformed Churches. In the relatively young HRC we have been encouraged by the outgoing and forward looking emphasis of her leaders. It is somewhat reflective of the reach the PRTS Seminary is having in the world. We continue to encourage active engagement in opportunities for advancing this relationship at the consistorial level as well.

4. Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)

KAPC was established in 1978 and as of May 2015, consists of 30 presbyteries (including some overseas) and 620 local churches (down 30 from our last report), ministered to by 1,300 ordained ministers (up 100 since our last report). Their communicant membership is about 64,000 (down 8,000 from our last report). Most of their congregations are Korean speaking but as an immigrant church they are slowly transitioning to English among the younger generations. They adhere to the Westminster standards. They have commissioned 107 missionary units through World Missionary Society, a sending agency commissioned by their General Assembly. In 2014 they had 24 men serving as chaplains in the US military at home and abroad.

Our contact with the Korean Presbyterian Church has been minimal, restricted to informal contacts at NAPARC. Contact with this church is further hindered by the fact that they are a predominantly Korean speaking federation of churches and the translation of their official documents into English are not always clear and have not been officially approved by any governing body of that federation. We do not anticipate any more meaningful contact with the KAPC until they become a more English speaking federation, which is in progress, but may take a generation.

5. Korean Presbyterian Church in America – Kosin (KPCA)

The KPCA (Kosin) was established in 1985. Its confessional standards are the Westminster Confession and Shorter and Larger Catechism and the Apostles' Creed. As of September 2015, they had 131 congregations in 8 presbyteries, and 231 ordained ministers. They have mission fields in China, Japan, The Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia, Brazil, and Paraguay. They are attempting to develop mission fields in North Korea and Cuba.

They were admitted to NAPARC in 2014 and by that fact are considered to be in Phase One with us. We have not had any formal meetings with their representatives. They have reported meeting with representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches which have enjoyed sister church relations with the Kosin mother churches in Korea for several years.

6. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

The PCA was founded in 1972, arising out of debates in the PCUSA regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. It is by far the largest member of NAPARC. As of December 31, 2014, the PCA consisted of 1,831 churches and missions (1,777 in 2013) and a total membership of 358,516 (364,019 in 2013). They hold to the Westminster standards. In addition to NAPARC, they are members of the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Reformed Fellowship. It is by far the largest denomination represented in NAPARC.

The PCA has two levels of ecclesiastical relationships. They designate their entry level of relations as Corresponding Relations. In 2015 the PCA formalized Corresponding Relations with the EPC. Fraternal Relations is the more intense level of relations, one which they have with all NAPARC denominations or federations by virtue of membership in NAPARC. This means that short of the pursuit of a merger, from the perspective of the PCA we are already in their highest level of relations. The PCA, though certainly open to greater, more complete unity with other bodies, has not been actively involved in pursuing it at NAPARC.

At the committee level our contact with the PCA has not progressed very far to this point. Efforts to meet with their committee this past year at NAPARC did not materialize due to a last minute sickness of one of their delegates. Our intention is to begin to work with the PCA through our Phase One dialogue in order to move toward a recommendation to enter into Phase Two *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*. We have sought to send fraternal delegates to their annual General Assembly. This past year Rev. Dennis Royall represented the URCNA at their GA in Chattanooga, Tenn.

We encourage classes and consistories that enjoy closer fellowship and proximity with the PCA to continue to pursue contact at the local level, where possible, to gain greater awareness and familiarity with the PCA.

7. Presbyterian Reformed Church

The PRC is the smallest group in NAPARC. It is an indigenous North American group of churches continuing historic Scottish Presbyterian orthodoxy in doctrine, worship, government and discipline, on the basis of a conviction that these principles and practices are founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God. It consists of four congregations in the US (Des Moines, IA, Columbus, IN, Charlotte, NC, and East Greenwich, RI), one in Chesley, Ontario and one in England. They have a total of 226 members in the six congregations. They are committed to a strict adherence to “The Directory for the Publick Worship Of God” (1645) and exclusive psalmody. All of their churches have ministers but most of their ministers are bi-vocational since their congregations are small and unable to fully support their pastors financially.

Although they are committed to organic union with like minded churches, because of geography and their strict adherence to “The Directory for the Publick Worship Of God” (1645), including exclusive psalmody, we have not yet pursued a Phase One dialogue with this group. We will continue informal contacts at NAPARC and we urge classes and congregations to pursue local contact where it is available to gain greater awareness and familiarity.

B. Churches in Phase Two– Ecclesiastical Fellowship

1. Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

We have been in a Phase Two – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* relationship with the Canadian Reformed churches since the ratification of the decision of Synod Escondido 2001. Looking back over these years, though we recognize things have not always gone smoothly or as some may have hoped, we must nevertheless acknowledge that this relationship has experienced much

of the blessing of God. Relationships and appreciation for one another, particularly where the relationships are the closest geographically have seen remarkably encouraging changes.

Given our historic, confessional and geographical proximity to these churches, we believe that our relationship with these churches should continue to be a priority in our ecumenical pursuits. As of January 1, 2015 the CanRC consisted of 69 congregations (including foreign and domestic mission works not yet organized – 54 in 2012) and 18,554 members (17,975 in 2012) with 83 ordained ministers (active and retired).

We continue to be grateful for the blessing of the Lord we have and are experiencing in this relationship. In our report to Synod 2014 we announced our intention to propose to Synod 2016 entering into Step A – *Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union (of Phase Three Church Union)*. The intent of making this advanced notice was that we might receive feedback from the churches in terms of readiness. A motion at Synod 2014 to encourage CERCUC in this plan was tabled indefinitely therefore our committee is not bringing to this synod a recommendation to enter *Phase Three, Step A* with the Canadian Reformed. In our own committee's discussions last November, as well as in our discussions with the Canadian Reformed, we came to the conclusion together that we will not make any recommendations concerning stepping forward to the next phase of relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches for at least the next six years.

It is our conviction, given the concerns expressed in some parts of our federation, particularly where the blessing of unity with the Canadian Reformed have not been experienced firsthand, that greater hope for eventual unity would be better served long-term if the pressure of an impending next-step was removed. It is our prayer and commitment that in the meantime our work on our relationship should continue even as we continue to seek greater unity amongst ourselves in our own URC federation. We continue to pray for peaceable and practical wisdom from above that we might be both patient and persevering in the pursuit of our ecumenical opportunities. We believe that God is pleased, the church is blessed, and our mission to the unbelieving world is helped through greater expressions of true biblical ecumenicity.

As committee we are committed to encouraging and assisting churches to work through whatever concerns and difficulties might yet stand in the way of making progress in this relationship. As we pray and work for continued progress in these matters, our commitment is to continue to engage and update the churches on the progress and the challenges and to re-evaluate whether and how to proceed to any potential next step in our reporting to Synod 2022.

Meanwhile, we also do well to learn from the things we've learned in our dialogue together, both in terms of challenge and opportunity.

In our discussions among the churches, where concerns have been expressed, they can be summarized as follows. Some have articulated the fear that joining with the Canadian Reformed Churches would change us. Others, particularly in classis MI and classis PNW have spoken of negative experiences with expressions of a narrow ecclesiology in particular Canadian (American) Reformed congregations in their vicinity. A number remain unconvinced that we are bound by any sort of obligation to pursue greater unity. And finally, there remains a general concern among a number of our churches with regard to our perception that the proposed joint

church order contains aspects that are hierarchical. We are grateful that our churches are addressing synod with their church polity concerns by way of overture (*Acts 2014*, Art. 73).

On the positive side it also needs to be said that over the long term, wherever this relationship has been engaged, the result has gradually but overwhelmingly been one of growing love, mutual appreciation and trust, as well as increased cooperation in such things as education, evangelism, youth activities, conferences, joint services, and pulpit exchanges. Vacant churches have made mutual use of the pastors of our respective federations to great blessing. A relationship of trust has been established so that ministers and candidates are being called across federational lines, and joint home mission works are being undertaken where Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches are standing together to establish a work and call a church planter. It should also be said that the negative experiences with a narrow ecclesiology were the regular concerns of our Canadian URCs about this relationship a decade and a half ago. We have learned that some of this was owing to misunderstanding and misperception, we have also learned that as we engaged these matters and each other much of this has also changed, as an indication of the blessing we have been to them in our ecumenical relationship.

We must not forget either, the great strides we were able to make together at our last Synod (Visalia 2014) in our understanding of the confessional agreement we enjoy on the doctrine of the covenants in Scripture. When Dr. Cornel Venema and Dr. Robert Godfrey were able to conclude in the presence of our Synod that in spite of our historical differences and varieties of expression, we do nevertheless find each other's positions within Confessional bounds, it means we have, and ought to enjoy, fundamental Confessional unity. Ecumenically speaking, as we live up to and out of our confession, we can see that we have a place to stand and a place from which to move forward, in God's good time.

A transcript of the colloquium with supporting documents has now been published under the title *The Bond of the Covenant* and is available at <http://amzn.com/0994796307> in the US and <http://www.amazon.ca/dp/0994796307> in Canada. Those for whom ordering copies as such would prove to be a hardship are free to contact the Chairman of the Committee for a complimentary copy of the pdf version of the book.

It was the work of our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which brought about the formation of the URC. It was God who gave the faith, courage, love, and mutual trust that united our churches under Scripture and the confessions with a new church order. If a similar love, courage, and trust will bring about a new union with other brothers and sisters of common confession and heritage, this also must be from God. This is why prayer is of utmost importance. Prayer acknowledges this dependence on God. Prayer means seeking God's will, and not our own. Prayer expresses and reinforces the importance of "making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

We continue to recommend the patient pursuit of unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches in the belief that such union would be according to God's Word, and thus pleasing to him. But such belief alone neither accomplishes anything nor proves it to be the will of God. This is why we once again include a recommendation that synod urge the churches to regularly pray for the Lord's guidance and grace that we may know and do his will, and that he might do "exceedingly

abundantly above all that we ask or think . . . to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations” (Ephesians 3:20-21).”

2. Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

The RCUS was established in 1746 making it one of the oldest, continuous Reformed denomination in North America. As of December 2014, they have 3,720 members (3,767 in 2012) a number that has been in a slow decline for many years. In past years they have experienced a decline in rural congregations.

We are grateful for the Phase Two *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* relationship we have enjoyed with this body since the ratification of the decision of Synod Calgary 2004. The RCUS has a position paper endorsing the idea of merger if it can be accomplished without any compromise in faith or practice. In our dialogues with these brothers to this end, we have also experienced, however, a certain degree of aversion to the greater pursuit of unity. As has been explained to us, this reflects some of the lingering concerns in many of their members and leaders that have developed as a result of the destruction experienced at the hands of a liberal ecumenism in the 1930s.

We encourage those classes and congregations in geographic proximity with RCUS classes and congregations to continue to promote and enhance the unity of faith we enjoy with this body through the exchange of fraternal delegates at broader assemblies, and in local engagement and encouragement of combined activities with RCUS churches as the Lord allows.

3. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

The OPC was born in the crucible of the corruption, by modernism, of the boards and agencies of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America during the 1930’s. The OPC holds to the Westminster standards. In 2014, the OPC reported a total membership of 31,122 (30,555 in 2012). They have 323 particular and mission congregations (319 in 2012). Foreign mission work is conducted in Asia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Japan, Quebec, Ukraine, Uganda, and Uruguay. A Christian School has been started in Karamoja, Uganda.

We recall with fondness how at our own earliest Synods in the mid to late 1990s our fledgling United Reformed federation of churches received warm and brotherly encouragement from an older brother on the North American confessionally Reformed scene, the OPC. They wrote to encourage us in the struggle to maintain the truth as they lamented with us the decline of what was for many of us, our mother church, the Christian Reformed Church. The OPC considered it their privilege and obligation to a debt of history, that they should encourage us in this way and invite us into fraternal relations with them. It was in the 1930s that the CRC had encouraged them when they went through their struggles in the United Presbyterian Church at that time.

With an understanding that our pursuit of unity would entail an “in principle” commitment to even greater commitment even, one day to full unity, our respective committees worked diligently and thoroughly through our Phase One dialogue through several meetings in the early years of this millennium. Since the ratification of the decision of Synod Schererville 2007, we

have been blessed to be in a Phase Two *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* relationship with the OPC. Our relationship has yielded wonderful fruit over the years. We have learned much from the OPC in terms of its missionary pursuits at home and abroad. We look forward to the completion of our work together on the new Trinity Psalter Hymnal as another wonderful expression of the unity we enjoy with the OPC. Their own *Biblical Principles on the Unity of the Church*, available on the OPC.org website, provide a very helpful encouragement toward the continued, patient pursuit of fulsome genuine ecumenicity.

We look forward to more fruit upon our ecumenical efforts with the OPC in the days to come. To that end we heartily encourage classes and congregations in geographic proximity with OPC presbyteries and congregations to continue the exchange of fraternal delegates, and to engage in other ecumenical activities that may be available. One such instance of such fruitful efforts would be the annual Semper Reformanda conference held jointly by classis Eastern US and the Presbytery of NJ of the OPC. Concurrent meetings of the classis and presbytery have also taken place in this connection, allowing for growing interaction and familiarity. CERCUC is grateful for such efforts as these and encourages other classes to take advantage of such opportunities for enjoying and advancing our ecumenical fellowship together.

4. **Reformed Church of Quebec / L’Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ)**

The Reformed Church of Quebec were established in 1988. They are a little band of five fledgling faithful Reformed congregations seeking to maintain a witness for the gospel in the midst of a traditionally French Roman Catholic culture that has become severely secularized, post-modern and hedonistic. As of December 2014, they number 359 total members (340 in 2012). They adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism. They are closely associated with the Farel Reformed Theological Seminary in Montreal, although an independent board governs that institution. They are working on translating Reformed literature into the French language. The churches are now wrestling with whether to permit any views regarding the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 other than creation in six real days of ordinary duration.

This small body of churches appear very happy to be a part of NAPARC. As a fledgling body seeking to minister in a very secularized culture, they eagerly seek the advice, support and encouragement of the other member churches of NAPARC, and we are thankful when we have opportunity to serve them in this way. The likelihood of more intense formal unity with this body is presently limited. First, the ERQ is a French speaking federation in a French speaking culture (Quebec). The ERQ has no intention of transitioning to the English language because their outreach is to a French speaking culture. Language barriers are a natural boundary which hinders the kind of close cooperation and contact needed to function together well in one federation.

We encourage those classes and congregations in geographic proximity with ERQ classis and congregations to continue the exchange of fraternal delegates, and to engage in other ecumenical activities that may be available. Opportunities exist for mission trips and vacation Bible school. Good work has been done in making French Reformed material available throughout Africa and the world.

5. **Reformed Presbyterian Church in North American (RPCNA)**

The RPCNA has its roots in Scottish Presbyterianism. It was organized in North America in 1798. As of December 2014 they had 6,940 total members in 97 congregations including eleven mission stations not yet organized. They operate a theological school, the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, established in 1810. The seminary is committed to the inerrancy of Scripture and to the Reformed Faith as summarized in the Westminster Standards and in the Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Their worship is characterized by exclusive psalmody and singing without musical accompaniment. The RPCNA owns and operates a liberal arts college, Geneva College in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, which is now 167 years old.

We entered into *Phase Two, Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with the ratification of the decision of Synod Nyack 2012. We have enjoyed continued brotherly fellowship with this body then, primarily at NAPARC meetings and the exchange of delegates at our broadest assemblies. We continue to look for ways to develop our relationship and encourage those in close geographical proximity to RPCNA works to take full advantage of the fellowship we can enjoy in Christ. This body has done particularly helpful work in terms of the arrangement of mission trips. We can learn from them, and as we have been assured, there is also a willingness on their part to participate with them in these works.

We pray that together in growing measure we may promote the cause of Christ in the world, giving united witness to the Reformed faith.

C. North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

NAPARC held its annual meeting November 10-12, 2015 in Quebec City. These meetings are hosted on a rotating basis by the member churches of NAPARC and this year it was hosted by l'Église réformée du Québec (the Reformed Church of Quebec - ERQ).

NAPARC, according to its constitution, is “a fellowship that enables the constituent churches to advise, council, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.”

During the meetings, each of the 13 member bodies give a report, respond to questions from the others and then pray for one another. As always, it was a blessed time of sharing and learning from one another and “communicating advantages to each other” (Purpose of NAPARC). Time was also devoted to talking about how the actual pursuit of organic unity is going among the various member churches. We talked frankly about the challenges and urged a prayerful waiting upon the Lord, while nevertheless continuing to hold before each other the ideal.

On Tuesday evening the Quebec City ERQ, St. Mark's, also hosted us in their facilities with a meal and with a devotional service at which one of the ERQ pastors, Pasteur Mario Veilleux preached a straight forward and helpful sermon (in French) from Matthew 28:19-20 on the confidence and courage we are to have going forward into all the world with Jesus with us. (We received a manuscript of his speech in English). Also on Wednesday evening, we were taken

once more to the church facilities, served a wonderful meal and listened to a speech by Pasteur Patrice Michaud on his coming to faith, his experience as a Reformed Pastor and on the challenges of ministering in the very secular context that Quebec has become.

Much of the work toward unity is accomplished not in the full meetings of NAPARC itself but in the bi-lateral meetings we have with several of the other member churches of NAPARC before, during and after the meetings of NAPARC. This time we met with the ERQ, the RPCNA, the CanRC, and the OPC. We also met with the HRC and the FRC, with which we currently have a lesser, *Phase One – Ecumenical Contact* relationship. We met with these two bodies simultaneously in light of the fact that together they are making good progress toward full union with each other. We have always enjoyed good fellowship with these bodies, would like to intensify our own contact with them, in time. We also met with brothers from the Protestant Reformed Churches who are considering the possibility of seeking membership in NAPARC and we sought to encourage them in what we perceived would be the blessings they could give and receive if they were able to take the step of joining.

The Basis of NAPARC and its statements of Purpose and Function can be found at <http://www.naparc.org/documents/cb>.

In order that our connections to NAPARC (and internationally with the ICRC) and the churches connected with us might feature more prominently in the lives of our churches and in the consciousness of our members we are making the following recommendation:

That synod urges the churches to make a regular part of the information they publish in weekly bulletins, church newsletters, church web-sites and other informational publications, our federation's membership in NAPARC and the ICRC, providing web addresses for each to encourage our members to learn about these ecumenical organizations and to help foster an awareness of the biblical ecumenical mandate to seek ever greater unity with those of like faith and practice. Just as the local church makes known its affiliation with the federation, so it should make known the federation's fraternal bonds.

IV. Recommendations

1. That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the committee chairman and secretary when committee matters are being considered (Regulations 5.4.2).
2. That synod re-appoint as a member-at-large Rev. Richard Miller to a second three-year term to commence in July 2016. (Rev. Richard Miller was first appointed by Synod 2012 to a term that began July 1, 2013. He is eligible for reappointment.
3. That synod re-appoints as a member-at-large Rev. Steve Swets to a second three-year term to commence July 1, 2017. (He was first appointed by Synod 2014 for a three-year term.) He is eligible for reappointment.
4. That synod appoints as a member-at-large Rev. William Boekestein to a three-year term to commence July 1, 2016. This is to replace Rev. Pols who is not eligible for re-appointment.
5. That synod appoints as alternate member-at-large Rev. Chris Gordon. There is no current alternate.

6. That Synod set the budget for CERCU at \$10,000 US per annum.
7. That Synod take note of the guidelines for the speeches of ecumenical observers and delegates that has been prepared by CERCU for use at all future synods.
8. That Synod remind the churches of our mutual responsibility to engage one another in our ecumenical task through prayer, classical dialogue, local efforts and the expression of concerns.
9. That Synod continue to encourage each classis and consistory to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting Canadian Reformed ministers to fill our pulpits, inviting Canadian Reformed representatives to our classis meetings, seeking open dialogue with Canadian Reformed brothers regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with Canadian Reformed congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection. And that synod encourage the churches to regularly pray for the Lord's guidance and grace that we may know and do his will, and that he might do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think . . . to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations” (Ephesians 3:20-21).”

Grounds:

- a. Those who have been involved in the process of facilitating greater unity have been profoundly impacted with the spirit of unity. Throughout the process, further dialogue has consistently resulted in warm and cordial relationships and misconceptions have been dispelled.
 - b. This would be an encouragement to the Canadian Reformed Churches who through their synodical communications have expressed their willingness to continue working through the challenges involved in seeking unity.
 - c. Our own unity as emerging URCNA churches was formed through much of these kinds of relations and interactions before our own official start together.
 - d. Prayer is needed for “Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1).
10. That synod urges the churches to make a regular part of the information they publish in weekly bulletins, church newsletters, church web-sites and other informational publications, our federation’s membership in NAPARC and the ICRC, providing web addresses for each to encourage our members to learn about these ecumenical organizations and to help foster an awareness of the biblical ecumenical mandate to seek ever greater unity with those of like faith and practice. Just as the local church makes known its affiliation with the federation, so it should make known the federation’s fraternal bonds.
 11. That the classes be reminded of their continuing responsibility to appoint or reappoint classical representatives (and alternates) to CERCU in the manner the classes deem appropriate.
 12. That Synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its various Phase One dialogues.

Humbly submitted,
Rev. John A. Bouwers, chairman
Rev. Ralph A. Pontier, secretary

Report of the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee to Synod Wyoming 2016

Synod Visalia 2014 gave our committee the following instruction:

Article 69 (page 57)

1. That Synod instruct the PJCO Committee to await further work on the PJCO until after the anticipated decision at the next Synod concerning the proposal to enter Phase 3A with the CanRC.

Ground:

The PJCO work properly belongs to Phase 3A and we are not yet in Phase 3A with the CanRC. *Adopted*

2. That this be Synod's response to the PJCO report. *Adopted*

We have received one communication from a consistory expressing concern about some aspects of the PJCO, but having been instructed by synod to take no action on the PJCO, we took no action.

Since the CERCU report to this synod states that they do not intend to propose entering Phase 3A for at least six years, and since the work of this committee properly belongs to Phase 3A, we respectfully request that our committee be dismissed with thanks. Whenever Synod decides to enter Phase 3A with the Canadian Reformed Churches, it has the option to appoint a new PJCO committee.

Recommendation: That the PJCO committee be dismissed with thanks.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Adrian Dieleman
Rev. William Pols
Rev. Ralph Pontier
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema
Rev. Mark Vander Pol

Report of the URCNA Psalter Hymnal Committee To Synod 2016 ~Wyoming, MI~

Introduction

In 1997, when our committee was appointed to explore the possibility of producing a songbook, Synod St. Catharines said, "Because the process of producing a psalter hymnal is lengthy it would be wise to begin the process as soon as possible." The delegates to that synod 19 years ago were insightful and prophetic, and we are now thankful to report that the work is finally coming to fruition. It is no small task to evaluate, plan and produce a book that will contain songs for the worship of God's people. You have entrusted our committee with this important responsibility and we are truly thankful for being given this opportunity. With this report we seek to provide you with an update of our work and present recommendations for your deliberation. The report includes history and mandates, a summary of our progress to date, anticipated contents of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, and recommendations for your consideration.

The mandate given to our committee from Synod 2012 (Nyack) is to work with the OPC Psalter Hymnal Special Committee to produce a psalter hymnal for use in our churches. In 2014 we brought a psalm proposal to the synodical delegates in Visalia who gave overwhelming approval. This year we're excited to present for your approval the hymn proposal.

I. History and Mandates

A. SYNOD 1997 (St. Catharines, ON) appointed a Psalter Hymnal committee "to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal." The grounds for this mandate were:

1. A common psalter hymnal would promote unity among the churches of our federation;
2. The *Psalter Hymnal* used in the majority of our churches is presently out of print;
3. Because the process of producing a psalter hymnal is lengthy it would be wise to begin the process as soon as possible.

(Minutes of Synod, October 1997, Article LXII.C.)

B. SYNOD 1999 (Hudsonville, MI) Our committee explored the options of producing, reproducing, or obtaining a psalter hymnal and reported its finding to Synod 1999. This synod approved the republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal, added members to the committee, and gave us 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)

C. SYNOD 2001 (Escondido, CA) Having begun this work, our committee reported our progress to Synod 2001. Synod Escondido approved entering into "Phase Two" of ecumenicity with the Canadian Reformed Churches and made the following decisions regarding our committee:

1. Approved the establishment of a fund to finance the cost of the new psalter hymnal and requested the churches to collect free-will offerings for this cause. (Minutes, Article XXXV,D,2,3)
2. Reaffirmed our mandate of Synod 1999 and requested that we present the guiding principles for study by the churches and for adoption by the next synod. (Minutes, Article XXXV,D,4)
3. Added the following to our mandate: "That the present 'Psalter Hymnal Committee' work together with the Canadian Reformed 'Book of Praise Committee' to consider for inclusion in this song book the 150 Psalms in metrical settings (one note for each syllable) from an English translation of the Genevan Psalter, as well as other non-Genevan settings for the Psalms, and also hymns that meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions. The two song books primarily in use need not be included in their totality." (Minutes, Article XLV,B,2,c)

D. SYNOD 2004 (Calgary, AB) released our committee from the responsibility to prepare and provide recommendations for the non-musical portion of the songbook (liturgical forms, prayers, confessions, etc.) and appointed another committee to take on that responsibility. (Minutes, Article 96.3-5) Further, Synod Calgary appointed more members to our committee (Article 96.6-7), recommended that the churches of the URCNA "familiarize themselves with the *Book of Praise*" (Article 96.2), and adopted the Principles and Guidelines for selecting music in the church (Article 96:1).

E. SYNOD 2007 (Schererville, IN) clarified our committee's mandate - particularly Synod Escondido's decision regarding our working relationship with the CanRC's Book of Praise committee which stated: "That the present 'Psalter Hymnal Committee' work together with the Canadian Reformed 'Book of Praise Committee' to consider for inclusion in this song book the 150 Psalms in metrical settings (one note for each syllable) from an English translation of the Genevan Psalter, as well as other non-Genevan settings for the Psalms, and also hymns that meet the standard of faithfulness to the Scriptures and to the Reformed Confessions. The two song books primarily in use need not be included in their totality."

The decisions of Synod Schererville included:

1. Acceding to Overture 17 in order to clarify these three phrases of the Synod Escondido decision as follows:

- a) “*work together with*” includes both consultation with and careful consideration of views advanced by the Canadian Reformed “Book of Praise Committee” but only insofar as such work does not hinder, delay, or divert the Psalter Hymnal Committee from fulfilling its purpose as originally adopted;
 - b) “*to consider for inclusion*” neither implies nor necessitates inclusion of any or all metrical psalmody;
 - c) “*this song book*” refers to a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal that will serve the churches of our federation alone, whether or not we are in ecclesiastical fellowship with any number of denominations / federations. (Minutes, Article 63.6)
2. “That Synod 2007 continue the Songbook Committee’s mandate given by previous synods (Article 78.1)
 3. “That Synod 2007 maintain the goal for production and use of a Common Song Book, but establish that the production and use of a Common Song Book is not a condition for federative unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches.” (Article 78.10)
 4. “That Synod 2007 provide direction to the committee, regarding whether the inclusion of all 150 Anglo-Genevan Psalms would be detrimental for the churches to accept the Common Song Book, by mandating the URCNA Songbook Committee to contact the churches of the URCNA for their input on this question.” (Article 78.11)

F. SYNOD 2010 (London, ON) approved the addition of members to the committee from classes not yet represented, received the “Hymn Proposal” and approved a process for evaluating and approving hymns, and in addition adopted the following decisions:

1. That Synod 2010 affirm the production of an official Songbook which will be purchased and used by all URCNA churches. (Article 24.3)
2. That Synod accede to Overture 13.3.a as follows: “To conclude the mandate of the Songbook Committee to produce a common songbook with the Canadian Reformed Churches for use in a united federation. (Article 135.1)
3. That Synod remind the Songbook Committee that they be in dialogue with the Canadian Reformed Churches in a manner consistent with Phase 2 relations. (Article 135.2)

G. SYNOD 2012 (Nyack, NY) accepted the invitation from the OPC’s 78th General Assembly “to work together to produce a Psalter Hymnal for use in a wide range of confessional Presbyterian and Reformed Churches,” with the intent that this would be the official songbook of the URCNA. (Minutes, Article 37.2) Furthermore, Synod referred the matters of concern expressed in Overture 8 regarding the “Hymn Proposal” to the Psalter Hymnal Committee for its careful consideration. (Article 72.B) The concerns raised in Overture 8 included modifications to gender-neutral language, discontinuing the use of the word “Jehovah,” and word changes to well-known and well-loved songs.

H. SYNOD 2014 (Visalia, CA) adopted without dissent the proposed psalm collection (Minutes, Article 32.4). Answering our committee’s request “to appoint a person or persons with authority to sign contractual agreements with the OPC regarding this project,” synod noted that the Board of Trustees already possesses this authority (Article 32.9).

II. Summary of Progress

A. Name

Following Synod 2014, our committee continued to work with the OPC Psalter Hymnal Special Committee to fulfill the mandates given us. As we began to work on pursuing copyright permissions, it was necessary for us to determine a name for the songbook. The copyright holder must be given the name and general content of the book before they can grant permission. Since the OPC published and uses the *Trinity Hymnal* and *Trinity Hymnal (Revised)*, and since the URC has been using the *Psalter Hymnal*, we thought it appropriate to name the book: ***Trinity Psalter Hymnal***.

B. Psalms

As we had reported to Synod Visalia, we've continued to fix editorial mistakes and typos in the Psalm collection. Further, in some songs we've made textual revisions to improve inflection and language flow. We have also contacted copyright holders seeking permission to publish their songs.

C. Hymns

We had several meetings with the OPC committee and worked hard to come to an agreed upon hymn collection. In May 2015 we sent a notice to every URC that this collection was available on the website and solicited comments and reaction from all interested parties. In September 2015 we sent a 2nd notice to all the churches as a reminder. After receiving many comments, we made several changes and are now proposing the following Hymn Proposal. (See **Recommendation 4.**)

Please Note: in order to view these songs with music and text, delegates are strongly encouraged to go to www.psalterhymnal.org and, when prompted, fill in the following information:

Username: psalter

Password: hymnal

Alphabetical List of Proposed Hymns

A Debtor to Mercy Alone	Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed
A Hymn of Glory Let Us Sing	All Authority and Power
A Mighty Fortress is Our God	All Creatures of Our God and King
A Parting Hymn We Sing	All for Jesus!
A Shoot will Spring from Jesse's Stump	All Glory be to God
Abide with Me	All Glory Be To Thee Most High
According to Thy Gracious Word	All Glory, Laud, and Honor
Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended	All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!
 All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall
 All My Heart This Night Rejoices
 All Praise to Christ
 All Praise to Thee, My God, This Night
 All Praise to You, Eternal Lord
 All Things Bright and Beautiful
 Alleluia! Alleluia!
 Almighty God, Your Word is Cast
 Am I a Soldier of the Cross
 Amazing Grace
 And Can It Be That I Should Gain
 Angels We Have Heard on High
 Angels, from the Realms of Glory
 Another Year is Dawning
 Approach, My Soul, the Mercy Seat
 Arise, My Soul, Arise
 Arise, O God
 As with Gladness Men of Old
 At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing
 At the Name of Jesus
 Baptized Into Your Name Most Holy
 Be Still, My Soul
 Be Thou My Vision
 Before the Throne of God Above
 Before Thee God, Who Knowest All
 Behold my servant
 Behold the Amazing Gift of Love
 Behold the Throne of Grace
 Beneath the Cross of Jesus
 Blessed Are the Sons of God
 Blessed Jesus, at Your Word
 Blessing and Honor and Glory and Power
 Blest be the God of Israel
 Blest Be the Tie That Binds
 Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow!
 Bread of the World in Mercy Broken
 Break Thou the Bread of Life
 Breathe on Me, Breath of God
 By Grace I'm Saved
 By Grace, I Am an Heir of Heaven
 By the Sea of Crystal
 Can a Little Child Like Me
 Cast Down, O God, the Idols
 Children of the Heavenly Father
 Christ for the World We Sing
 Christ is Coming
 Christ is Made the Sure Foundation

Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands
 Christ Shall Have Dominion
 Christ the Lord is Risen Today
 Christ, Above All Glory Seated
 Christ, of All My Hopes the Ground
 Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies
 Christian Hearts in Love United
 Christians, Awake, Salute the Happy Morn
 Come to the Waters
 Come unto Me, Ye Weary
 Come, Ye, Thankful People, Come
 Come, Christians, Join to Sing
 Come, My Soul, with Every Care
 Come, O Come, Thou Quickening Spirit
 Come, Take By Faith the Body of the Lord
 Come, Thou Almighty King
 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing
 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus
 Come, Ye Disconsolate, Where'er Ye
 Languish
 Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain
 Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy
 Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Wretched
 Comfort, Comfort, Ye My People
 Consider Well
 Crown Him With Many Crowns
 Day by Day and with Each Passing
 Moment
 Day of Judgment! Day of Wonders!
 Eternal Spirit, God of Truth
 Fairest Lord Jesus
 Far and Near the Fields are Teeming
 Father, Again in Jesus' Name We Meet
 Father, I Know That All My Life
 Father, Long Before Creation
 Fight the Good Fight
 Fill Thou My Life, O Lord My God
 For All the Saints
 For the Beauty of the Earth
 For Your Gift of God the Spirit
 Forgive Our Sins as We Forgive
 Forth In Your Name
 From Depths of Woe I Raise to Thee
 From Heaven High I Come to You
 Give Praise to God
 Give to Our God Immortal Praise
 Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken
 Glory Be to God the Father

Glory Be to Jesus
Go, Labor On
God Be with You Till We Meet Again
God Himself Is With Us
God Moves in a Mysterious Way
God of the Prophets
God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen
God the All-Terrible
God, All Nature Sings Thy Glory
God, in the Gospel of His Son
Good Christian Men, Rejoice
Gracious Savior, Gentle Shepherd
Gracious Spirit, Dwell with Me
Gracious Spirit, Love Divine
Great God, We Sing That Mighty Hand
Great God, What Do I See and Hear
Great is Thy Faithfulness
Great King of Nations, Hear Our Prayer
Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah
Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise
Hail, Thou Once Despised Jesus!
Hallelujah!
Hark! the Herald Angels Sing
Hark! the Voice of Love and Mercy
Hast Thou Not Known, Hast Thou Not
 Heard
Have Thine Own Way, Lord!
He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought!
Here From All Nations
Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face
Holy Ghost, Dispel Our Sadness
Holy God, We Praise Your Name
Holy Spirit of Messiah
Holy, Holy, Holy!
Hope of the World
Hosanna, Loud Hosanna
How Bright Appears the Morning Star
How Deep the Father's Love for Us
How Firm a Foundation
How Great the Bright Angelic Host
How Great Thou Art (O Lord, My God)
How Lovely Shines the Morning Star
How Marvelous, How Wise, How Great
How Shall They Hear the Word of God
How Sweet and Awesome in the Place
How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds
How Vast the Benefits Divine
I Asked the Lord that I Might Grow

I Belong to Jesus
I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art
I Have No Other Comfort
I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say
I Know Whom I Have Believed
I Lay My Sins on Jesus
I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord
I Love to Tell the Story
I Need Thee, Precious Jesus
I Sing the Almighty Power of God
I Sought the Lord and Afterward I Knew
I Will Sing of My Redeemer
I'm Not Ashamed to Own My Lord
If I Speak a Foreign Tongue
If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee
Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise
In Christ Alone
In Christ There Is No East or West
In Doubt and Temptation
Infant Holy, Infant Lowly
It is Well with My Soul
Jerusalem the Golden
Jesus Calls Us
Jesus Christ Is Risen Today
Jesus Lives, and So Shall I
Jesus Loves Me, This I Know
Jesus Paid It All
Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun
Jesus Sinners Doth Receive
Jesus, I am Resting, Resting
Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken
Jesus, Lord, Redeemer
Jesus, Lover of My Soul
Jesus, Master, Whose I Am
Jesus, My Great High Priest
Jesus, My Lord, My God, My All
Jesus, Priceless Treasure
Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee
Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness
Jesus, Where'er Your People Meet
Jesus, with Thy Church Abide
Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners!
Join All the Glorious Names
Joy to the World!
Just As I Am, without One Plea
Kind and Merciful God, We Have Sinned
Lamb, Precious Lamb
Lead Me, Lord, Lead Me in Thy

Righteousness
 Lead On, O King Eternal
 Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
 Let All Things Now Living
 Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds
 Let Our Choir New Anthems Raise
 Let Thy Blood in Mercy Poured
 Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder
 Lift High the Cross
 Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates!
 Like a River Glorious
 Lo What a Glorious Sight Appears
 Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
 Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending
 Look, Ye Saints, the Sight is Glorious
 Lord Jesus Christ, Be Present Now
 Lord Jesus Christ, Our Lord Most Dear
 Lord of the Sabbath, Hear Us Pray
 Lord, I Lift My Soul to Thee
 Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word
 Lord, My Weak Thought in Vain Would
 Climb
 Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak
 Lord, with Glowing Heart I'd Praise Thee
 Lord, You Love a Cheerful Giver
 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
 Loved with Everlasting Love
 Loving Shepherd of Your Sheep
 Man of Sorrows! What a Name
 Master, Speak! Thy Servant Heareth
 May the Mind of Christ My Savior
 Mighty God, While Angels Bless You
 More Love to Thee, O Christ
 More than conquerors
 My Child, Do Not Forget God's Word
 My Dear Redeemer and My Lord
 My Faith Has Found a Resting Place
 My Faith Looks Up to Thee
 My God, How Wonderful Thou Art
 My Hope is Built on Nothing Less
 My Jesus, I Love Thee
 My Sins, My Sins, My Savior!
 My Song is Love Unknown
 My Soul Doth Magnify the Lord
 Nearer, Still Nearer
 None Other Lamb
 Not All the Blood of Beasts
 Not What My Hands Have Done

Nothing but the Blood
 Now I Make My Good Confession
 Now May Your Servant, Lord
 Now Thank We All Our God
 O Breath of Life, Come Sweeping Through
 Us
 O Christ, Our Hope, Our Heart's Desire
 O Christ, Our King, Creator, Lord
 O Come, All Ye Faithful
 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
 O Day of Rest and Gladness
 O Father, You are Sovereign
 O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing
 O Fountain of Unceasing Grace
 O God Beyond All Praising
 O God, Great Father, Lord, and King
 O God, My Faithful God
 O God, Our Help in Ages Past
 O God, We Praise Thee
 O Gracious Lord
 O Jesus Sweet, O Jesus Mild
 O Jesus, I Have Promised
 O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts
 O Jesus, We Adore Thee
 O Light That Knew No Dawn
 O Little Town of Bethlehem
 O Lord, How Shall I Meet You
 O Love of God, How Strong and True
 O Love That Will Not Let Me Go
 O Love, How Deep, How Broad
 O Righteous in the Lord, Rejoice
 O Sacred Head, Now Wounded
 O Savior, Precious Savior
 O Shine Upon These, Lord
 O Sons and Daughters, Let Us Sing!
 O Spirit, Fill Our Hearts
 O Splendor of God's Glory Bright
 O That I Had a Thousand Voices
 O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus!
 O the Deep, Unbounded Riches
 O Thou Eternal Son of God
 O Thou That Hear'st When Sinners Cry
 O Word of God Incarnate
 O Worship the King
 O Zion, Haste, Your Mission High
 Fulfilling
 Of the Father's Love Begotten
 Oh Blest the House

On the Good and Faithful
Once in David's Royal City
One There is, above All Others
Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty
Our Children, Lord, in Faith and Prayer
Praise God for Joy of Sabbath Blest
Praise the Savior Now and Ever
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven
Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven
Rejoice, Believer in the Lord
Rejoice, Rejoice Believers
Rejoice, the Lord is King
Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart
Revive Thy Work, O Lord
Ride On, Ride On in Majesty!
Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me
Safely Through Another Week
Salvation Unto Us Has Come
Savior of the Nations, Come
Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise
Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us
Savior, Teach Me, Day by Day
See, the Conqueror Mounts in Triumph
Shepherd of Tender Youth
Shine Thou upon Us, Lord
Shout, for the Blessed Jesus Reigns
Silent Night! Holy Night!
Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above
Sing to the Lord of Harvest
Sing, Choirs of New Jerusalem
Soldiers of Christ, Arise
Sometimes a Light Surprises
Songs of Thankfulness and Praise
Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness
Speak, O Lord
Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart
Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus
Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted
Take My Life, and Let It Be
Take Up Your Cross," the Savior Said
Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord
That Easter Day with Joy Was Bright
The Battle is the Lord's
The Beatitudes
The Church's One Foundation
The Day of Resurrection

The Day You Gave Us, Lord, Is Ended
The God of Abraham Praise
The Head That Once Was Crowned with
Thorns
The Lord Will Come and Not Be Slow
The Lord's Prayer
The People who in Darkness Walked
The Sands of Time Are Sinking
The Son of God Goes Forth to War
The Strife is O'er, the Battle Done
The Ten Commandments
Thee We Adore, Eternal Lord!
There is a Fountain Filled with Blood
There is a Green Hill Far Away
Thine Be the Glory
This Day at Thy Creating Word
This is My Father's World
Thou Art the Way
Thou Who Wast Rich beyond All Splendor
Though Troubles Assail Us
Throned Upon the Awful Tree
Thus Saith the Mercy of the Lord
Thy Mercy, Lord, is What I Need
Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ
Tis Midnight; and on Olive's Brow
Tis Not That I Did Choose Thee
To God be the Glory
To Thy Temple I Repair
To Us a Child of Hope Is Born
Twas on That Night When Doomed to
Know
Union with Thee
Up from the Grave He Arose
Up to the Mountain Went the Lord
Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying
We All Believe in One True God
We Come, O Christ, to You
We Gather Together
We Give Thee But Thine Own
We Have Not Known Thee As We Ought
We Plow the Fields and Scatter
We Praise You, O God, Our Redeemer,
Creator
We Rest on Thee
Weary of Earth, and Laden with My Sin
Welcome, Happy Morning!
What a Friend We Have in Jesus
What Child is This?

What Wondrous Love is This
 Whate'er My God Ordains is Right
 When All Your Mercies, O My God
 When His Salvation Bringing
 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross
 When Morning Gilds the Skies
 When the Prophet Moses Raised
 When This Passing World is Done
 While the Shepherds Watched Their
 Flocks
 Who Are These like Stars Appearing
 Who is He Born in the Stall?
 Who Is This, So Weak and Helpless
 Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode
 Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me?
 Wondrous King, All-Glorious
 Worship Christ, the Risen King!
 Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim
 Ye Who His Temple Throng
 Your Hand, O God, Has Guided
 Your Law, O God, Is Our Delight

Zion, to Thy Savior Singing
Service Music:
 Hear Our Prayer, O Lord
 The Lord's Prayer
 The Apostle's Creed
 The Apostle's Creed
 Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing
 May the Grace of Christ Our Savior
 Doxology
 Doxology
 Doxology
 Gloria Patri
 Gloria Patri
 Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
 Now Blessed Be Jehovah God
 Praise Ye the Lord Ye Hosts Above
 Two-fold Amen
 Two-fold Amen
 Three-fold Amen

While adopting this hymn proposal means that this is synod's final approval, please understand that the committees may need to make certain minor changes prior to production. As with the psalm collection we may find editorial mistakes or "typos" that need correction. Further, we may run into unforeseen copyright problems and need to make whatever changes are required in order to bring the particular song into copyright compliance, or to remove the song from the collection should the necessary changes or cost prove to be excessive.

D. Liturgical Forms

After asking classes to comment on the inclusion/exclusion of liturgical forms in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, and having received very few objections from the classes, our combined committees (URC and OPC) and the URC Board of Trustees agree with the recommendation of the Liturgical Forms Committee to publish a separate liturgical forms booklet, thus not including these in the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. While originally it was our intention to include them and have a separate URC "edition" of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, as we began to look more closely at the production side of this project we found that producing one book would save on cost and simplify the process of ordering and distribution. But more importantly, we became more convinced that one book makes a stronger ecumenical statement. What a witness to have a continental Reformed federation and a Presbyterian denomination unite in this project to produce one book that includes Psalms, hymns, and the best of the Reformation Confessions!

E. Structure and Language

As our committees worked together through the psalm collection, we had agreed that pronouns referring to the deity would be capitalized, and reported such to Synod 2014. However, the OPC committee was unwilling to carry that practice over into the hymns since neither the *Trinity Hymnal* nor the *Trinity Hymnal (Revised)* followed that practice. It seemed to us that we ought to be consistent throughout the entire song collection (psalms and hymns) and therefore concluded that we will not capitalize pronouns referring to the deity. We note that not doing so is the current practice of nearly all Bible translators, and also note that the proposed URCNA liturgical forms do not capitalize such pronouns.

A hymn that is clearly based on a psalm will be identified as such in the hymn section.

Heeding the concerns raised by Synod 2012, we have left unchanged the name ‘Jehovah’ and archaic language in well-loved hymns and those considered classics.

F. Copyrights

After Synod 2014 we continued to work on editing the Psalm collection of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*. During that time we sought the counsel of those with experience in Christian music publishing as well as that of an attorney in preparing the necessary licensing contracts. As of mid-March 2016 we are in communication with our two largest copyright holders, namely The Free Church of Scotland, and Crown & Covenant Publications. Those with whom we sought counsel informed us that this process would likely take at least 9 months to complete. While we recognize that there may be a desire for digital copies of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, copyright permissions are being sought only for print editions at this time.

G. Contractual Agreements with the OPC

Synod 2014 (Visalia), in answer to our committee’s request, noted that the URCNA Board of Trustees is to handle contractual agreements. Please see the Board of Trustees’ report.

III. Anticipated Contents of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*

- Table of Contents
- Preface
- Introduction
- Short essays on:
 - “Why Christians Sing”
 - “Why Christians Sing the Psalms”
 - “Why Christians Also Sing Hymns”
- Guitar Chord Chart
- Psalms
- Hymns
- Service Music
- The Ten Commandments and The Lord’s Prayer

Ecumenical Creeds
 The Apostle's Creed
 The Nicene Creed
The Three Forms of Unity
 The Heidelberg Catechism
 The Belgic Confession of Faith
 The Canons of Dort
The Westminster Standards
 The Westminster Confession of Faith
 The Larger Catechism
 The Shorter Catechism
Indices
 Copyright holders
 Authors, Translators and Sources of Hymns
 Composers, Arrangers and Sources of Tunes
 Tunes
 Meters
 Scripture References
 Topics
 Titles and First Lines

IV. Recommendations

- 1. That synod receive the work of the committee to date.**
- 2. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the URC Psalter Hymnal Committee when this report is being discussed.**
- 3. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the OPC members serving the OPC's Psalter Hymnal Special Committee when recommendation 4 is being discussed (namely, Dr. Alan Strange, Rev. Danny Olinger, Mr. David Winslow).**
- 4. That synod adopt the submitted hymn proposal to be the hymn portion of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*.**

Grounds:

- a. Synod 1999 mandated the Psalter Hymnal committee to provide "a recommendation of songs to be included in the new psalter hymnal." (Art. XLI.c.(a))**
 - b. This hymn proposal will be presented to this year's OPC General Assembly for its approval as an entire collection.**
- 5. That synod budget \$5000 annually for the continued work of the Psalter Hymnal Committee.**

Conclusion

It is our privilege to serve Jesus Christ and the URCNA in the work entrusted to us as the Psalter Hymnal Committee. Please pray for His continued blessing on our work, and that the final product will prove to be useful and fruitful in the worship of God's people, for their edification and for God's glory!

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. David Buursma (Classis Central US)

Rev. Brian Cochran (Classis Western Canada)

Rev. Christopher Folkerts (Classis Pacific Northwest)

Rev. Rand Lankheet (Classis Ontario East)

Mrs. Denise Marcusse, Secretary (Classis Michigan)

Mr. Joel Pearce (Classis Eastern US)

Mrs. Angeline Vanderboom (Recorder, Member at large)

Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen, Chairman (Classis Southwest US)

Rev. Harry Zekveld (Classis Southwestern Ontario)

Report of the Liturgical Forms Committee

Introduction. With this report the Liturgical Forms committee wishes to bring to a close twelve years of work. While we believe the committee will need to remain constituted to assist with matters of production, including formatting and printing, we pray that our body of work will be approved and/or revised as necessary by Synod 2016.

We wish to begin this concluding submission with an exhortation and a plea:

This side of glory, the church's act of confessing a common faith and worshipping together is an act of compromise. It is also an act of pilgrimage, an act that each generation must take up and make its own. Our Heavenly Father's words, alone, are unchanging. Our words must be ever new, even as they seek to be ever faithful to the words of the past.

To borrow the words of an American politician, this is a time for choosing. We have made some difficult decisions, made more difficult by knowing that any change to a beloved confession or prayer will be painful for some members of our federation. Yet we have worked hard as a committee to ensure that in the spirit of compromise all the proposed changes to our historic confessions, forms, and prayers are only those necessary for continued faithfulness today and in the future.

Our plea to the churches in Synod is that you consider our work with charity and patience and with an eye to this larger, generations-long act of confession and compromise. We pray that you will read this report with care, seek to understand the rationale of our decisions, and interact with our work on the grounds upon which it is presented here. We know this work is not perfect, but we ask Synod to join us in the labor of making hard choices that nevertheless reflect the best path forward for the United Reformed Churches to walk together.

Review of Committee Mandate (cf. Acts of Synod London 2010, 481– 537)

Synod 2004 adopted Recommendation 3 of the Songbook Committee to create a new committee that dealt with all the non-musical material in a new Psalter Hymnal: "That Synod 2004 relieve our committee of the non-musical section (liturgical forms, creeds and confessions, prayers, etc.) of the new book and appoint another committee to accomplish this work" (Acts 2004, art. 96.3–5, p. 39; cf. p. 102).

Synod 2007 mandated the committee to report directly to the churches and to consult with the comparable committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

A brief history of work

By Synod 2014, the committee had presented a complete body of revised liturgical forms and prayers, and proposed texts for the ecumenical Creeds, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. We promised that a proposed translation of the Heidelberg Catechism would be forthcoming in time for thorough review before final approval in 2016

Given the gravity and urgency of our work, the committee determined to conduct the majority of our work in face to face meetings. In addition to a preliminary conference call meeting to set our agenda of work, we have met in person three times in the intervening two years. A major work of these meetings was determining the final submission for the Heidelberg Catechism. However, we

also conducted numerous, thorough reviews of all previously submitted work. We further engaged at great length with correspondence and input from the churches, and recorded and tracked all substantive changes with great care.

November 10 – 14, 2014. San Diego, California.

February 23 – 27, 2015. San Diego, California.

March 9 – 10, 2016. Dyer, Indiana. This final, shorter meeting was held to carefully respond to all the comments and input we had received from the churches on our

November 2015 report, and to finalize our report and submission for Synod 2016.

In fulfillment of the guidance of Synod 2014, the committee has also issued regular reports on the progress of our work:

June 2015. In this report we made available the proposed text of the Heidelberg Catechism, giving the churches the maximum amount of time for review and comment. We also provided for the churches an expanded collection of prayers.

November 2015. Our Fall report was comprehensive in providing our full submission for Synod 2016 early enough to enable the churches to interact with it. While we recognize that there was a short window in which the churches were able to provide feedback ahead of our final submission, we appreciate the careful review many of you conducted and the detailed comments you provided.

Correspondence. We appreciate the great deal of support and interaction with the churches we have received. In response to concerns expressed at Synod 2014, our committee has placed a top priority to responding to correspondence in a timely fashion.

Creeds and Confessions:

Creeds

From the outset our commitment was to provide a translation of the Creeds that was truest to the original versions available to us. As faithful summaries of the faith all Christians profess, the Creeds are not unique to our churches or to our tradition. They transcend the tumultuous era of the reformation, and express with most beautiful simplicity the essential truths of the Gospel. As such, they connect us with the church through the ages and across the globe. Indeed, it is a hallmark of the catholicity of the continental Reformed tradition that we confess our allegiance to the Ecumenical Creeds in our Belgic Confession (Article 9).

For this reason we compared our proposed versions of the Creeds with Reformed Churches in the English speaking world. We also reviewed the standard original language texts of the Creeds, as well as versions confessed in some non-English speaking parts of the world. This process of reviewing our versions of the Creeds has resulted in a number of changes; some minor, some more significant.

While we tend to view the Creeds as fixed and timeless, our review revealed that there is no small amount of variety among current English translations. This is reflect by the fact that there is an international group seeking greater agreement in translation, the English Language Liturgical Consultation, the results of which we critically reviewed.

It was thus with fear and trepidation that we came to the conclusion that we would need to present a number of changes to the churches, some minor, and some more significant. We present these in the interest of accuracy to the original texts, clarity of confession, and agreement with the church universal.

Explanation of Minor Changes Throughout

On the minor side, we've included footnotes in each of the Creeds when the word "catholic" is used and where the descent into hell is referenced. We've also added a footnote to Article 19 of the Athanasian Creed in connection with the word "persons" and in Article 37 in connection with the phrase "rational soul". In each of these instances it was the Committee's sense that sufficient confusion could arise from the unexplained use of these phrases. We remain committed to the proper understanding of these terms and therefore retain them in our proposals. However, to better assist our members in understanding the proper use of these words or phrases we have included the footnotes.

Other minor changes found in each of the Creeds were updates to the language to reflect contemporary forms and usage.

The Athanasian Creed received the most work in the regard of minor updates to language. After comparing the version in the Blue Psalter with other translations, especially the translation found in the new standard edition of *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*¹, we believed this Creed could be better translated for use today than what is found in our 1976 *Psalter Hymnal*. While there is nothing controversial about this translation, because it is sufficiently different we've provided a two-column comparison between the version we're offering and the Blue Psalter version.

The Nicene Creed undergoes the least amount of changes in our proposal. There are only three changes we're proposing that update the language of "sitteth," "proceedeth," and "spake" to "sits," "proceeds," and "spoke". We trust the churches will receive these minor updates

The Apostles Creed has two minor changes, in keeping with similar changes in the Nicene Creed: "sitteth" and "thence" are updated to "sits" and "from there."

Explanation of More Substantive Changes to the Apostles' Creed

We are, however, proposing two more significant changes to the Apostles' Creed. While these changes are a departure from our most recent versions in the *Psalter Hymnal*, we believe they are well justified by the original text of the Creed and clarify the Trinitarian nature of this creed which we confess in Q&A 24 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The first change is the addition of an "I believe" at the beginning of the second part of the creed, and the second change is a removal of an "I believe" in the third part.

¹ Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie R. Hotchkiss, eds., 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Given the weightiness of any substantive change to the Apostles' Creed, and our anticipation of some discussion of these matters at Synod, we wish to provide here a full explanation of these changes.

First, the addition of the "I believe" in the second part of the creed was a change we noted in other contemporary translations and which we found compelling. The OPC, PCA, and CRC have approved this format of the Apostles' Creed.

The earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed only use "credo" twice: once for God the Father and once for the Holy Spirit. We are suggesting another "I believe", this one before the second part of the Creed concerning Jesus Christ. We agree with other contemporary translators that the insertion of this "I believe" is implied and is a faithful translation of the Latin western text.

Thus we would confess, "I believe in God the Father... I believe in Jesus Christ... I believe in the Holy Spirit." This three-fold repetition of "I believe" highlights the Trinitarian nature of the Creed, in keeping with Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 24. And though it is not explicit in earliest versions of the Apostles' Creed, it is undoubtedly implied.

The second substantive change is the removal of an "I believe" in the third part of the Creed, and the use of a definite article in confessing "the holy catholic Church." Again, we believe this change is justified by the original texts, our history of confession, and the threefold division of the Creed. In response to the discussion of this change at Synod 2014, we are re-submitting this proposal to the churches. We acknowledge that it was not sufficiently explained in 2014, and we hope to address that oversight with the fulsome explanation below.

What we are recommending to the churches is that the third part of the Apostles' Creed be as follows:

*I believe in the Holy Spirit;
the holy catholic Church;
the communion of the saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.*

The form in the Blue Psalter Hymnal is as follows:

*I believe in the Holy Spirit.
I believe a holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.*

To appreciate the difference a little historical context may be helpful. Historically, the earliest versions of the Creed available to us and confessed by believers for almost a thousand years declared: “I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church; etc.” This was true even in the days of the Reformation. The version of the Creed that was included in the original German of the Heidelberg Catechism at Q&A 23 is consistent with this historical version.

The addition of the second “I believe” that is found in our 1976 Psalter Hymnal and many other versions is based on a translation of a later and unofficial Latin version of the Heidelberg Catechism. Reformed editors of the Creed understandably sought to correct the perception that the Creed supported the flawed ecclesiology of the Roman church, namely, that we were confessing faith in the church of Rome. While we recognize and appreciate the history behind this editorial change to the Creed — and share their desire to distance ourselves from the errors of Rome — it is our conviction that we should return to the original language of the Creed. We believe we should do so not simply based on its antiquity, but more importantly, for its theological clarity.

Consider first the change of the article from the indefinite “a” to definite “the”: “the holy catholic Church.” In Latin, the language of the oldest copies of the Creed, the articles are not expressed. There is no word for “the” or “a” present in the Latin text. However, that doesn’t mean they are not implied. In fact, our current translation of the Creed includes the word “the” before most of the phrases in this third part of the Creed. Thus, we confess faith in the Holy Spirit, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting. In English, the definite article conveys the unity and identity of each of these elements. There is one Holy Spirit, one communion of saints, one forgiveness of sins, etc. In our 1976 version, the only phrase that does not include the word “the” is “a holy catholic Church.” It is, however, more natural to translate this phrase in a manner consistent with the other phrases of this third part of the Creed, because there is in fact one single catholic church. We do not confess faith in “a” catholic church, as one of many such churches. It is worth noting that in Q&A 54 the Heidelberg Catechism returns to the better translation when it asks, “What do you believe concerning the holy catholic Church?” This inclusion of the Article also harmonizes with the Belgic Confession’s treatment of “The Catholic Christian Church” in its Article 27. For these reasons we are recommending a return to the more natural and consistent use of the definite article in our translation.

Next, we need consider the removal of the additional “I believe” in the article of the holy catholic church. The first and most important thing to note is that there is no “credo” at this point of the original text of the creed, nor did the church confess an additional “I believe” for a thousand years after its composition. In the interest of joining our voices to the church through the ages, we should seek the greatest possible fidelity to the original text.

At Synod 2014, it was suggested that removing this “I believe” would necessarily incline one to the Roman error that we were confessing belief “in” the church. We understand this concern, and how it has arisen. However, we don’t believe it is ultimately justified, especially when the

Catechism's teaching about the Creed's theology and structure is kept in mind. Heidelberg Q&A 24 teaches us that the third part of the Creed concerns "God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification." In Q&A 54, the Catechism further explains what we believe concerning "the holy catholic church," namely that this community is a result of the activity of the Son through his Spirit and Word. The holy catholic church is therefore to be understood as a part of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, along with the communion of saints, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. This explains why other Protestant communions today confess "the holy catholic church" without fear of suggesting they confess a Roman Catholic ecclesiology.

Furthermore, any clarity or emphasis that has historically been gained by inserting an additional "I believe" before the article pertaining to the church has come at a cost. Namely, there is a corresponding confusion that the concluding list of elements in the Creed presents faith in a miscellany of items that are not connected to the work of the Holy Spirit. Recently, a committee member encountered precisely this view in a membership interview.

To put the matter differently, when we confess the Creed as it is in the 1976 Blue Psalter the language suggests that there are four parts to the Creed. We believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And then we also believe an assortment of truths that don't really fit anywhere else. Understood in this way, the Creed then has nothing to say about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. By returning to the original language of the Creed we are restoring the focus on the Holy Spirit's work in each of these areas of his ministry. For this reason we are content to follow the historic form and the global church and so remove the "I believe" before "a holy catholic Church" and restoring the article so that it now reads, "I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting."

In conclusion, we understand and acknowledge that adopting this change to the Apostles' Creed is substantial, and will cause some frustration and confusion among the membership of our churches. Nevertheless, we believe it to be a necessary course at this time, bringing us into greater conformity to the original language of the Creed as it has historically been confessed and as it is confessed in many parts of the world today. Furthermore, we would note as well that this brings us into conformity with the Trinity Hymnal, currently in use by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, with whom we plan to share the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*.

By suggesting this change, we do not dismiss lightly the efforts of previous Reformed editors of the creed, who sought to clarify the teaching about the church, which served its purpose for a time. However, we believe there is greater benefit in retaining the clarity of the original language and its emphasis on the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Confessions

Our committee deems its work regarding the Three Forms of Unity, namely the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, as most principal and important for the churches. Accordingly, we expended much effort in this regard.

In assessing translations, our translation philosophy was driven first by accuracy to the original source document, and coming in second in order of importance was that the translation demonstrate accessibility of understanding and fluency in modern English. This means that we looked for translations that were essentially literal but not wooden; and so literary excellence combined with lingual and theological correctness were the driving principles for translation selection. Regarding Scripture quotations within the confessions, which are sometimes not direct quotations but paraphrases, we sought to honor the confessions themselves and therefore we have followed the wording of the confession.

In an attempt to assess the best existing translations of each of our confessions, we discovered that it was not difficult to determine the foundational text for the Canons of Dort, since that document was composed in Latin as the original and definitive text, and adopted at the National Synod of Dort (1618-19). Consequently, any proper English translation of the Canons must conform to that text as the basis of the translation.

Matters proved to be a bit more complex regarding the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. As will be explained below, the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism each underwent revisions to varying degrees. The Heidelberg's revisions were fairly immediate after it was first produced. The Belgic Confession, however, underwent several revisions through the sixteenth century, and a more thorough revision at the Synod of Dort. Moreover, unlike the Canons of Dort, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism were not first composed in Latin but in the vernacular—for the Belgic Confession the original tongue was French; and for the Heidelberg Catechism the original tongue was German. Our committee has thus sought for English translations of each of these confessional documents which are based upon their respective original languages, though Latin translations of each of these works are available and have been used.

In tracing out source material for the Three Forms of Unity, we have made grateful use of the work of J. N. Bakhuizen van der Brink, *De Nederlandsche Belijdenisgeschrifte*, which presents the original sources materials for each of our confessions. For the Belgic Confession this includes in parallel columns the texts of the original version, the official Dort revision (both in French), the Latin translation commissioned at Dort, and the Dutch translation commissioned and approved at Dort. For the Heidelberg Catechism the texts in parallel columns are the officially approved original German text, in its third edition, the Latin translation of it, and the Dutch translation as well. For the Canons of Dort, the officially authorized Latin text is set in parallel to the Dutch translation of it. Perhaps the most definitive and scholarly work treating creeds and confessions in Christendom today, making available these documents in English, is *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols., edited by Pelikan and Hotchkiss (New Haven & London:

Yale University Press, 2003). This largely displaces the well-known work of Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*. Pelikan and Hotchkiss present original source texts and what they judge to be the best English translations of these texts. Our committee has also made grateful use of this valuable work.

As further explanation of our work regarding the confessions, we will treat each separately.

The Belgic Confession

The Belgic Confession was first written and dispersed in French by Guido de Brès (1561). Since the confession sought to be an expression of the living faith of believers, both the learned and the unlearned, it was written in the vernacular and functioned in the life of the church accordingly. The text of the Belgic Confession underwent several emendations through the years leading up to the Synod of Dort (1618 – 19). Specifically, in 1566 the text of this confession was revised and adopted at the local synod held at Antwerp, also Wessel (1568), Emden (1571), Dort (1574), and Middelburg (1581). The text, not the contents, was revised again at the National Synod of Dort in 1618 – 19 and adopted as one of the doctrinal standards to which all office-bearers in the Dutch Reformed churches were required to subscribe. The National Synod of Dort officially approved the revised French text (the tongue in which it was originally composed and known by the common people) as well as a Dutch text. The officially commissioned Latin translation of the Belgic Confession was not completed before the Synod adjourned. Thus, that text was never officially approved though it was used and reprinted many times.²

Our committee discovered, upon analysis, that the English translation of the text of the Belgic Confession as printed in the 1959 blue Psalter Hymnal and as reprinted in the 1975 blue Psalter Hymnal (the translation with which most of our churches are familiar) is based upon the non-official Latin text commissioned at Dort. We sought a grounding text, i.e., an original text that had official ecclesiastical sanction, as basis for the English translation. This meant that we determined to recommend an English translation of this confession based upon the officially approved French text of Dort (1618-19) rather than the non-official Latin translation, which for all of its commendable features never received official ecclesiastical endorsement. Therefore we sought a faithful English translation of the revised French text. The English translation we are recommending to the churches for adoption is such a text. This is the translation that is found in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, edited by Pelikan and Hotchkiss, vol. 2, 405-426. We have made a few slight emendations to this text.

² Two of the best sources treating the history of the Belgic Confession in detail are J. N. Bakhuizen van der Brink, *De Nederlandsche Belijdenisgeschrifte* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversmaatschappij Holland, 1940); and Nicolaas H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007);

Note also the revision to article 36, treating the civil government, which Reformed churches both in the Netherlands and America have adopted. The Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in 1958, in line with 1910 and 1938, substituted a reworking of part of this article. This can be found in both the 1959 and 1975 editions of the blue Psalter Hymnal. The CRC Synod of 1985, in approving the new translation of the Belgic Confession, substituted the reworded portion of that article into the body of article 36, and placed in a footnote the old wording which was judged to be less than biblical. Our committee has done the same in the version of the Belgic Confession that we are recommending to the churches for approval.

The Heidelberg Catechism

Regarding the Heidelberg Catechism, here matters were a bit more complicated. As with the Belgic Confession, the matter of translation for the Heidelberg Catechism is not unrelated to the foundational text upon which the text is based. Our committee discovered, in meticulously analyzing the translation of the catechism in the 1959 Psalter Hymnal, that that translation appears to be based upon the Latin translation of the catechism rather than the original German. As explained above, we sought to find a translation which followed the German, the language in which the catechism was first composed—the language in the vernacular in which the catechism lived and thrived in the life of the churches. The third edition of the German text, which included the final revision to Q/A 80, as well as containing a minor revision to Q/A 57, was officially approved by the church of the German Palatinate, where the Heidelberg Catechism originated. The third edition of the Heidelberg Catechism was also officially approved at the National Synod of Dort (1618-19), being one of the Three Forms of Unity for the Dutch Reformed churches, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort comprising the other documents of that unity.³

As a committee we investigated numerous English translations of the catechism, including many translations in use among Reformed churches, including the CanRef, CRC, RCA, PRC, FRC, RCUS, as well as a newer independent translation by Lee C. Barrett, III. Many of these translations showed the influence of older English translations, and thus lacked fluency in modern English. Some were based upon the Latin translation of the Heidelberg Catechism, and at points lacked fidelity to the original German.

Our committee found that the English translation of the Heidelberg Catechism found in the 1975 blue Psalter Hymnal to be a translation based upon the German text of the third edition approved

³ Among the best sources treating the history of the Heidelberg Catechism in detail are J. N. Bakhuizen van der Brink, *De Nederlandsche Belijdenisgeschrifte*; Lyle D. Bierma, with Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., Karin Y. Maag, and Paul W. Fields, *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Lyle B. Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Reformation Synthesis*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013); and Karla Apperloo-Boerma and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., *Power of Faith: 450 Years of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013).

at Dort. Regarding this translation, however, we noted that while it excels in the fluency of the English, it sometimes sacrifices accuracy unnecessarily in seeking to achieve that aim.

As remedy we determined to offer to the churches the best features of the translation found in the 1975 Psalter Hymnal, fluency of the English, with an accurate rendering of the German original. Although the 1975 translation is not printed in Pelikan and Hotchkiss, it is nonetheless commended by those editors. Thus we present a *revision* of the 1975 translation of the Heidelberg Catechism. This revision was done, as intimated above, by comparing many translations in use among Reformed churches (mentioned above), as well as the aforementioned newer independent translation. Where we encountered archaic German words we consulted the Latin and Dutch translations, as well as two modern, updated German versions of the catechism.

One member of the committee, Dr. Mark Beach, did the initial work on the revised translation, and then as a whole committee we reviewed and improved the entire revised translation, comparing the German original, and, again, where needed carefully consulting the Latin and Dutch translations. (We might add, that this was a most edifying endeavor for our committee.) The result is a revision of the translation found in the blue Psalter Hymnal 1976. This translation has been in use in many of our churches for some forty years and is therefore not unfamiliar to said churches. We are confident that this revised translation will serve our churches well for both catechetical instruction, memorization, and pulpit ministry. It is properly accurate to the original while speaking in appropriately fluent English.

Canons of Dort

For the Canons of Dort, matters are much simpler than with the catechism and the confession. The original and approved text of the Canons of Dort is the Latin text produced at the Synod of Dort itself. In keeping with our standards of translation, we looked for an English translation of the Canons that was scrupulously accurate and true to the Latin original of this theologically technical document, yet in understandable and readable English. We judged that the 1986 translation of the Christian Reformed Church best meets this standard. Whereas the version of the Canons found in the 1959 and 1975 Psalter Hymnals is competent, the 1986 translation is more careful in capturing the nuance of Latin terms and is presented in smoother modern English. This is the translation printed in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, edited by Pelikan and Hotchkiss, vol. 2, 569-600. We have made a few slight emendations to the text.⁴

Liturgical Forms

Our approach to the liturgical forms began with a commitment to those forms currently in use among our churches, found in the 1976 version of the CRC Psalter Hymnal. While this

⁴ Two fine sources on the Canons of Dort are J. N. Bakhuizen van der Brink, *De Nederlandsche Belijdenis-geschrifte*, and W. van't Spijker, C.C. de Bruin, H. Florijn, A. Moerkerken, H. Natziyl, *De Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619* (Houten: Den Hertog B.V., 1987).

commitment remained throughout our work, it became evident that we could not limit our work to those forms. Some of our churches celebrate weekly communion. The Lord's Supper forms in the Psalter Hymnal did not anticipate such a practice and their length was prohibitive. As well, the Psalter Hymnal did not have a form for the reception of families or for household baptisms. We would need to produce a form for these increasingly frequent events in our churches. However, whenever a new form was written, the historical expressions of the Reformed churches were always kept in view. For this reason we have made an effort to retain a 'familiar' form, updated in language and edited for ease of expression, but essentially the same in structure, content and character as the historic forms of the Reformed churches. If there was a second form found in the Psalter Hymnal, we reviewed it, as well as forms from other churches, and produced a second form that was consistent in content with our first form but varied in presentation. This variety is especially valuable in churches where they are used regularly (frequent baptisms, professions of faith, and Lord's Supper, for example). It is our hope that we have struck the right balance between appreciation for the historical forms and a fresh expression of these truths in updated forms.

In order to facilitate reflection on the forms as they have been presented, we provide the following comments on the forms according to their liturgical event. While not every change or emendation will be addressed, major changes and the overall approach will be. It is also worth noting that the major changes reflected in this report are changes since our last Synod. Since 2014 there have been two reports sent out to the churches from our committee. This report and the documents included in the Agenda for Synod are to be understood as the definitive versions for our 2016 Synod.

On Baptism:

The major change since Synod 2014 was a result of a decision made at that Synod. In Article 60 of the Acts of Synod 2014 the following adopted motion is recorded: "to adopt provisionally the attached proposed enhancement of the form for the 'Baptism of Infants: Form 1' for continued refinement by the Liturgical Forms Committee" and "to instruct the Committee to bring those components of the forms for 'Adult Baptism,' 'Reception of Families,' and 'Household Baptism' that overlap with the basic baptismal form into conformity with one another, as appropriate." As a result of this decision we have made every effort to bring all the Forms referenced into conformity with the enhanced form adopted by Synod 2014. We have made editorial changes, but have maintained conformity to the proposed form as much as possible.

Besides this major change, our work has sought to update the language of the baptism forms, rather than make significant changes. As the communications from the churches indicated, the theological issues that any discussion of baptism prompt among Reformed believers continue to circulate among our churches. For this reason we were also careful to avoid making significant changes one way or the other in response to these issues. The historical Form for Infant Baptism has benefited the churches for hundreds of years and has been adopted by Reformed churches of various theological convictions. For this reason we believe the historic Form remains the best

expression of our confessional and Scriptural understanding of this sacrament. Where we have made changes they have been stylistic rather than substantive.

One noticeable change to the baptism forms is the inclusion of the congregational vow. In the Psalter Hymnal there are three baptism forms, of which only one has the congregational vow. It was our understanding from the churches that some of our congregations are committed to using this vow, while others are not. We also determined that this commitment to the congregational vow could affect which form was used in our services. Wanting to ensure that all versions of the baptism form were available to our churches, we have inserted the congregational vow in both forms. However, we have made it optional in both. It is our hope that this will allow both forms to be used in all our churches.

We have made a change to placement of the vow. In previous versions of these forms we have included the vow after the response of the parents to the three questions they are asked. In the version included in the Synodical Agenda we have moved the congregational vow to after the baptism itself. We discerned a danger in having the congregational vow immediately after the parental response. The questions asked of the parents are to illustrate that they are having their child baptism not out of superstition or mere custom. The congregational vow is not relevant to this concern. The congregational vow is an expression of our covenantal commitment as community.

The danger is that the character of the congregational vow affects the character of the parental response. Those in attendance might imagine that we baptize infants because their parents promise to raise them in the fear of the Lord and because the community commits to the same. This would be a flawed understanding of baptism. To illustrate this simply consider the effect a negative response would have on the sacrament. If parents answered “no” to the questions asked the baptism would not be administered. If the congregation answered “no” to their question the baptism would still be administered. Thus, the nature of these responses are significantly different. In order to illustrate the difference between these responses we have moved the optional congregational vow to after the baptism.

On the Lord’s Supper:

There is little that we have changed in the Lord’s Supper Forms. The most significant change is in Form 7b where we have made the call to self examination more direct. Instead of speaking generically (Let each one...) we strengthened the call so that it reads, “Therefore, you should...” It is our conviction that this more direct address is in keeping with the purpose of this aspect of the Lord’s Supper form.

On the Forms for Excommunication and Readmission:

The most significant change to the first Form for Excommunication concerns the exhortation made to the congregation. It was our conviction that the old language could lead to confusion, suggesting that our relationship to the one excommunicated was akin to shunning. We have retained the Scriptural references used, but rather than quoting them out of context we have tried

to express their import. It is our hope that this will aid the churches in ministering to those who are excommunicated by the church. The forms for readmission are essentially unchanged.

On the Forms for Ordination:

These forms are essentially unchanged since our last submission. It is worth noting, however, that we updated all the forms found in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal. We've included them all even though our Church Order does not account for the Ordination of Teachers and Extraordinary tasks.

On the Forms for Marriage:

These forms remained largely the same as our previous submission. There are a few editorial changes, but nothing of great significance.

Miscellaneous:

Pronouns referring to God

In our communication with the churches there was one matter that was mentioned a number of times, namely, the capitalization of the pronouns referring to God. We received communications both for and against this practice. In our deliberation on this matter we decided not to capitalize the pronouns relating to God, and we did so for the following reasons.

The practice of capitalizing is of a more recent vintage. The New King James Version made the decision to capitalize the pronouns referring to God, although the King James Version did not. The 1984 NIV and the ESV, the versions widely used in our federation, do not capitalize these pronouns. Maybe most significantly, the earliest Greek Manuscripts do not show a preference for the pronouns referring to God.

Of less significance, but worth noting, there is no uniformity within our tradition, especially as concerns the Liturgical Forms and Confessions. Form 1 for the Baptism of Infants capitalizes the pronouns, but Form 2 for the Baptism of Children does not. The same is true for the Profession of Faith forms, although the Lord's Supper Forms do. The same is true of the Confessions. The Belgic and the Canons capitalize the pronouns, but the Heidelberg does not. Thus, there is no uniformity on the practise currently, leaving the committee to decide for our work.

In reflecting on this matter we were not convinced of the necessity of capitalizing the pronouns. While the matter is certainly not essential to the faith, we believe that the relative newness of this practice, and the general practice in the Bible's used by our churches to not capitalize justify not following this practice. Furthermore, we are not convinced that the practice of capitalizing the pronouns is any more respectful than not capitalizing them. For this reason we have chosen not to capitalize the pronouns referring to God.

Third-person pronouns

Within the liturgical forms, our committee, with some regularity, has sought to avoid an over use of third-person masculine singular pronouns, which on some occasions seems archaic when both men and women are in purview. The tendency in modern English in day-to-day usage is away from the generic use of “he,” “him,” and “his.” We have sought to speak in “common” English that people are actually using. Thus the use of “they,” “them,” and “their” to express a generic singular idea. This generic use of the indefinite or singular “they/them/their” actually has a venerable place in English idiom. Consequently, where “anyone” or “everyone” or some equivalent is generally used as antecedent, the generic pronouns of “they/them/their” are duly applicable. This usage was not uncommon in older English, was displaced in the 18th and 19th centuries, and is now returning to usage again.

Formatting

While some of the formatting of the various documents we have prepared has been carried over from the source documents (ex. The Heidelberg Catechism) as a Committee we have not spent much time working with their formatting. It is our expectation that when the documents are prepared for print the formatting will be set. It is our commitment to format the documents in a way that contributes to their readability and understanding. For example, the Apostles and Nicene Creed will be laid out in a way that illustrates their Trinitarian nature. The Athanasian Creed will continue to have each article numbered. We will also prepare the various forms in a stylistic way.

Publishing

It is our recommendation as a committee that the Liturgical Forms be printed as a stand-alone book. While others may contribute their reasons for having this book published separately — including economies of scale for the songbook as a result of larger print runs in combination with the OPC — we believe that such a printing will allow greater flexibility and revision of the Liturgical Forms in the future. While we do not envision a constant revision of these documents, as with, for example, our Church Order, we would note that placing these forms in the back of our Song Book would make revising them much more difficult. If in years to come the churches wish to add to these forms or revise them, it is a much simpler matter if the Forms are in a separate book. Having had the task of updating forms that were not updated since 1976, we believe that such a book would serve the churches better as they continue to speak in a way that is clear and contemporary.

Prayers

The churches of the Reformation have historically included forms of prayer alongside their songs and liturgies in their service books. The churches of Geneva, for example, had “The Form of Church Prayers and Hymns...According to the Custom of the Ancient Church” first published in 1542. In our particular tradition, the Psalter and service book of Petrus Dathenus (1556) also contained a series of prayers. These prayers were first translated into English and included in the

Christian Reformed Church's *Psalter Hymnal* in 1934 and were included in the 1959 and 1976 editions.

Experience has shown that our collection of prayers are an overlooked part of our liturgical life. Some of the reasons offered in conversations with ministers are that they are antiquated and verbose. As we considered our prayers, it was decided to use the older versions as a baseline and to update the language, shorten when appropriate, add more prayers for variety by drawing upon the best of the broader Reformed tradition (England, Geneva, Heidelberg, Strasbourg, as well as Martin Luther), and consider the liturgical and personal needs of our churches. We believe this will enhance the prayer life of our people at home as well as those who lead in prayer in public worship.

It's important to mention that these prayers are not obligatory but are for voluntary use. While our Church Order requires the use of liturgical forms and their prayers for those moments in congregation life (e.g., baptism, Lord's Supper), nowhere are prescribed forms of public prayer in weekly worship imposed. These prayers are offered as aids and examples for those who are called to lead in public prayer as well as for the direction and edification of our people in their daily lives.

We have arranged our collection of prayers in four major sections for ease of use:

1) Prayers for Lord's Day Worship

This section includes a variety of prayers for use in weekly morning and afternoon/evening worship, taking into consideration the typical moments of prayer we have in our various churches: *declaration of dependence, invocation, confession, pastoral prayer* (long and short), *before and after the sermon, before and after the explanation of the Catechism, thanksgiving, and concluding.*

2) Prayers for Special Services

This section includes prayers for the special services that the Church Order article 37 gives as examples of those that may be called in the churches: *Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost, a day of prayer, the national Thanksgiving Day, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, and services in times of great distress or blessing.* We realize that some churches may freely celebrate days such as Palm Sunday or Advent, but we have left that to the churches' discretion in terms of prayers.

3) Prayers for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

This section includes updated versions of the traditional outline of prayers used in our churches: *opening and closing prayer for ecclesiastical assemblies and opening prayer for the meetings of deacons.*

4) Prayers for Personal and Family Use

This section includes many prayers we considered to be useful personally and as families, with several even being adaptable in public prayer. Like the old prayers, there is a *morning and evening prayer* while we have added prayers *for children at bedtime*, which can be used especially by new believers in learning how to teach their children to pray. Like the old prayers, there is a *prayer before and after meals*, but again, we have added prayer *for children before and after meals*. Given the heightened awareness of the persecuted church in our time across the world, we have adapted a section from the old “Prayer for all the Needs of Christendom” as a *prayer for the persecuted church*. Given Paul’s command in 1 Timothy 2 and mention in our old prayers, we have included a specific *prayer for all in civil authority*. As we as churches continue to labor to take the gospel to the nations, we have also added a *prayer for missions*. Since the experience of communing with our Lord among his people is such a high point in the life of our churches, we have included *prayers before and after communion*, which may be used individually, around the table at home after worship, and even in public worship. Finally, we have updated the old *prayers for the sick and the spiritually distressed* (see below).

In addition to the *prayers for the sick and the spiritually distressed* we have also added a section. Included in the liturgical forms and prayers of Petrus Dathenus’ *Psalter* (1566) that were adopted by the Synod of Dort (1618–19) was a section entitled “*De Ziekentroost*,” (The Consolation of the Sick). This was a series of 21 meditations on sin, death, and grace to prepare believers for death and a series of Scripture verses to be used for that purpose. One writer described this section and its use in this way:

“While it was one of the special duties of ministers in Holland to visit the sick and give them the consolations of religion, yet in destitute fields or in parishes too large for one minister to attend to, Helpers were called to their assistance. There was an elaborate Form prepared for use when the sick were visited. The title of this form is The Consolation of the Sick; or Instruction in Faith and the Way of Salvation; to Prepare Believers to Die Willingly. It was printed with all editions of the liturgy, in Holland; and in the first two editions in English, in America, namely, in those of 1793 and 1815. There were two terms used to describe these Helpers, namely, *Krankenbesoeckers* and *Ziekentroosters*. The terms were practically synonymous; but etymologically considered, the former meant a seeker out and visitor of the sick and needy, to give them help and comfort, while the latter more strictly meant a comforter (*trooster*, trust-exciter) of those that were very sick and nearing their end.” (Edward Tanjore Corwin, *A Manual of the Reformed Church in America (formerly Ref. Prot. Dutch Church). 1628–1902* [New York: Board of Publications of the Reformed Church in America, 1902], 18)

This material was included in *The Psalter* of 1912, which our churches utilized prior to developing what we now know as the *Psalter Hymnal*. Yet in no version of the *Psalter Hymnal* (1934, 1959, 1976, 1987) was *De Ziekentroost* included. A survey of the Acts of Synod of the CRC gives no answer as to why. We have re-included this material in order to edify those

in hospitals, convalescent homes, and shut-in at home as well as to be used by ministers, elders, deacons, and members in visiting the sick and dying.

Conclusion

As we've noted already, we do not believe the work of this committee is finished. The work of preparing this material for publication, as well as incorporating any changes recommended or approved at Synod, will require our continued service to the churches. However, we do recommend all of our material as presented to the churches.

The committee has chosen Dr. Brian Lee to serve as Chairman *pro tem* at Synod 2016 due to the expected absence of Rev. Daniel Hyde. Also, during those portions of our meeting when these matters are discussed, we humbly ask that Dr. Mark Beach be given the privilege of the floor. We are grateful to the churches for the trust they have placed in our committee in this important work. It is our hope and prayer that we have fulfilled this trust in our work.

The Liturgical Forms Committee

Rev. Daniel Hyde

Dr. J. Mark Beach

Dr. Brian Lee

Rev. William VanderWoerd

Rev. Joel Dykstra

Rev. Mitch Dick

INTRODUCTION TO THE CREEDS AND CONFESSIONS

The practice of writing and confessing creeds (from the Latin *credo*, “I believe”) is as old as the Lord’s Church herself. Thus, we find in both the Old (Deut. 6:4) and New Testaments (Matt. 16:16; 1 Cor. 15:3–4; Eph. 4:4–6; 1 Tim. 3:16) of the Holy Scriptures summary statements of the faith of God’s covenant people.

The following ancient Christian creeds (Apostles’, Nicene, Athanasian) and Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort) contain the doctrinal standards, or publicly confessed faith, of the United Reformed Churches in North America. This forms are not peculiar to us. The Creeds unite us to the ancient Christian church, and the three forms of unity, unite us to the broader reformed tradition of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

As Christian churches, our foundational text is the Bible, the inspired and infallible Word of God. The basic beliefs of the Bible—that there is only one God who exists eternally as a Trinity and that Jesus Christ our Savior is both God and man—were expressed by the early Christian church in the Apostles’, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. The Belgic Confession says, “we willingly receive” these three creeds (Art. 9), since they are *ecumenical* (general, universal) and have been accepted by a large portion of the churches of Christendom.

As Reformed churches, we belong to those churches of the Protestant Reformation that acknowledge Jesus Christ as Head of his church. He rules and governs his church by his Word and his Spirit, not by the dictates of men. Therefore the authority of the creeds and confessions, to which all our office-bearers subscribe as fully agreeing with the Word of God, is always subordinate to the authority of his inspired and infallible Word, the Bible. It was in that context that our forefathers wrote the following Reformed Confessions, also known as the Three Forms of Unity: the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort.

Appended to these doctrinal standards is the Form of Subscription, which the ministers, elders, and deacons of each congregation have signed as a promise to preserve and to propagate this faith to the utmost of our abilities. This Form has been used in one form or another since the Reformation.

ECUMENICAL CREEDS

The Apostles’ Creed, *The Nicene Creed*, and *The Athanasian Creed* date from the early centuries of the Christian church. Creeds, also called “symbols of faith,” are concise and authorized statements of the essential tenets of the faith which the believing community employs for testimony, instruction, and worship—including setting forth normative expressions of Christian truth and serving as standard bearers for theological inquiry. Although many kinds of creeds exist, the “ecumenical creeds” have the broadest recognition within the Christian church. They are called “Ecumenical” because they have been approved and accepted by a large portion of the churches of Christendom.

THE APOSTLES' CREED

The creed is called *The Apostles' Creed* not because it was produced by the apostles themselves but because it contains a concise summary of their teachings. Its chief tenets can be traced to specific New Testament texts, such as Matthew 1:18; 16:16; and 28:19; Luke 1:35 and 23:43; and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and 15:20. As has been well said, it sets forth biblical doctrine “in sublime simplicity, in unsurpassable brevity, in beautiful order, and with liturgical solemnity.”* This creed originated as a baptismal confession, probably in the second century, and developed into its present form by the sixth or seventh century, being the culmination of several centuries of reflection. The creed is Trinitarian in structure and accents God’s operations for our salvation. It has long been admired for its brevity and simplicity as a summary of the content of Christian faith. More than any other creed of Christendom, it may justly be called an ecumenical symbol of faith.

*Philip Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church*, trans. Edward D. Yeomans (New York: Charles Scribner, 1859), 568.

THE NICENE CREED

The Nicene Creed, also called *The Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed*, is a statement of the orthodox faith of the early Christian church in opposition to certain heresies, especially Arianism. These heresies, which disturbed the church during the fourth century, concerned the doctrine of the Trinity and the person of Christ. Both the Greek (Eastern) and the Latin (Western) church held this creed in honor, though with one important difference: the Western church insisted on the inclusion of the phrase *and the Son* (known as the *filioque*) in the article on the procession of the Holy Spirit; this phrase still is repudiated by the Eastern Orthodox church. In its present form this creed goes back partially to the Council of Nicea (325) with additions by the Council of Constantinople (381). It was accepted in its present form at the Council of Chalcedon in 451, but the *filioque* phrase was not added until 589. Nonetheless, the creed is in substance an accurate and majestic formulation of the Nicene faith. It consists of three sections—one section for each Person of the Trinity—and concludes with four statements affirming the universal tenets of the Christian gospel. In combatting the Arian error, the creed makes clear that the Son is equal in status with the Father, since the Son is of the same substance as the Father. Indeed, *The Nicene Creed* remains a standard of trinitarian orthodoxy.

THE ATHANASIAN CREED

This creed is named after Athanasius (A.D. 293-373), the champion of orthodoxy against Arian attacks on the doctrine of the Trinity. Although Athanasius did not write this creed and it is improperly named after him, the name persists because until the seventeenth century it was commonly ascribed to him. It is also called the *Quicumque vult*, derived from the opening words in the Latin original.

The general consensus among scholars is that this creed was produced during the fifth or sixth century. Originally it seems to have been used not as a creed or confession but as a tool of instruction and test of orthodoxy for clergy. It is first quoted in the canons of the Fourth Synod of Toledo (633), and apparently gained the status of a creed at the Synod of Autun (c. 670). By the

thirteenth century it was regarded in the West as one of the three principal creeds of the church, along with *The Apostles' Creed* and *The Nicene Creed*.

The Athanasian Creed's liturgical function is limited because of its length, though its theological import continues to define a markedly Western understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity and presents positively the Christology of Chalcedon. It was formulated in response to the post-Nicene controversies regarding the person of Jesus Christ, specifically concerning the incarnation and the relationship between Christ's divine and human natures. It addresses Apollinarianism and Nestorianism and perhaps also Eutychianism, which were condemned at the councils of Constantinople (381), Ephesus (431), and Chalcedon (451), respectively.

Apart from the opening and closing sentences, this creed consists of two parts, each part consisting of a series of declarations. The first part sets forth the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity (3-28) and the second treats chiefly the incarnation and the doctrine of the two natures of Christ (29-41). As for the doctrine of the Trinity, this creed accents the Augustinian teaching on the Trinity, with the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son, the *filioque*, and an accent on the divine unity. The Godhead is altogether one—one divine substance or essence, yet each distinct person has a particular property by virtue of which He differs and is distinct from the other, namely the distinctiveness of the Father is that he is neither generated nor begotten, the Son's particularity is that he is generated or begotten, and the particularity of the Holy Spirit is that he proceeds or is sent. As for the doctrine of Christ, this creed teaches the full deity and humanity of Christ; and, contrary to Nestorianism, it affirms the unity and oneness of his person. His humanity is constituted with a rational soul and human body. Seemingly addressing Eutychianism as well as Apollinarianism, this creed denies any confusion of natures in Jesus Christ and affirms that the Son of God assumed a full human nature. Next follows statements about Christ's death and resurrection and the general resurrection and judgment. The creed's introduction and conclusion assert that the corruption or denial of the teaching of this creed is inconsistent with salvation.

THE BELGIC CONFESSION

The Belgic Confession of Faith is the first of the doctrinal standards of our churches. In the sixteenth century, when the confession was first composed, "*Belgic*" designated the entirety of the Netherlands, both north and south, which today is divided into distinct countries: the Netherlands and Belgium. The confession's chief author was Guido de Brès, a preacher of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands. During the sixteenth century the churches in this country were exposed to the most terrible persecution by the Roman Catholic government. To protest against this cruel oppression, and to prove to the persecutors that the adherents of the Reformed faith were not rebels, as they were accused, but law-abiding citizens who professed the true Christian doctrine according to the Holy Scriptures, de Brès prepared this confession in the year 1561. The following year a copy was sent to King Philip II, together with an address in which the petitioners declared that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that they would "offer their backs to the stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire" rather than deny the truth expressed in this confession. Nearly every copy of de Brès's confession was destroyed by official order (only two copies still exist). In the year 1567, Guido de Brès suffered the kind of martyr's death he had described.

Although the immediate purpose of securing freedom from persecution was not attained, and many thousands sealed their faith with their lives, de Brès's work endured. The political situation

soon changed in the Netherlands, leading to the ascendancy of the Reformed faith there, and the Belgic Confession became a doctrinal standard of the Dutch churches. In 1566 the text of this confession was revised and adopted at the local synod held at Antwerp, also Wessel (1568), Emden (1571), Dort (1574), and Middleburg (1581). Revisions to the text were made again at the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 and the revised text was adopted as one of the doctrinal standards to which all office-bearers in the Dutch Reformed churches were required to subscribe.

In its composition the author availed himself to some extent of a confession of the Reformed churches in France, written chiefly by John Calvin, published two years earlier. The work of de Brès, however, is not a mere revision of Calvin's work, but an independent composition.

Readers will find that Scripture quotations and paraphrases which appear in the text have been indicated by the use of italics. It should be noted, however, that the Scripture references that may be found in the footnotes of each article are not part of the officially adopted text of the Belgic Confession as revised by the Synod of Dort. Although these references are not part of the official text of the Belgic Confession, they are sometimes included in published versions of the confession. We have inserted them here in order to assist readers in using this confession alongside Scripture.

The English translation of the Belgic Confession found below is based upon the official French text approved by the Synod of Dort (1618-19). The translation with minor emendations can be found in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2 edited by Pelikan and Hotchkiss.

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) is among the most cherished catechisms ever written, and is perhaps best known for its first question and answer: “*What is your only comfort in life and in death? That I, with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.*”

It was composed in Heidelberg at the request of Elector Frederick III, who ruled the Palatinate, an influential German province, from 1559 to 1576. The Palatinate was one of the few pockets of Calvinistic faith in the Lutheran and Roman Catholic territories of Germany at that time. An old tradition credits Zacharias Ursinus and Casper Olevianus as the coauthors of the new catechism. Zacharias Ursinus (1534- 83), a student of both Calvin and Melancthon and a professor of theology at the University of Heidelberg, is often credited with providing the initial drafts of the catechism by means of his *Summa Theologicae* (323 questions) and in the condensed version of the *Summa*, his *Catechesis Minor* (108 questions). As for Casper Olevianus (1536-87), he had been a student of Calvin and Beza and served as the pastor of the Holy Spirit Church at Heidelberg. Although he probably played a less prominent role than earlier scholarship has suggested, he certainly participated in the deliberations about the final form of the catechism.

It is worth noting what Elector Frederick III himself reported in his preface to the catechism, dated January 19, 1563. There readers are informed that the Elector secured the preparation of the catechism “with the advice and cooperation of our entire theological faculty in this place, and of all superintendents and distinguished servants of the church.” Therefore, it was a committee of theologians, appointed by Frederick III, who are responsible for the official text of the catechism, drawing on resources that proved useful.

The Heidelberg Catechism was approved by a Palatinate synod in Heidelberg in January 1563 and printed with the above mentioned preface by the Elector in February. Second and third German

editions, each with small additions, as well as a Latin translation were published the same year in Heidelberg. Soon the catechism was divided into fifty-two sections so that on successive Lord's Days a portion of the catechism could be expounded from the pulpit throughout the year.

The Synod of Dort in 1618-1619 approved *The Heidelberg Catechism*, and it soon became the most ecumenical of the Reformed catechisms and confessions. Indeed, the catechism was the most widely used and most warmly praised catechism of the Reformation period.

The Heidelberg Catechism, after some introductory questions and answers, is divided into three parts: human misery (Q&As 3-11); divine deliverance, which includes an exposition of *The Apostles' Creed*, as well as justification, good works, and the means of grace (Q&As 12-85); and Christian gratitude, which takes up the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer as chief constituents of the Christian life (Q&As 86-129).

The English translation presented here (a thorough revision of the version that appeared in the 1976 Blue Psalter hymnal) follows the third German edition of the catechism, which included the approved emendations to the text (see Q&As 57 and 80). This is the German edition that was included in the Palatinate Church Order of November 15, 1563, and is the "received text" used throughout the world.

THE CANONS OF DORT

The "Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands" is popularly known as *The Canons of Dort*. It consists of statements of doctrine adopted by the great Synod of Dort which met in the city of Dordrecht in 1618-19. Although this was a national synod of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, it had an international character, since it was composed not only of Dutch delegates but also of twenty-six delegates from eight foreign countries.

The Synod of Dort was held in order to settle a serious controversy in the Dutch churches occasioned by the rise of Arminianism. Jacob Arminius, a theological professor at Leiden University, questioned the teaching of Calvin and his followers on a number of important points. After Arminius's death, his own followers presented their views on five of these points in the Remonstrance or "protest" of 1610. In this document or in later more explicit writings, the Arminians taught election based on foreseen faith, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and the possibility of a lapse from grace. In the Canons, the Synod of Dort rejected these views and set forth the Reformed doctrine on these points. In terms of strict accuracy, the Canons fit uncomfortably under the slogans: unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. These abbreviated phrases fail to capture the breadth of the Canons' teachings.

The five "heads" or topics in the Canons, divided into four parts, treat (1) "Divine Election and Reprobation"; (2) "The Death of Christ and Human Redemption"; (3-4) "Human Corruption" and "Conversion to God"; and (5) "Perseverance of the Saints."

The first topic, in treating unconditional election, begins with the fallen condition of human beings, who are under the penalty of death as sin's curse. However, God, according to his lovingkindness, saves all who believe in Christ through the preaching of the gospel. Although man has only himself to blame for his sin, salvation is the free gift of God. As a gift, salvation is grounded in God's gracious election of sinners, which is according to his good pleasure. Being unchangeable and eternal, divine election provides assurance to believers as they experience its

fruits in their lives, namely faith in Christ, sorrow over sin, and thirst for righteousness. The Canons briefly touch on the decree of reprobation as a divine passing over, a non-election, so that God leaves such persons “in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves.” Divine non-action, then, leaves them in their unbelief; and divine action condemns them eternally for their sin. Moreover, this topic aims to console godly parents whose children die at a tender age, such that, in view of the covenant of grace, they “ought not to doubt the election and salvation” of such children.

The Canons, in the second topic, accent the efficacious character of Christ’s sacrifice as a full and perfect satisfaction for sin, “of infinite value and worth,” “sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.” This sufficiency undergirds the Canons’ teaching that the gospel must be preached to all people. Since sinners cannot satisfy for their own sins for salvation, “God in his boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee, his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.” The fault that some people remain in their unbelief resides in them. Grace is grounded in Christ from eternity, and Christ’s death is efficacious for the elect alone. According to his eternal love, the elect are gathered together as God’s church, “founded on Christ’s blood.”

The next topic, three and four together, takes up a subject touched on earlier, namely human corruption. Man has fallen from his original state, and now suffers “blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his emotions.” This corruption has spread to all of Adam’s progeny. As such, all people are “born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin”; without the gift of rebirth and renewal they are neither willing nor able to fellowship with God or reform their brokenness. They cannot even dispose themselves to such reform. God, however, effects healing through the gospel, by the operation of the Holy Spirit. As such, the call of the gospel calls “seriously” all who hear it. The blame and responsibility for failing to heed this call resides with sinners. Conversion, on the other hand, is a divine work, wherein God effectually calls the elect to faith and repentance, and that by means of the “effective operation of the . . . regenerating Spirit.” Thus, we should pray for the lost since God is wholly able to bring life from the dead.

The last topic examines the perseverance of the saints. Believers are set free from “the reign and slavery of sin” but they are not yet entirely free, in this life, from “the flesh” and “from the body of sin.” Although believers still struggle with sin, God does not abandon them so that they must fend for themselves. Rather, God continues to strengthen and preserve believers in faith, even when they experience periods of straying from his will and fall into monstrous sins. God never forsakes his elect. He never allows them to permanently forfeit grace. He always brings them back to repentance and faith, so that they live according to the gospel. Meanwhile, assurance of the forgiveness of sins and eternal life is also in the way of faith—grounded in God’s promises and strengthened by the believer’s walk of obedience. Such assurance is an incentive to godliness.

The Canons have a special character because of their original purpose as a judicial decision on the doctrinal points in dispute during the Arminian controversy. The original preface called them a “judgment, in which both the true view, agreeing with God’s Word, concerning the aforesaid five points of doctrine is explained, and the false view, disagreeing with God’s Word, is rejected.” The Canons also have a limited character in that they do not cover the whole range of doctrine, but focus on the five points of doctrine in dispute.

Each of the main points consists of a positive and a negative part, the former being an exposition of the Reformed doctrine on the subject, the latter a repudiation of the corresponding errors. In the text presented here, each of the errors being rejected is shaded in gray.

The translation of the Canons here presented is based on the only extant Latin manuscript among those signed at the Synod of Dort. The biblical quotations are translations from the original Latin and so do not always correspond to current versions. Though not in the original text, subheadings have been added to the positive articles and to the conclusion in order to facilitate study of the Canons. The translation with minor emendations can be found in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 2 edited by Pelikan and Hotchkiss.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell;¹ the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic² Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

¹ We understand this phrase to mean that especially on the cross Jesus suffered God's anger and curse and the agonies of hell (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 44; Canons of Dort 2.4).

² "Catholic" means universal, that is, that there is one Church across all times, places, and peoples (Belgic Confession, art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54).

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and he shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic¹ and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

¹ “Catholic” means universal, that is, that there is one Church across all times, places, and peoples (Belgic Confession, art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54).

The Athanasian Creed

Blue Psalter Hymnal

- (1) Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;
- (2) Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
- (3) And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
- (4) Neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance.
- (5) For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.
- (6) But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal.
- (7) Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.
- (8) The Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Spirit uncreate.
- (9) The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.
- (10) The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.
- (11) And yet they are not three eternal, but one eternal.
- (12) As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.
- (13) So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty;
- (14) And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.
- (15) So the Father is God, the Son is God, and Holy Spirit is God;
- (16) And yet there are not three Gods, but one God.
- (17) So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit;

The Athanasian Creed

Proposed

- (1) Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic¹ faith.
- (2) Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.
- (3) Now this is the catholic faith: That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,
- (4) neither confounding their persons nor dividing the essence.
- (5) For the person of the Father is a distinct person, the person of the Son is another, and that of the Holy Spirit still another.
- (6) But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
- (7) Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Spirit.
- (8) The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated.
- (9) The Father is immeasurable, the Son is immeasurable, the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.
- (10) The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal.
- (11) And yet there are not three eternal beings; there is but one eternal being.
- (12) So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings; there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.
- (13) Similarly, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty.
- (14) Yet there are not three almighty beings; there is but one almighty being.
- (15) Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God.
- (16) Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God.
- (17) Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord.

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| <p>(18) And yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord.</p> <p>(19) For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and Lord;</p> <p>(20) So we are forbidden by the catholic religion to say: There are three Gods or Three Lords.</p> <p>(21) The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.</p> <p>(22) The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.</p> <p>(23) The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.</p> <p>(24) So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.</p> <p>(25) And in this Trinity none is afore, or after another; none is greater, or less than another.</p> <p>(26) But the whole three persons are co-eternal, and co-equal.</p> <p>(27) So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.</p> <p>(28) He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.</p> <p>(29) Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.</p> <p>(30) For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.</p> <p>(31) God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world.</p> <p>(32) Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.</p> <p>(33) Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.</p> | <p>(18) Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.</p> <p>(19) Just as Christian truth compels us to confess each person² individually as both God and Lord,</p> <p>(20) So catholic religion forbids us to say that there are three gods or lords.</p> <p>(21) The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.</p> <p>(22) The Son was neither made nor created; he was begotten from the Father alone.</p> <p>(23) The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten; he proceeds from the Father and the Son.</p> <p>(24) Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers; there is one Son, not three sons; there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.</p> <p>(25) None in this trinity is before or after, none is greater or smaller;</p> <p>(26) In their entirety the three persons are coeternal and coequal with each other.</p> <p>(27) So in everything, as was said earlier, the unity in Trinity, and Trinity in unity is to be worshipped.</p> <p>(28) Anyone then who desires to be saved should think thus about the trinity.</p> <p>(29) But it is necessary for eternal salvation that one also believe in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.</p> <p>(30) Now this is the true faith: that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, is both God and man, equally.</p> <p>(31) He is God from the essence of the Father, begotten before time; and he is man from the essence of his mother, born in time;</p> <p>(32) Completely God, completely man, with a rational soul and human flesh;</p> <p>(33) Equal to the Father as regards divinity, less than the Father as regards humanity.</p> <p>(34) Although he is God and man, yet Christ is not two, but one.</p> <p>(35) He is one, however, not by his divinity</p> |
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- (34) Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.
- (35) One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God.
- (36) One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.
- (37) For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ;
- (38) Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead;
- (39) He ascended into heaven, He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty;
- (40) From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.
- (41) At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;
- (42) And shall give account of their own works.
- (43) And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.
- (44) This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.
- being turned into flesh, but by God's taking humanity to himself.
- (36) He is one, certainly not by the blending of his essence, but by the unity of his person.
- (37) For just as one man is both rational³ soul and flesh, so too the one Christ is both God and man.
- (38) He suffered for our salvation; he descended to hell⁴; he arose from the dead on the third day;
- (39) he ascended to heaven; he is seated at the Father's right hand;
- (40) from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
- (41) At his coming all people will arise bodily
- (42) and give an accounting of their own deeds.
- (43) Those who have done good will enter eternal life, and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.
- (44) This is the catholic faith: one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.

¹ "Catholic" means universal, that is, that there is one Church across all times, places, and peoples (Belgic Confession, art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54).

² "Each person," means that each person of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are divine, not that each *human* person is divine.

³ A "rational soul" means that Jesus had a true human soul like ours.

⁴ We understand this phrase to mean that on especially the cross Jesus suffered God's anger and curse and the agonies of hell (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 44; Canons of Dort 2.4).

The Belgic Confession

2016 URCNA Version

Article 1: The Only God

We all believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is a single and simple spiritual being, whom we call God—

eternal,
incomprehensible,
invisible,
unchangeable,
infinite,
almighty;

completely wise,
just,
and good,
and the overflowing source
of all good.

Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God

We know him by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book

in which all creatures,
great and small,
are as letters
to make us ponder
the invisible things of God:
his eternal power
and his divinity,
as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20.

All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse.

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Second, he makes himself known to us more openly

by his holy and divine Word,
as much as we need in this life,
for his glory
and for the salvation of his own.

Article 3: The Written Word of God

We confess that this Word of God was not sent nor delivered by the will of men, but that holy men of God spoke, being moved by the Holy Spirit, as Peter says.¹

Afterwards our God—
because of the special care he has
for us and our salvation—
commanded his servants,
the prophets and apostles,
to commit this revealed Word to writing.
He himself wrote
with his own finger
the two tables of the law.

Therefore we call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.

¹ 2 Pet. 1:21

Article 4: The Canonical Books

We include in the Holy Scripture the two volumes of the Old and New Testaments. They are canonical books with which there can be no quarrel at all.

In the church of God the list is as follows:

In the Old Testament,
the five books of Moses—
Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy;
the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth;
the two books of Samuel, and two of Kings;
the two books of Chronicles, called Paralipomenon;
the first book of Ezra; Nehemiah, Esther, Job;
the Psalms of David;
the three books of Solomon—

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song;
the four major prophets—
Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel;
and then the other twelve minor prophets—
Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah,
Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk,
Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

In the New Testament,
the four gospels—
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John;
the Acts of the Apostles;
the fourteen letters of Paul—
to the Romans;
the two letters to the Corinthians;
to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians;
the two letters to the Thessalonians;
the two letters to Timothy;
to Titus, Philemon, and to the Hebrews;
the seven letters of the other apostles—
one of James;
two of Peter;
three of John;
one of Jude;
and the Revelation of the apostle John.

Article 5: The Authority of Scripture

We receive all these books
and these only
as holy and canonical,
for the regulating, founding, and establishing
of our faith.

And we believe
without a doubt
all things contained in them—
not so much because the church
receives and approves them as such
but above all because the Holy Spirit
testifies in our hearts
that they are from God,
and also because they
prove themselves
to be from God.

For even the blind themselves are able to see
that the things predicted in them
do happen.

Article 6: The Difference Between Canonical and Apocryphal Books

We distinguish between these holy books
and the apocryphal ones,
which are the third and fourth books of Esdras;
the books of Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Jesus Sirach, Baruch;
what was added to the Story of Esther;
the Song of the Three Children in the Furnace;
the Story of Susannah;
the Story of Bell and the Dragon;
the Prayer of Manasseh;
and the two books of Maccabees.

The church may certainly read these books
and learn from them
as far as they agree with the canonical books.
But they do not have such power and virtue
that one could confirm
from their testimony
any point of faith or of the Christian religion.
Much less can they detract
from the authority
of the other holy books.

Article 7: The Sufficiency of Scripture

We believe
that this Holy Scripture contains
the will of God completely
and that everything one must believe
to be saved
is sufficiently taught in it.
For since the entire manner of service
which God requires of us
is described in it at great length,
no one—
even an apostle
or an angel from heaven,
as Paul says—²
ought to teach other than
what the Holy Scriptures have

already taught us.
For since it is forbidden
to add to or subtract from the Word of God,³
this plainly demonstrates
that the teaching is perfect
and complete in all respects.

Therefore we must not consider human writings—
no matter how holy their authors may have been—
equal to the divine writings;
nor may we put custom,
nor the majority,
nor age,
nor the passage of time or persons,
nor councils, decrees, or official decisions
above the truth of God,
for truth is above everything else.

For all human beings are liars by nature
and more vain than vanity itself.

Therefore we reject with all our hearts
everything that does not agree
with this infallible rule,
as we are taught to do by the apostles
when they say,
“Test the spirits
to see if they are of God,”⁴
and also,
“If anyone comes to you
and does not bring this teaching,
do not receive him
into your house.”⁵

² Gal. 1:8

³ Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:18-19

⁴ 1 John 4:1

⁵ 2 John 10

Article 8: The Trinity

In keeping with this truth and Word of God
we believe in one God,
who is one single essence,
in whom there are three persons,
really, truly, and eternally distinct
according to their incommunicable properties—
namely,

Father,
Son,
and Holy Spirit.
The Father
is the cause,
origin,
and source of all things,
visible as well as invisible.
The Son
is the Word,
the Wisdom,
and the image
of the Father.
The Holy Spirit
is the eternal power
and might,
proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Nevertheless,
this distinction does not divide God into three,
since Scripture teaches us
that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
each has his own subsistence
distinguished by characteristics—
yet in such a way
that these three persons are
only one God.

It is evident then
that the Father is not the Son
and that the Son is not the Father,
and that likewise the Holy Spirit is
neither the Father nor the Son.

Nevertheless,
these persons,
thus distinct,
are neither divided
nor fused or mixed together.

For the Father did not take on flesh,
nor did the Spirit,
but only the Son.

The Father was never
without his Son,
nor without his Holy Spirit,

since all these are equal from eternity,
in one and the same essence.

There is neither a first nor a last,
for all three are one in truth and power,
in goodness and mercy.

Article 9: The Scriptural Witness on the Trinity

All these things we know
from the testimonies of Holy Scripture
as well as from the effects of the persons,
especially from those we feel within ourselves.

The testimonies of the Holy Scriptures,
which teach us to believe in this Holy Trinity,
are written in many places of the Old Testament,
which need not be enumerated
but only chosen with discretion.

In the book of Genesis God says,
“Let us make man in our image,
according to our likeness.”
So “God created man in his own image”—
indeed, “male and female he created them.”⁶
“Behold, man has become like one of us.”⁷

It appears from this
that there is a plurality of persons
within the Deity,
when he says,
“Let us make man in our image”—
and afterwards he indicates the unity
when he says,
“God created.”

It is true that he does not say here
how many persons there are—
but what is somewhat obscure to us
in the Old Testament
is very clear in the New.

For when our Lord was baptized in
the Jordan,
the voice of the Father was heard
saying,
“This is my dear Son”;⁸
the Son was seen in the water;

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and the Holy Spirit appeared in the form of a dove.

So, in the baptism of all believers
this form was prescribed by Christ:
“Baptize all people in the name
of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.”⁹

In the Gospel according to Luke
the angel Gabriel says to Mary,
the mother of our Lord:
“The Holy Spirit will come upon you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;
and therefore that holy one to be born of you
shall be called the Son of God.”¹⁰

And in another place it says:
“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you.”¹¹

“There are three who bear witness in heaven—
the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit—
and these three are one.”¹²

In all these passages we are fully taught
that there are three persons
in the one and only divine essence.
And although this doctrine surpasses human understanding,
we nevertheless believe it now,
through the Word,
waiting to know and enjoy it fully
in heaven.
Furthermore,
we must note the particular works and activities
of these three persons in relation to us.
The Father is called our Creator,
by reason of his power.
The Son is our Savior and Redeemer,
by his blood.
The Holy Spirit is our Sanctifier,
by his living in our hearts.

This doctrine of the holy Trinity
has always been maintained in the true church,

from the time of the apostles until the present,
against Jews, Muslims, and certain false Christians
and heretics,
such as Marcion, Mani,
Praxeas, Sabellius, Paul of Samosata, Arius,
and others like them,
who were rightly condemned by the holy fathers.

And so,
in this matter we willingly accept
the three ecumenical creeds—
the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian—
as well as what the ancient fathers decided
in agreement with them.

⁶ Gen. 1:26-27

⁷ Gen. 3:22

⁸ Matt. 3:17

⁹ Matt. 28:19

¹⁰ Luke 1:35

¹¹ 2 Cor. 13:14

¹² 1 John 5:7 (KJV)

Article 10: The Deity of Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ,

according to his divine nature,

is the only Son of God—
eternally begotten,
not made nor created,
for then he would be a creature.

He is one in essence with the Father;
coeternal;
the exact image of the person of the
Father
and the “reflection of his glory,”¹³

being in all things like him.

He is the Son of God
not only from the time he assumed our
nature
but from all eternity,
as the following testimonies teach us

when they are taken together.

Moses says that God “created the world”;¹⁴
and John says that “all things were created by the Word,”¹⁵
which he calls God.

The apostle says that “God made the world by his Son.”¹⁶
He also says that “God created all things by Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

And so it must follow
that he who is called God, the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ
already existed when all things were created by him.

Therefore the prophet Micah says
that his origin is “from ancient times,
from eternity.”¹⁸

And the apostle says
that he has “neither beginning of days
nor end of life.”¹⁹

So then,
he is the true eternal God,
the Almighty,
whom we invoke,
worship,
and serve.

¹³ Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3

¹⁴ Gen. 1:1¹⁵ John 1:3

¹⁶ Heb. 1:2

¹⁷ Col. 1:16

¹⁸ Mic. 5:2

¹⁹ Heb. 7:3

Article 11: The Deity of the Holy Spirit

We believe and confess also
that the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally
from the Father and the Son—
neither made,
nor created,
nor begotten,
but only proceeding
from the two of them.

In regard to order,
he is the third person of the Trinity—
of one and the same essence,
and majesty,

and glory,
with the Father and the Son.

He is true and eternal God,
as the Holy Scriptures teach us.

Article 12: The Creation of All Things

We believe that the Father
created heaven and earth and all other creatures
from nothing,
when it seemed good to him,
by his Word—
that is to say,
by his Son.

He has given all creatures
their being, form, and appearance,
and their various functions
for serving their Creator.

Even now
he also sustains and governs them all,
according to his eternal providence,
and by his infinite power,
that they may serve man,
in order that man may serve God.

He has also created the angels good,
that they might be his messengers
and serve his elect.

Some of them have fallen
from the excellence in which God created them
into eternal perdition;
and the others have persisted and remained
in their original state,
by the grace of God.

The devils and evil spirits are so corrupt
that they are enemies of God
and of everything good.
They lie in wait for the church
and every member of it
like thieves,
with all their power,
to destroy and spoil everything
by their deceptions.

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So then,
by their own wickedness
they are condemned to everlasting damnation,
daily awaiting their torments.

For that reason
we detest the error of the Sadducees,
who deny that there are spirits and angels,
and also the error of the Manicheans,
who say that the devils originated by themselves,
being evil by nature,
without having been corrupted.

Article 13: The Doctrine of God's Providence

We believe that this good God,
after he created all things,
did not abandon them to chance or fortune
but leads and governs them
according to his holy will,
in such a way that nothing happens in this world
without his orderly arrangement.

Yet God is not the author of,
nor can he be charged with,
the sin that occurs.
For his power and goodness
are so great and incomprehensible
that he arranges and does his work very well and justly
even when the devils and wicked men act unjustly.

We do not wish to inquire
with undue curiosity
into what he does that surpasses human understanding
and is beyond our ability to comprehend.
But in all humility and reverence
we adore the just judgments of God,
which are hidden from us,
being content to be Christ's disciples,
so as to learn only what he shows us in his Word,
without going beyond those limits.

This doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort
since it teaches us
that nothing can happen to us by chance
but only by the arrangement of our gracious

heavenly Father.
He watches over us with fatherly care,
keeping all creatures under his control,
so that not one of the hairs on our heads
(for they are all numbered)
nor even a little bird can fall to the ground²⁰
without the will of our Father.

In this thought we rest,
knowing that he holds in check
the devils and all our enemies,
who cannot hurt us
without his permission and will.

For that reason we reject
the damnable error of the Epicureans,
who say that God involves himself in nothing
and leaves everything to chance.

²⁰ Matt. 10:29-30

²¹

Article 14: The Creation and Fall of Man

We believe
that God created man from the dust of the earth
and made and formed him in his image and likeness—
good, just, and holy;
able by his own will to conform
in all things
to the will of God.

But when he was in honour
he did not understand it²¹
and did not recognize his excellence.
But he subjected himself willingly to sin
and consequently to death and the curse,
lending his ear to the word of the devil.

For he transgressed the commandment of life,
which he had received,
and by his sin he separated himself from God,
who was his true life,
having corrupted his entire nature.

So he made himself guilty
and subject to physical and spiritual death,
having become wicked,
perverse,

and corrupt in all his ways.
He lost all his excellent gifts
which he had received from God,
and he retained none of them
except for small traces
which are enough to make him
inexcusable.

Moreover, all the light in us is turned to darkness,
as the Scripture teaches us:

“The light shone in the darkness,
and the darkness did not receive it.”²²

Here John calls men “darkness.”

Therefore we reject everything taught to the contrary
concerning man’s free will,
since man is nothing but the slave of sin
and cannot do a thing
unless it is “given him from heaven.”²³

For who can boast of being able
to do anything good by himself,
since Christ says,
“No one can come to me
unless my Father who sent me
draws him”?²⁴

Who can glory in his own will
when he understands that “the mind of the flesh
is enmity against God”?²⁵

Who can speak of his own knowledge
in view of the fact that “the natural man
does not understand the things of the Spirit of God”?²⁶

In short,
who can produce a single thought,
since he knows that we are “not able to think a thing”
about ourselves,
by ourselves,
but that “our ability is from God”?²⁷

And therefore,
what the apostle says
ought rightly to stand fixed and firm:
“God works within us both to will and to do
according to his good pleasure.”²⁸

For there is no understanding nor will
conforming to God's understanding and will
apart from Christ's work,
as he teaches us when he says,
"Without me you can do nothing."²⁹

²¹ Ps. 49:20

²² John 1:5

²³ John 3:27

²⁴ John 6:44

²⁵ Rom. 8:7

²⁶ 1 Cor. 2:14

²⁷ 2 Cor. 3:5

²⁸ Phil. 2:13

²⁹ John 15:5

Article 15: The Doctrine of Original Sin

We believe
that by the disobedience of Adam
original sin has been spread
through the whole human race.

It is a corruption of all nature—
an inherited depravity which even infects small infants
in their mother's womb,
and the root which produces in man
every sort of sin.

It is therefore so vile and
enormous in God's sight
that it is enough to
condemn the human race,
and it is not abolished

or wholly uprooted

even by baptism,

seeing that sin
constantly boils forth

as though from a
contaminated spring.

Nevertheless,
it is not imputed to
God's children
for their condemnation

but is forgiven
by his grace and mercy —
not to put them to sleep
but so that the awareness of this corruption
might often make believers groan
as they long to be set free
from the "body of this death."³⁰

Therefore we reject the error of the Pelagians
who say that this sin is nothing else than a matter of
imitation.

³⁰ Rom. 7:24

Article 16: The Doctrine of Election

We believe that—
all Adam's descendants having thus fallen
into perdition and ruin
by the sin of the first man—
God showed himself to be as he is:
merciful and just.

He is merciful
in withdrawing and saving from this perdition those whom he,
in his eternal and unchangeable counsel,
has elected and chosen in Jesus Christ our Lord
by his pure goodness,
without any consideration of their works.

He is just
in leaving the others in their ruin and fall
into which they plunged themselves.

Article 17: The Recovery of Fallen Man

We believe that our good God,
by his marvelous wisdom and goodness,
seeing that man had plunged himself in this manner
into both physical and spiritual death
and made himself completely miserable,
set out to find him,
though man,
trembling all over,
was fleeing from him.

And he comforted him,

promising to give him his Son,
“born of a woman,”³¹
to crush the head of the serpent,³²
and to make him blessed.

³¹ Gal. 4:4

³² Gen. 3:15

Article 18: The Incarnation

So then we confess
that God fulfilled the promise
which he had made to the early fathers
by the mouth of his holy prophets
when he sent his only and eternal Son
into the world
at the time set by him.

The Son took the “form of a servant”
and was made in the “likeness of man,”³³
truly assuming a real human nature,
with all its weaknesses,
except for sin;
being conceived in the womb of
the blessed virgin Mary
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
without male participation.

And he not only assumed
human nature
as far as the body is
concerned
but also a real human soul,

in order that he might be a
real human being.
For since the soul had been
lost as well as the body
he had to assume them both
to save them both together.

Therefore we confess,
against the heresy of the Anabaptists

who deny that Christ assumed human
flesh from
his mother,

that he “shared the very flesh and blood of children”;³⁴
that he is “fruit of the loins of David” according to the flesh;³⁵
“born of the seed of David” according to the flesh;³⁶
“fruit of the womb of the virgin Mary”;³⁷
“born of a woman”;³⁸
“the seed of David”;³⁹
“a shoot from the root of Jesse”;⁴⁰
“the offspring of Judah,”⁴¹
having descended from the Jews according to the flesh;
“from the seed of Abraham”—
for he “assumed Abraham’s seed”
and was “made like his brothers
except for sin.”⁴²

In this way he is truly our Immanuel—
that is: “God with us.”⁴³

³³ Phil. 2:7

³⁴ Heb. 2:14

³⁵ Acts 2:30

³⁶ Rom. 1:3

³⁷ Luke 1:42

³⁸ Gal. 4:4

³⁹ 2 Tim. 2:8

⁴⁰ Rom. 15:12

⁴¹ Heb. 7:14

⁴² Heb. 2:17; 4:15

⁴³ Matt. 1:23

Article 19: The Two Natures of Christ

We believe that by being thus conceived
the person of the Son has been inseparably united
and joined together
with human nature,
in such a way that there are not two Sons of God,
nor two persons,
but two natures united in a single person,
with each nature retaining its own distinct properties.

Thus his divine nature has always remained uncreated,
without beginning of days or end of life,⁴⁴
filling heaven and earth.

His human nature has not lost its properties
but continues to have those of a creature—
it has a beginning of days;
it is of a finite nature

and retains all that belongs to a real body.
And even though he,
by his resurrection,
gave it immortality,
that nonetheless did not change
the reality of his human nature;
for our salvation and resurrection
depend also on the reality of his body.

But these two natures
are so united together in one person
that they are not even separated by his death.

So then,
what he committed to his Father when he died
was a real human spirit which left his body.
But meanwhile his divine nature remained
united with his human nature
even when he was lying in the grave;
and his deity never ceased to be in him,
just as it was in him when he was a little child,
though for a while it did not show itself as such.

These are the reasons why we confess him
to be true God and true man—
true God in order to conquer death
by his power,
and true man that he might die for us
in the weakness of his flesh.

Article 20: The Justice and Mercy of God in Christ

We believe that God—
who is perfectly merciful
and also very just—
sent his Son to assume the nature
in which the disobedience had been committed,
in order to bear in it the punishment of sin
by his most bitter passion and death.

So God made known his justice toward his Son,
who was charged with our sin,
and he poured out his goodness and mercy on us,
who are guilty and worthy of damnation,
giving to us his Son to die,
by a most perfect love, and raising him to life
for our justification,

in order that by him
we might have immortality
and eternal life.

Article 21: The Atonement

We believe
that Jesus Christ is a high priest forever
according to the order of Melchizedek—
made such by an oath—
and that he presented himself
in our name
before his Father,
to appease his wrath
with full satisfaction
by offering himself
on the tree of the cross
and pouring out his precious blood
for the cleansing of our sins,
as the prophets had predicted.

For it is written
that “the chastisement of our peace”
was placed on the Son of God
and that “we are healed by his wounds.”
He was “led to death as a lamb”;
he was “numbered among sinners”⁴⁵
and condemned as a criminal by Pontius Pilate,
though Pilate had declared
that he was innocent.
So he paid back
what he had not stolen,⁴⁶
and he suffered—
the “just for the unjust,”⁴⁷
in both his body and his soul—
in such a way that
when he senses the horrible punishment
required by our sins
his sweat became like “big drops of blood
falling on the ground.”⁴⁸
He cried, “My God, my God,
why have you abandoned me?”⁴⁹

And he endured all this
for the forgiveness of our sins.

Therefore we rightly say with Paul that

we “know nothing but Jesus and him crucified”;⁵⁰
we consider all things as “dung
for the excellence of the knowledge
of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵¹
We find all comforts in his wounds
and have no need to seek or invent any other means
to reconcile ourselves with God
than this one and only sacrifice,
once made,
which renders believers perfect
forever.

This is also why
the angel of God called him Jesus—
that is, “Savior”—
because he would save his people
from their sins.⁵²

⁴⁵ Isa. 53:4-12
⁴⁶ Ps. 69:4
⁴⁷ 1 Pet. 3:18
⁴⁸ Luke 22:44
⁴⁹ Matt. 27:46
⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 2:2
⁵¹ Phil. 3:8
⁵² Matt. 1:21

Article 22: The Righteousness of Faith

We believe that
for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery
the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith
that embraces Jesus Christ,
with all his merits,
and makes him its own,
and no longer looks for anything
apart from him.

For it must necessarily follow
that either all that is required for our salvation
is not in Christ or,
if all is in him,
then he who has Christ by faith
has his salvation entirely.

Therefore, to say that Christ is not enough
but that something else is needed as well
is a most enormous blasphemy against God—

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for it then would follow
that Jesus Christ is only half a Savior.
And therefore we justly say with Paul
that we are justified “by faith alone”
or by faith “apart from works.”⁵³

However,
we do not mean,
properly speaking,
that it is faith itself that justifies us—
for faith is only the instrument
by which we embrace Christ,
our righteousness.

But Jesus Christ is our righteousness
in making available to us all his merits
and all the holy works he has done
for us and in our place.
And faith is the instrument
that keeps us in communion with him
and with all his benefits.

When those benefits are made ours
they are more than enough to absolve us
of our sins.

Article 23: The Justification of Sinners

We believe
that our blessedness lies in the forgiveness of our sins
because of Jesus Christ,
and that in it our righteousness before God is contained,
as David and Paul teach us
when they declare that man blessed
to whom God grants righteousness
apart from works.⁵⁴

And the same apostle says
that we are justified “freely” or “by grace”
through redemption in Jesus Christ.⁵⁵
And therefore we cling to this foundation,
which is firm forever,
giving all glory to God,
humbling ourselves,
and recognizing ourselves as we are;
not claiming a thing for ourselves or our merits
and leaning and resting

on the sole obedience of Christ
crucified,
which is ours when we believe in him.

That is enough to cover all our sins
and to make us confident,
freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror
of God's approach,
without doing what our first father, Adam, did,
who trembled as he tried to cover himself
with fig leaves.

In fact,
if we had to appear before God relying—
no matter how little—
on ourselves or some other creature,
then, alas, we would be swallowed up.
Therefore everyone must say with David:
“Lord, do not enter into judgment with your servants,
for before you no living person shall be justified.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ps. 32:1; Rom. 4:6

⁵⁵ Rom. 3:24

⁵⁶ Ps. 143:2

Article 24: The Sanctification of Sinners

We believe that this true faith,
produced in man by the hearing of God's Word
and by the work of the Holy Spirit,
regenerates him and makes him a “new man,”⁵⁷
causing him to live the “new life”⁵⁸
and freeing him from the slavery of sin.

Therefore,
far from making people cold
toward living in a pious and holy way,
this justifying faith,
quite to the contrary,
so works within them that
apart from it
they will never do a thing out of love for God
but only out of love for themselves
and fear of being condemned.

So then, it is impossible
for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being,

seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith
but of what Scripture calls
“faith working through love,”⁵⁹
which leads a man to do by himself
the works that God has commanded
in his Word.

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.

So then, we do good works,
but not for merit—
for what would we merit?
Rather, we are indebted to God for the good works we do,
and not he to us,
since it is he who “works in us both to will and do
according to his good pleasure”⁶⁰—
thus keeping in mind what is written:
“When you have done all that is commanded you,
then you shall say, ‘We are unworthy servants;
we have done what it was our duty to do.’”⁶¹

Yet we do not wish to deny
that God rewards good works—
but it is by his grace
that he crowns his gifts.

Moreover,
although we do good works
we do not base our salvation on them;
for we cannot do any work
that is not defiled by our flesh
and also worthy of punishment.
And even if we could point to one,
memory of a single sin is enough
for God to reject that work.

So we would always be in doubt,
tossed back and forth

without any certainty,
and our poor consciences would be tormented constantly

if they did not rest on the merit
of the suffering and death of our Savior.

⁵⁷ 2 Cor. 5:17

⁵⁸ Rom. 6:4

⁵⁹ Gal. 5:6

⁶⁰ Phil. 2:13

⁶¹ Luke 17:10

Article 25: The Fulfillment of the Law

We believe
that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ended
with the coming of Christ,
and that all foreshadowings have come to an end,
so that the use of them ought to be abolished
among Christians.

Yet the truth and substance of these things
remain for us in Jesus Christ,
in whom they have been fulfilled.

Nevertheless,
we continue to use the witnesses
drawn from the law and prophets
to confirm us in the gospel
and to regulate our lives with full integrity
for the glory of God,
according to his will.

Article 26: The Intercession of Christ

We believe that we have no access to God
except through the one and only Mediator and Intercessor:
Jesus Christ the Righteous.⁶²

He therefore was made man,
uniting together the divine and human natures,
so that we human beings might have access to the divine
Majesty.
Otherwise we would have no access.

But this Mediator,
whom the Father has appointed between himself and us,
ought not terrify us by his greatness,
so that we have to look for another one,

according to our fancy.
For neither in heaven nor among the creatures on earth
is there anyone who loves us
more than Jesus Christ does.

Although he was “in the form of God,”
he nevertheless “emptied himself,”
taking the form of “a man” and “a servant” for us;⁶³
and he made himself “completely like his brothers.”⁶⁴

Suppose we had to find another intercessor.
Who would love us more than he who gave his life for us,
even though “we were his enemies”?⁶⁵
And suppose we had to find one who has prestige and power.
Who has as much of these as he who is seated
“at the right hand of the Father,”⁶⁶
and who has all power
“in heaven and on earth”?⁶⁷
And who will be heard more readily
than God’s own dearly beloved Son?

So then, sheer unbelief has led to the practice
of dishonoring the saints,
instead of honoring them.
That was something the saints never did nor asked for,
but which in keeping with their duty,
as appears from their writings,
they consistently refused.

We should not plead here
that we are unworthy—
for it is not a question of offering our prayers
on the basis of our own dignity
but only on the basis of the excellence and dignity
of Jesus Christ,
whose righteousness is ours
by faith.

Since the apostle for good reason
wants us to get rid of this foolish fear—
or rather, this unbelief—
he says to us that Jesus Christ
was “made like his brothers in all things,”
that he might be a high priest
who is merciful and faithful
to purify the sins of the people.⁶⁸
For since he suffered,
being tempted,

he is also able to help those
who are tempted.⁶⁹

And further,
to encourage us more
to approach him
he says, “Since we have a high priest,
Jesus the Son of God,
who has entered into heaven,
we maintain our confession.
For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to have compassion for our weaknesses,
but one who was tempted in all things,
just as we are,
except for sin.
Let us go then
with confidence
to the throne of grace
that we may obtain mercy
and find grace,
in order to be helped.”⁷⁰

The same apostle says that
we “have liberty to enter into the holy place
by the blood of Jesus.
Let us go, then, in the assurance
of faith....”⁷¹

Likewise,
“Christ’s priesthood is forever.
By this he is able to save completely
those who draw near to God through him
who always lives to intercede
for them.”⁷²

What more do we need?
For Christ himself declares:
“I am the way, the truth, and the life;
no one comes to my Father but by me.”⁷³
Why should we seek
another intercessor?

Since it has pleased God
to give us his Son as our Intercessor,
let us not leave him for another—
or rather seek, without ever finding.
For when God gave him to us

he knew well that we were sinners.

Therefore,
in following the command of Christ
we call on the heavenly Father
through Christ,
our only Mediator,
as we are taught by the Lord’s Prayer,
being assured that we shall obtain
all we ask of the Father
in his name.

62 1 John 2:1
63 Phil. 2:6-8
64 Heb. 2:17
65 Rom. 5:10
66 Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3
67 Matt. 28:18
68 Heb. 2:17
69 Heb. 2:18
70 Heb. 4:14-16
71 Heb. 10:19, 22
72 Heb. 7:24-25
73 John 14:6

Article 27: The Holy Catholic Church

We believe and confess
One single catholic or universal church—
a holy congregation and gathering
of true Christian believers,
awaiting their entire salvation in Jesus Christ
being washed by his blood,
an sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This church has existed from the beginning of the world and will last until the end,
as appears from the fact
that Christ is eternal King
who cannot be without subjects.

And this holy church is preserved by God
against the rage of the whole world,
even though for a time
it may appear very small
in the eyes of men—
as though it were snuffed out.

For example,

during the very dangerous time of Ahab
the Lord preserved for himself seven thousand men
who did not bend their knees to Baal.⁷⁴

And so this holy church
is not confined,
bound,
or limited to a certain place or certain persons.
But it is spread and dispersed
throughout the entire world,
though still joined and united
in heart and will,
in one and the same Spirit,
by the power of faith.

⁷⁴ 1 Kings 19:18

Article 28: The Obligations of Church Members

We believe that
since this holy assembly and congregation
is the gathering of those who are saved
and there is no salvation apart from it,
no one ought to withdraw from it,
content to be by himself,
regardless of his status or condition.

But all people are obliged
to join and unite with it,
keeping the unity of the church
by submitting to its instruction and discipline,
by bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ,

and by serving to build up one another,
according to the gifts God has given them
as members of each other
in the same body.

And to preserve this unity more effectively,
it is the duty of all believers,
according to God's Word,
to separate themselves
from those who do not belong to the church,
in order to join this assembly
wherever God has established it,
even if civil authorities and royal decrees forbid
and death and physical punishment result.

And so,
all who withdraw from the church
or do not join it
act contrary to God's ordinance.

Article 29: The Marks of the True Church

We believe that we ought to discern
diligently and very carefully,
by the Word of God,
what is the true church—
for all sects in the world today
claim for themselves the name of “the church.”

We are not speaking here of the company of hypocrites who are mixed among the
good in the church
and who nonetheless are not part of it,
even though they are physically there.
But we are speaking of distinguishing
the body and fellowship of the true church
from all sects that call themselves “the church.”

The true church can be recognized
if it has the following marks:

The church engages in the pure preaching
of the gospel;
it makes use of the pure administration of the sacraments
as Christ instituted them;
it practices church discipline
for correcting faults.

In short, it governs itself
according to the pure Word of God,
rejecting all things contrary to it
and holding Jesus Christ as the only Head.
By these marks one can be assured
of recognizing the true church—
and no one ought to be separated from it.

As for those who can belong to the church,
we can recognize them by the distinguishing marks of Christians:
namely by faith,
and by their fleeing from sin and pursuing righteousness,
once they have received the one and only Savior,
Jesus Christ.
They love the true God and their neighbors,

without turning to the right or left,
and they crucify the flesh and its works.

Though great weakness remains in them,
they fight against it
by the Spirit
all the days of their lives,
appealing constantly
to the blood, suffering, death, and obedience of the Lord
Jesus,
in whom they have forgiveness of their sins,
through faith in him.

As for the false church,
it assigns more authority to itself and its ordinances
than to the Word of God;
it does not want to subject itself
to the yoke of Christ;
it does not administer the sacraments
as Christ commanded in his Word;
it rather adds to them or subtracts from them
as it pleases;
it bases itself on men,
more than on Jesus Christ;
it persecutes those
who live holy lives according to the Word of God
and who rebuke it for its faults, greed, and idolatry.

These two churches
are easy to recognize
and thus to distinguish
from each other.

Article 30: The Government of the Church

We believe that this true church
ought to be governed according to the spiritual order
that our Lord has taught us in his Word.

There should be ministers or pastors
to preach the Word of God
and administer the sacraments.

There should also be elders and deacons,
along with the pastors,
to make up the council of the church.

By this means
true religion is preserved;

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true doctrine is able to take its course;
and evil men are corrected spiritually and held in check,
so that also the poor
and all the afflicted
may be helped and comforted
according to their need.

By this means
everything will be done well
and in good order
in the church,
when such men are elected
who are faithful
and are chosen according to the rule
that Paul gave to Timothy.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ 1 Tim. 3

Article 31: The Officers of the Church

We believe that
ministers of the Word of God, elders, and deacons
ought to be chosen to their offices
by a legitimate election of the church,
with prayer in the name of the Lord,
and in good order,
as the Word of God teaches.

So everyone must be careful
not to push one's self forward improperly,
but he must for God's call,
so that he may be assured of his calling
and be certain and sure that he is
chosen by the Lord.

As for the ministers of the Word,
they all have the same power and authority,
no matter where they may be,
since they are all servants of Jesus Christ,
the only universal bishop,
and the only head of the church.

Moreover,
to keep God's holy order
from being violated or despised,
we say that everyone ought,
as much as possible,

to hold the ministers of the Word and elders of the church
in special esteem,
because of the work they do,
and be at peace with them,
without grumbling, quarreling, or fighting.

Article 32: The Order and Discipline of the Church

We also believe that
although it is useful and good
for those who govern the churches
to establish and set up
a certain order among themselves
for maintaining the body of the church,
they ought always to guard against deviating
from what Christ,
our only Master,
has ordained
for us.

Therefore we reject all human innovations
and all laws imposed on us,
in our worship of God,
which bind and force our consciences
in any way.

So we accept only what is proper
to maintain harmony and unity
and to keep all in obedience
to God.

To that end excommunication,
with all it involves,
according to the Word of God,
is required.

Article 33: The Sacraments

We believe that our good God,
mindful of our crudeness and weakness,
has ordained sacraments for us
to seal his promises in us,
to pledge his good will and grace toward us,
and also to nourish and sustain our faith.

He has added these to the Word of the gospel
to represent better to our external senses

both what he enables us to understand by his Word
and what he does inwardly in our hearts,
confirming in us
the salvation he imparts to us.

For they are visible signs and seals
of something internal and invisible,
by means of which God works in us
through the power of the Holy Spirit.
So they are not empty and hollow signs
to fool and deceive us,
for their truth is Jesus Christ,
without whom they would be nothing.

Moreover,
we are satisfied with the number of sacraments
that Christ our Master has ordained for us.
There are only two:
the sacrament of baptism
and the Holy Supper of Jesus Christ.

Article 34: The Sacrament of Baptism

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ,
in whom the law is fulfilled,
has by his shed blood
put an end to every other shedding of blood,
which anyone might do or wish to do
in order to atone or satisfy for sins.

Having abolished circumcision,
which was done with blood,
he established in its place
the sacrament of baptism.
By it we are received into God's church
and set apart from all other people and alien religions,
that we may be dedicated entirely to him,
bearing his mark and sign.
It also witnesses to us
that he will be our God forever,
since he is our gracious Father.

Therefore he has commanded
that all those who belong to him
be baptized with pure water
“in the name of the Father,
and the Son,

and the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁶

In this way he signifies to us
that just as water washes away the dirt of the body
when it is poured on us
and also is seen on the body of the baptized
when it is sprinkled on him,
so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally,
in the soul,
by the Holy Spirit.

It washes and cleanses it from its sins
and transforms us from being the children of wrath
into the children of God.

This does not happen by the physical water
but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of
God,
who is our Red Sea,
through which we must pass
to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh,
who is the devil,
and to enter the spiritual land
of Canaan.

So ministers,
as far as their work is concerned,
give us the sacrament and what is visible,
but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—
namely the invisible gifts and graces;
washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls
of all filth and unrighteousness;
renewing our hearts and filling them
with all comfort;
giving us true assurance
of his fatherly goodness;
clothing us with the “new man” and stripping off the
“old,”
with all its works.

For this reason we believe that
anyone who aspires to reach eternal life
ought to be baptized only once
without ever repeating it—
for we cannot be born twice.
Yet this baptism is profitable
not only when the water is on us
and when we receive it
but throughout our

entire lives.

For that reason we detest the error of the Anabaptists
who are not content with a single baptism
once received
and also condemn the baptism
of the children of believers.
We believe our children ought to be baptized
and sealed with the sign of the covenant,
as little children were circumcised in Israel
on the basis of the same promises
made to our children.

And truly,
Christ has shed his blood no less
for washing the little children of believers
than he did for adults.

Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament
of what Christ has done for them,
just as the Lord commanded in the law that
by offering a lamb for them
the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ
would be granted them
shortly after their birth.
This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore,
baptism does for our children
what circumcision did for the Jewish people.
That is why Paul calls baptism
the “circumcision of Christ.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Matt. 28:19

⁷⁷ Col. 2:11

Article 35: The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper

We believe and confess
that our Savior Jesus Christ
has ordained and instituted the sacrament of the Holy Supper to nourish and sustain those
who are already born again and ingrafted
into his family:
his church.

Now those who are born again have two lives in them.
The one is physical and temporal—

they have it from the moment of their first birth,
and it is common to all.

The other is spiritual and heavenly,
and is given them in their second birth;
it comes through the Word of the gospel
in the communion of the body of Christ;
and this life is common to God's elect only.

Thus, to support the physical and earthly life
God has prescribed for us
an appropriate earthly and material bread,
which is as common to all
as life itself also is.

But to maintain the spiritual and heavenly life
that belongs to believers
he has sent a living bread
that came down from heaven:
namely Jesus Christ,
who nourishes and maintains
the spiritual life of believers
when eaten—
that is, when appropriated
and received spiritually
by faith.

To represent to us
this spiritual and heavenly bread
Christ has instituted
an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body
and wine as the sacrament of his blood.
He did this to testify to us that
just as truly as we take and hold the sacraments in our
hands
and eat and drink it in our mouths,
by which our life is then sustained,
so truly we receive into our souls,
for our spiritual life,
the true body and true blood of Christ,
our only Savior.
We receive these by faith,
which is the hand and mouth of our souls.

Now it is certain
that Jesus Christ did not prescribe
his sacraments for us in vain,
since he works in us all he represents
by these holy signs,

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although the manner in which he does it
goes beyond our understanding
and is uncomprehensible to us,
just as the operation of God's Spirit
is hidden and incomprehensible.

Yet we do not go wrong when we say
that what is eaten is Christ's own natural body
and what is drunk is his own blood—
but the manner in which we eat it
is not by the mouth but by the Spirit,
through faith.

In that way Jesus Christ remains always seated
at the right hand of God the Father
in heaven—
but he never refrains on that account
to communicate himself to us
through faith.

This banquet is a spiritual table
at which Christ communicates himself to us
with all his benefits.
At that table he makes us enjoy himself
as much as the merits of his suffering and death,
as he nourishes, strengthens, and comforts
our poor, desolate souls
by the eating of his flesh,
and relieves and renews them
by the drinking of his blood.

Moreover,
though the sacraments and thing signified are joined together, not all receive both of them.
The wicked person certainly takes the sacrament,
to his condemnation,
but does not receive the truth of the sacrament,
just as Judas and Simon the Sorcerer both indeed
received the sacrament,
but not Christ,
who was signified by it.
He is communicated only to believers.

Finally,
with humility and reverence
we receive the holy sacrament
in the gathering of God's people,
as we engage together,

with thanksgiving,
in a holy remembrance
of the death of Christ our Savior,
and as we thus confess
our faith and Christian religion.
Therefore no one should come to this table
without examining himself carefully,
lest "by eating this bread
and drinking this cup
he eat and drink to his own judgment."⁷⁸

In short,
by the use of this holy sacrament
we are moved to a fervent love
of God and our neighbors.

Therefore we reject
as desecrations of the sacraments
all the muddled ideas and damnable inventions
that men have added and mixed in with them.

And we say that we should be content with the procedure
that Christ and the apostles have taught us
and speak of these things
as they have spoken of them.

⁷⁸ 1 Cor. 11:27

Article 36: The Civil Government

We believe that
because of the depravity of the human race
our good God has ordained kings, princes, and civil
officers.
He wants the world to be governed by laws and policies
so that human lawlessness may be restrained
and that everything may be conducted in good order
among human beings.

For that purpose he has placed the sword
in the hands of the government,
to punish evil people
and protect the good.

And being called in this manner
to contribute to the advancement of a society
that is pleasing to God,

the civil rulers have the task,
subject to God's law,
of removing every obstacle
to the preaching of the gospel
and to every aspect of divine worship.

They should do this
while completely refraining from every tendency
toward exercising absolute authority,
and while functioning in the sphere entrusted to them,
with the means belonging to them.

They should do it in order that
the Word of God may have free course;
the kingdom of Jesus Christ may make progress;
and every anti-Christian power may be resisted.*

Moreover everyone,
regardless of status, condition, or rank,
must be subject to the government,
and pay taxes,
and hold its representatives in honor and respect,
and obey them in all things that are not in conflict
with God's Word,
praying for them
that the Lord may be willing to lead them
in all their ways
and that we may live a peaceful and quiet life
in all piety and decency.

And on this matter we denounce the Anabaptists, other anarchists,
and in general all those who want
to reject the authorities and civil officers
and to subvert justice
by introducing common ownership of goods
and corrupting the moral order
that God has established among human beings.

* Various Reformed Synods in Europe and North America have substituted the above statement, which they judged unbiblical, for the following: And the government's task is not limited to caring or and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, with a view to removing and destroying all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promoting the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and to furthering the preaching of the gospel everywhere; to the end that God may be honored and served by everyone, as he requires in his word.

Article 37: The Last Judgment

Finally we believe,
according to God's Word,
that when the time appointed by the Lord is come
(which is unknown to all creatures)
and the number of the elect is complete,
our Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven,
bodily and visibly,
as he ascended,
with great glory and majesty,
to declare himself the judge
of the living and the dead.
He will burn this old world,
in fire and flame,
in order to cleanse it.

Then all human creatures will appear in person
before that great judge—
men, women, and children,
who have lived from the beginning until the end
of the world.

They will be summoned there
by the voice of the archangel
and by the sound of the divine trumpet.⁷⁹

For all those who died before that time
will be raised from the earth,
their spirits being joined and united
with their own bodies
in which they lived.
And as for those who are still alive,
they will not die like the others
but will be changed “in the twinkling of an eye”
from “corruptible to incorruptible.”⁸⁰

Then “the books” (that is, the consciences) will be opened,
and the dead will be judged
according to the things they did in the world,⁸¹
whether good or evil.

Indeed, all people will give account
of all the idle words they have spoken,⁸²
which the world regards
as only playing games.
And then the secrets and hypocrisies of men
will be publicly uncovered
in the sight of all.

Therefore,
with good reason
the thought of this judgment
is horrible and dreadful
to wicked and evil people.
But it is very pleasant
and a great comfort
to the righteous and elect,
since their total redemption
will then be accomplished.
They will then receive the fruits of their labor
and of the trouble they have suffered;
their innocence will be openly recognized by all;
and they will see the terrible vengeance
that God will bring on the evil ones
who tyrannized, oppressed, and tormented them
in this world.

The evil ones will be convicted
by the witness of their own consciences,
and shall be made immortal—
but only to be tormented
in the everlasting fire
prepared for the devil and his angels.⁸³

In contrast,
the faithful and elect will be crowned
with glory and honor.
The Son of God will “confess their names”⁸⁴
before God his Father and the holy and elect angels;
all tears will be “wiped from their eyes”;⁸⁵
and their cause—
at present condemned as heretical and evil
by many judges and civil officers—
will be acknowledged as the “cause of the Son of God.”

And as a gracious reward
the Lord will make them possess a glory
such as the heart of man

could never imagine.

So we look forward to that great day with longing
in order to enjoy fully
the promises of God in Christ Jesus,
our Lord.

⁷⁹ 1 Thess. 4:16

⁸⁰ 1 Cor. 15:51-53

⁸¹ Rev. 20:12

⁸² Matt. 12:36

⁸³ Matt. 25:14

⁸⁴ Matt. 10:32

⁸⁵ Rev. 7:17

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Lord's Day 1

1 Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own,¹
but belong—
body and soul,
in life and in death—²
to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.³
He has fully paid for all my sins with his
precious blood,⁴
and has set me free from the tyranny of the
devil.⁵
He also watches over me in such a way⁶
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;⁷
in fact, all things must work together for my
salvation.⁸
Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
assures me of eternal life⁹
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and
ready
from now on to live for him.¹⁰

¹ 1 Cor. 6:19-20

² Rom. 14:7-9

³ 1 Cor. 3:23; Titus 2:14

⁴ 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:2

⁵ John 8:34-36; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11

⁶ John 6:39-40; 10:27-30; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5

⁷ Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18

⁸ Rom. 8:28

⁹ Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14

¹⁰ Rom. 8:1-17

2 Q. What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three things:
first, how great my sin and misery are;¹
second, how I am set free from all my sins
and misery;²
third, how I am to thank God for such
deliverance.³

Lord's Day 1

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precious blood,⁴
and has delivered me from the tyranny of
the devil.⁵
He also watches over me in such a way⁶
that not a hair can fall from my head
without the will of my Father in heaven;⁷
in fact, all things must work together for my
salvation.⁸
Because I belong to him,
Christ, by his Holy Spirit,
also assures me of eternal life⁹
and makes me wholeheartedly willing and
ready
from now on to live for him.¹⁰

¹ 1 Cor. 6:19-20

² Rom. 14:7-9

³ 1 Cor. 3:23; Titus 2:14

⁴ 1 Pet. 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7-9; 2:2

⁵ John 8:34-36; Heb. 2:14-15; 1 John 3:1-11

⁶ John 6:39-40; 10:27-30; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:5

⁷ Matt. 10:29-31; Luke 21:16-18

⁸ Rom. 8:28

⁹ Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14

¹⁰ Rom. 8:1-17

2 Q. How many things must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?

A. Three:
first, how great my sin and misery are;¹
second, how I am delivered from all my
sins and misery;²
third, how I am to thank God for such
deliverance.³

¹ Rom. 3:9-10; 1 John 1:10

² John 17:3; Acts 4:12; 10:43

³ Matt. 5:16; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 5:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:9-

¹ Rom. 3:9-10; 1 John 1:10

² John 17:3; Acts 4:12; 10:43

³ Matt. 5:16; Rom. 6:13; Eph. 5:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:9-

PART I: MISERY

Lord’s Day 2

3 Q. How do you come to know your misery?

A. The law of God tells me.¹

¹ Rom. 3:20; 7:7-25

4 Q. What does God’s law require of us?

A. Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22 –

“You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart
and with all your soul
and with all your mind,
and with all your strength.”¹
This is the greatest and first commandment.
“And a second is like it:
‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’²
“On these two commandments depend all
the law and the Prophets.”

¹ Deut. 6:5

² Lev. 19:18

5 Q. Can you live up to all this perfectly?

A. No.¹

I have a natural tendency
to hate God and my neighbor.²

¹ Rom. 3:9-20, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10

² Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:23-24; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3

Lord’s Day 3

6 Q. Did God create man so wicked and perverse?

A. No.

God created man good¹ and in his own image,²
that is, in true righteousness and holiness,³
so that he might

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‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’²
“On these two commandments hang all the
law and the Prophets.”

¹ Deut. 6:5

² Lev. 19:18

5 Q. Can you live up to all this perfectly?

A. No.¹

I am inclined by nature
to hate God and my neighbor.²

¹ Rom. 3:9-20, 23; 1 John 1:8, 10

² Gen. 6:5; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:23-24; 8:7; Eph. 2:1-3; Titus 3:3

Lord’s Day 3

6 Q. Did God create man so wicked and perverse?

A. No.

God created man good¹ and in his own image,²
that is, in true righteousness and holiness,³
so that he might

truly know God his creator,⁴
love him with all his heart,
and live with God in eternal happiness,
for his praise and glory.

¹ [Gen. 1:31](#)

² [Gen. 1:26-27](#)

³ [Eph. 4:24](#)

⁴ [Col. 3:10](#)

⁵ [Ps. 8](#)

7 Q. Then where does man’s corrupt nature come from?

- A.** From the fall and disobedience of our first parents,
Adam and Eve, in Paradise.¹
This fall has so poisoned our nature²
that we are born sinners – corrupt from conception on.

¹ [Gen. 3](#)

² [Rom. 5:12, 18-19](#)

³ [Ps. 51:5](#)

8 Q. But are we so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil?

- A.** Yes,¹ unless we are born again by the Spirit of God.²

¹ [Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Isa. 53:6](#)

² [John 3:3-5](#)

Lord’s Day 4

9 Q. But doesn’t God do man an injustice by requiring in his law what man is unable to do?

- A.** No, God created man with the ability to keep the law.¹
Man, however, tempted by the devil,²
in reckless disobedience,³
robbed himself and all his descendants of these gifts.⁴

¹ [Gen. 1:31; Eph. 4:24](#)

² [Gen. 3:13; John 8:44](#)

³ [Gen. 3:6](#)

⁴ [Rom. 5:12, 18, 19](#)

truly know God his creator,⁴
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and live with God in eternal happiness,
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7 Q. Then where does man’s corrupt nature come from?

- A.** From the fall and disobedience of our first parents,
Adam and Eve, in Paradise.¹
This fall has so poisoned our nature²
that we are all conceived and born in sin.³

¹ [Gen. 3](#)

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¹ [Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Job 14:4; Isa. 53:6](#)

² [John 3:3-5](#)

Lord’s Day 4

9 Q. But doesn’t God do man an injustice by requiring in his law what man is unable to do?

- A.** No, God created man with the ability to keep the law.¹
Man, however, at the instigation of the devil,
in willful disobedience,³
robbed himself and all his descendants of these gifts.⁴

¹ [Gen. 1:31; Eph. 4:24](#)

² [Gen. 3:13; John 8:44](#)

³ [Gen. 3:6](#)

⁴ [Rom. 5:12, 18, 19](#)

- 10 Q. Will God permit such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?**
- A.** Certainly not.
He is terribly angry
about the sin we are born with
as well as the sins we personally commit.
As a just judge he punishes them now and in eternity.

He has declared:

“Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.”

¹ Ex. 34:7; Ps. 5:4-6; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Heb. 9:27

² Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26

- 11 Q. But isn’t God also merciful?**

- A.** God is certainly merciful,¹
but he is also just.²
His justice demands
that sin, committed against his supreme majesty,
be punished with the supreme penalty—
eternal punishment of body and soul.³

¹ Ex. 34:6-7; Ps. 103:8-9

² Ex. 34:7; Deut. 7:9-11; Ps. 5:4-6; Heb. 10:30-31

³ Matt. 25:35-46

PART II: Deliverance

Lord’s Day 5

- 12 Q. According to God’s righteous judgment we deserve punishment both in this world and forever after: how then can we escape this punishment and return to God’s favor?**

- A.** God requires that his justice be satisfied.¹
Therefore the claims of this justice must be paid in full,
either by ourselves or by another.²

¹ Ex. 23:7; Rom. 2:1-11

² Isa. 53:11; Rom. 8:3-4

- 10 Q. Will God permit such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?**

- A.** Certainly not.
He is terribly angry
with the sin we are born with
as well as our actual sins.
God will punish them by a just judgment both now and in eternity,¹
having declared:

“Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey
all the things written in the book of the law.”²

¹ Ex. 34:7; Ps. 5:4-6; Nah. 1:2; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6; Heb. 9:27

² Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26

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either by ourselves or by another.²

¹ Ex. 23:7; Rom. 2:1-11

² Isa. 53:11; Rom. 8:3-4

- 13 Q. Can we pay this debt ourselves?**
A. Certainly not.
Actually, we increase our guilt every day.¹

¹ Matt. 6:12; Rom. 2:4-5

- 14 Q. Can another creature—any at all—pay this debt for us?**

- A.** No.
To begin with,
God will not punish another creature for man’s guilt.¹
Besides,
no mere creature can bear the weight of God’s eternal anger against sin and release others from it.²

¹ Ezek. 18:4, 20; Heb. 2:14-18

² Ps. 49:7-9; 130:3

- 15 Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer should we look for then?**
A. He must be truly human and truly righteous,² yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, he must also be true God.³

¹ Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:17

² Isa. 53:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26

³ Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Jer. 23:6; John 1:1

Lord’s Day 6

- 16 Q. Why must he be truly human and truly righteous?**

- A.** God’s justice demands it:
man has sinned,
man must pay for his sin;¹
but a sinner can not pay for others.²

¹ Rom. 5:12, 15; 1 Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:14-16

² Heb. 7:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:18

- 17 Q. Why must he also be true God?**

- A.** So that,
by the power of his divinity,
he might bear the weight of God’s anger in his humanity and earn for us and restore to us righteousness and life.¹

¹ Isa. 53; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21

- 13 Q. Can we make this payment ourselves?**
A. Certainly not.
Actually, we increase our debt every day.¹

¹ Matt. 6:12; Rom. 2:4-5

- 14 Q. Can another creature—any at all—pay this debt for us?**

- A.** No.
To begin with,
God will not punish any other creature for what a human is guilty of.¹
Furthermore,
no mere creature can bear the weight of God’s eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.²

¹ Ezek. 18:4, 20; Heb. 2:14-18

² Ps. 49:7-9; 130:3

- 15 Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer should we look for then?**

- A.** One who is a true¹ and righteous² man, yet more powerful than all creatures, that is, one who is also true God.³

¹ Rom. 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:17

² Isa. 53:9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26

³ Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Jer. 23:6; John 1:1

Lord’s Day 6

- 16 Q. Why must the mediator be a true and righteous man?**

- A.** Because God’s justice requires that human nature, which has sinned, must pay for its sin;¹
but a sinner could never pay for others.²

¹ Rom. 5:12, 15; 1 Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:14-16

² Heb. 7:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:18

- 17 Q. Why must he also be true God?**

- A.** So that,
by the power of his divinity,
he might bear in his humanity the weight of God’s wrath,
and earn for us
and restore to us
righteousness and life.¹

¹ Isa. 53; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21

**18 Q. And who is this mediator—
true God and at the same time
a truly human and truly righteous?**

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ,¹
who was given to us
to set us completely free
and to make us right with God.²

19 Q. How do you come to know this?

A. The holy gospel tells me.
God himself began to reveal the gospel
already in Paradise;¹
later, he proclaimed it
by the holy patriarchs² and prophets,³
and portrayed it
by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of
the law;⁴
finally he fulfilled it
through his own dear Son.⁵

¹ Gen. 3:15

² Gen. 22:18; 49:10

³ Isa. 53; Jer. 23:5-6; Mic. 7:18-20; Acts 10:43; Heb. 1:1-2

⁴ Lev. 1-7; John 5:46; Heb. 10:1-10

⁵ Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:4-5; Col. 2:17

**18 Q. Then who is this mediator—
true God and at the same time
a true and righteous man?**

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ,¹
who was given to us
for our complete deliverance
and righteousness.²

19 Q. How do you come to know this?

A. The holy gospel tells me.
God himself began to reveal the gospel
already in Paradise;¹
later, he proclaimed it
by the holy patriarchs² and prophets³
and foreshadowed it
by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of
the law;⁴
and finally he fulfilled it
through his own beloved Son.⁵

¹ Gen. 3:15

² Gen. 22:18; 49:10

³ Isa. 53; Jer. 23:5-6; Mic. 7:18-20; Acts 10:43; Heb. 1:1-2

⁴ Lev. 1-7; John 5:46; Heb. 10:1-10

⁵ Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:4-5; Col. 2:17

Lord's Day 7

**20 Q. Are all men saved through Christ just as
were lost through Adam?**

A. No.
Only those are saved
who by true faith
are grafted into Christ
and accept all his blessings.¹

¹ Matt. 7:14; John 3:16, 18, 36; Rom. 11:16-21

21 Q. What is true faith?

A. True faith is
not only a knowledge and conviction
that everything God reveals in his Word is
true;¹
it is also a deep-rooted assurance,²
created in me by the Holy Spirit through the
gospel that,
out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ,

Lord's Day 7

**20 Q. Are all people then saved through Christ
just as they were lost through Adam?**

A. No.
Only those are saved
who through true faith
are grafted into Christ
and accept all his benefits.¹

¹ Matt. 7:14; John 3:16, 18, 36; Rom. 11:16-21

21 Q. What is true faith?

A. True faith is
not only a sure knowledge by which I hold
as true all that God has revealed to us in his
Word;¹
it is also a wholehearted trust,²
which the Holy Spirit works in me³ by the
gospel,⁴
that God has freely granted, not only to others
but to me also.⁵

not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven,
have been made forever right with God,
and have been granted salvation.

¹ John 17:3, 17; Heb. 11:1-3; James 2:19

² Rom. 4:18-21; 5:1; 10:10; Heb. 4:14-16

³ Matt. 16:15-17; John 3:5; Acts 16:14

⁴ Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21

⁵ Gal. 2:20

⁶ Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:10

⁷ Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10

forgiveness of sins,
eternal righteousness,
and salvation.⁶

These gifts are purely of grace,
only because of Christ's merit

¹ John 17:3, 17; Heb. 11:1-3; James 2:19

² Rom. 4:18-21; 5:1; 10:10; Heb. 4:14-16

³ Matt. 16:15-17; John 3:5; Acts 16:14

⁴ Rom. 1:16; 10:17; 1 Cor. 1:21

⁵ Gal. 2:20

⁶ Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:10

⁷ Rom. 3:21-26; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-10

22 Q. What then must a Christian believe?

- A.** Everything God promises us in the gospel.¹
That gospel is summarized for us
In the articles of our Christian faith –
a creed beyond doubt,
And confessed throughout the world.

¹ Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:30-31

22 Q. What then must a Christian believe?

- A.** All that is promised us in the gospel,¹
a summary of which is taught us in the
articles of our catholic and undoubted
Christian faith.

¹ Matt. 28:18-20; John 20:30-31

23 Q. What are these articles?

- A.** I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son,
our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary;
suffered under Pontius Pilate;
was crucified, dead, and buried;
he descended into hell;
the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty;
from thence he shall come
to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit;
I believe a holy catholic church, the
communion of the saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.

23 Q. What are these articles?

- A.** I believe in God, the Father, Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten
Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
born of the virgin Mary;
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, dead, and buried;
he descended into hell; the third day he rose
again from the dead;
he ascended to heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty; from there he will come
to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Lord's Day 8

24 Q. How are these articles divided?

- A. Into three parts:
God the Father and our creation;
God the Son and our deliverance;
and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

25 Q. Since there is but one God,¹ why do you speak of three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

- A. Because that is how God has revealed himself in his Word:² these three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God.

¹ Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6

² Matt. 3:16-17; 28:18-19; Luke 4:18 (Isa. 61:1); John 14:26; 15:26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; Tit. 3:5-6

Lord's Day 9

26 Q. What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth"?

- A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who out of nothing created heaven and earth
and everything in them,¹
who still upholds and rules them
by his eternal counsel and providence,²
is my God and Father
because of Christ the Son.³

I trust him so much that I do not doubt
he will provide
whatever I need
for body and soul,⁴
and will turn to my good
whatever adversity he sends upon me
in this sad world.⁵

He is able to do this because he is almighty God;⁶

Lord's Day 8

24 Q. How are these articles divided?

- A. Into three parts:
God the Father and our creation;
God the Son and our deliverance;
and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification.

25 Q. Since there is only one divine being,¹ why do you speak of three: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

- A. Because that is how God has revealed himself in his Word:² these three distinct persons are one, true, eternal God.

¹ Deut. 6:4; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6

² Matt. 3:16-17; 28:18-19; Luke 4:18 (Isa. 61:1); John 14:26; 15:26; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 4:6; Tit. 3:5-6

Lord's Day 9

26 Q. What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth"?

- A. That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who out of nothing created heaven and earth
and everything in them,¹
who still upholds and rules them
by his eternal counsel and providence,²
is my God and Father
for the sake of Christ the Son.³

I trust God so much that I do not doubt
he will provide
whatever I need
for body and soul,⁴
and will turn to my good
whatever adversity he sends upon me
in this vale of tears.⁵ [

He is able to do this because he is almighty God;⁶

he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.⁷

¹ Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24; Acts 4:24; 14:15

² Ps. 104; Matt. 6:30; 10:29; Eph. 1:11

Lord's Day 10

27 Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

- A. Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God¹ by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures,² and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty—³ all things, in fact, come to us not by chance⁴ but by his fatherly hand.⁵

¹ Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28

² Heb. 1:3

³ Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17/a>; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2

⁴ Prov. 16:33

⁵ Matt. 10:29

28 Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

- A. We can be patient when things go against us,¹ Thankful when things go well,² and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that nothing will separate us from his love.³ All creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.⁴

he desires to do this because he is a faithful Father.⁷

¹ Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24; Acts 4:24; 14:15

² Ps. 104; Matt. 6:30; 10:29; Eph. 1:11

Lord's Day 10

27 Q. What do you understand by the providence of God?

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¹ Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28

² Heb. 1:3

³ Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17/a>; John 9:3; Prov. 22:2

⁴ Prov. 16:33

⁵ Matt. 10:29

28 Q. How does the knowledge of God's creation and providence help us?

- A. We can be patient in adversity,¹ thankful in prosperity,² and for the future we can have good confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature will separate us from his love.³ For all creatures are so completely in his hand that without his will they can neither move nor be moved.⁴

¹ Job 1:21-22; James 1:3

² Deut. 8:10; 1 Thess. 5:18

³ Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38-39

⁴ Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28

Lord's Day 11

29 Q. Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning "savior"?

- A. Because he saves us from our sins;¹
Salvation cannot be found in anyone else;
it is futile to look for salvation elsewhere.²

¹ Matt. 1:21; Heb. 7:25

² Isa. 43:11; John 15:5; Acts 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:5

30 Q. Do those who look for their salvation and security in saints, in themselves, or elsewhere really believe in the only savior Jesus?

- A. No.
Although they boast of being his,
by their deeds they deny
the only savior, Jesus.¹
Either Jesus is not a perfect savior,
or those who in true faith accept this savior
have in him all they need for their salvation.²

¹ 1 Cor. 1:12-13; Gal. 5:4

² Col. 1:19-20; 2:10; 1 John 1:7

Lord's Day 12

31 Q. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"?

- A. Because he has been ordained by God the Father
and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit¹
to be
our chief prophet and teacher²
who perfectly reveals to us
the secret counsel and will of God for our
deliverance;³
our only high priest⁴
who has set us free by the one sacrifice
of his body,⁵

¹ Job 1:21-22; James 1:3

² Deut. 8:10; 1 Thess. 5:18

³ Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38-39

⁴ Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28

Lord's Day 11

29 Q. Why is the Son of God called "Jesus," meaning "savior"?

- A. Because he saves us from our sins;¹
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² Isa. 43:11; John 15:5; Acts 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 2:5

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Lord's Day 12

31 Q. Why is he called "Christ," meaning "anointed"?

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and has been anointed with the Holy Spirit¹
to be
our chief prophet and teacher²
who fully reveals to us
the secret counsel and will of God
concerning our deliverance;³
our only high priest⁴
who has delivered us by the one sacrifice
of his body,⁵

and who continually pleads our cause
with the Father;⁶
and our eternal king⁷
who governs us by his Word and Spirit,
and who guards us and keeps us
in the freedom he has won for us.⁸

¹ [Luke 3:21-22; 4:14-19 \(Isa. 61:1\); Heb. 1:9 \(Ps. 45:7\)](#)

² [Acts 3:22 \(Deut. 18:15\)](#)

³ [John 1:18; 15:15](#)

⁴ [Heb. 7:17 \(Ps. 110:4\)](#)

⁵ [Heb. 9:12; 10:11-14](#)

⁶ [Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24](#)

⁷ [Matt. 21:5 \(Zech. 9:9\)](#)

⁸ [Matt. 28:18-20; John 10:28; Rev. 12:10-11](#)

32 Q. But why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ¹
and so I share in his anointing.²

I am anointed
to confess his name,³
to present myself to him as a living
sacrifice of thanks,⁴
to strive with good conscience against sin
and the devil in this life,⁵
and afterward to reign with Christ
over all creation
for eternity.⁶

¹ [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#)

² [Acts 2:17 \(Joel 2:28\); 1 John 2:27](#)

³ [Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 13:15](#)

⁴ [Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9](#)

⁵ [Gal. 5:16-17; Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 1:18-19](#)

⁶ [Matt. 25:34; 2 Tim. 2:12](#)

Lord's Day 13

33 Q. Why is he called God's "only begotten Son" when we also are God's children?

A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God.¹
We, however, are adopted children of God—
adopted by grace through Christ.

¹ [John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Heb. 1](#)

² [John 1:12; Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5-6](#)

and who continually intercedes for us
before the Father;⁶
and our eternal king⁷
who governs us by his Word and Spirit,
and who guards us and keeps us
in the deliverance he has won for us.⁸

¹ [Luke 3:21-22; 4:14-19 \(Isa. 61:1\); Heb. 1:9 \(Ps. 45:7\)](#)

² [Acts 3:22 \(Deut. 18:15\)](#)

³ [John 1:18; 15:15](#)

⁴ [Heb. 7:17 \(Ps. 110:4\)](#)

⁵ [Heb. 9:12; 10:11-14](#)

⁶ [Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24](#)

⁷ [Matt. 21:5 \(Zech. 9:9\)](#)

⁸ [Matt. 28:18-20; John 10:28; Rev. 12:10-11](#)

32 Q. But why are you called a Christian?

A. Because by faith I am a member of Christ¹
and so I share in his anointing.²

I am anointed
to confess his name,³
to present myself to him as a living sacrifice
of thanks,⁴
to strive with a free conscience against sin
and the devil
in this life,⁵
and afterward to reign with Christ
over all creation
for eternity.⁶

¹ [1 Cor. 12:12-27](#)

² [Acts 2:17 \(Joel 2:28\); 1 John 2:27](#)

³ [Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 13:15](#)

⁴ [Rom. 12:1; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9](#)

⁵ [Gal. 5:16-17; Eph. 6:11; 1 Tim. 1:18-19](#)

⁶ [Matt. 25:34; 2 Tim. 2:12](#)

Lord's Day 13

33 Q. Why is he called God's "only begotten Son" when we also are God's children?

A. Because Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God.¹
We, however, are adopted children of God—
adopted by grace for the sake of Christ.²

¹ [John 1:1-3, 14, 18; Heb. 1](#)

² [John 1:12; Rom. 8:14-17; Eph. 1:5-6](#)

34 Q. Why do you call him “our Lord”?

- A. Because—
not with gold or silver,
but with his precious blood—¹
he has set us free
from sin and from the tyranny of the devil,²
and has bought us, body and soul, to be his
very own.³

¹ 1 Pet. 1:18-19

² Col. 1:13-14; Heb. 2:14-15

³ 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Tim. 2:5-6

34 Q. Why do you call him “our Lord”?

- A. Because—
not with gold or silver,
but with his precious blood—¹
he has delivered and purchased us body and
soul
from sin and from the tyranny of the devil,²
to be his very own.³

¹ 1 Pet. 1:18-19

² Col. 1:13-14; Heb. 2:14-15

³ 1 Cor. 6:20; 1 Tim. 2:5-6

Lord’s Day 14

**35 Q. What does it mean that he
“was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary”?**

- A. That the eternal Son of God,
who is and remains
true and eternal God,¹
took to himself,
through the working of the Holy Spirit,²
from the flesh and blood of the virgin
Mary,³
a truly human nature
so that he might become David’s true
descendant,⁴
in all things like us his brothers.⁵
except for sin.⁶

¹ John 1:1; 10:30-36; Acts 13:33 (Ps. 2:7); Col. 1:15-17; 1 John 5:20

² Luke 1:35

³ Matt. 1:18-23; John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14

⁴ 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 132:11; Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3

⁵ Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:17

⁶ Heb. 4:15; 7:26-27

Lord’s Day 14

**35 Q. What does it mean that he
“was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary”?**

- A. That the eternal Son of God,
who is and remains
true and eternal God,¹
took to himself,
through the working of the Holy Spirit,²
from the flesh and blood of the virgin
Mary,³
a true human nature
so that he might also become David’s true
descendant,⁴
like his brothers in all things⁵
except for sin.⁶

¹ John 1:1; 10:30-36; Acts 13:33 (Ps. 2:7); Col. 1:15-17; 1 John 5:20

² Luke 1:35

³ Matt. 1:18-23; John 1:14; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 2:14

⁴ 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 132:11; Matt. 1:1; Rom. 1:3

⁵ Phil. 2:7; Heb. 2:17

⁶ Heb. 4:15; 7:26-27

**36 Q. How does the holy conception and birth of
Christ benefit you?**

- A. He is our mediator¹
and, with his innocence and perfect holiness
he removes from God’s sight
my sin – mine since I was conceived.

**36 Q. How does the holy conception and birth of
Christ benefit you?**

- A. He is our mediator¹
and, in God’s sight,
he covers with his innocence and perfect
holiness
my sin, in which I was conceived.²

¹ [1 Tim. 2:5-6](#); [Heb. 9:13-15](#)

² [Rom. 8:3-4](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 4:4-5](#); [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#)

Lord's Day 15

37 Q. What do you understand by the word “suffered”?

- A. That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained
in body and soul
the anger of God against the sin of the whole human race.¹

This he did in order that,
by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice,²
he might set us free, body and soul,
from eternal condemnation,³
and gain for us
God's grace,
righteousness,
and eternal life.⁴

¹ [Isa. 53](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#); [3:18](#)

² [Rom. 3:25](#); [Heb. 10:14](#); [1 John 2:2](#); [4:10](#)

³ [Rom. 8:1-4](#); [Gal. 3:13](#)

⁴ [John 3:16](#); [Rom. 3:24-26](#)

38 Q. Why did he suffer “under Pontius Pilate” as judge?

- A. So that he,
though innocent,
might be condemned by a civil judge,¹
and so free us from the severe judgment of God
that was to fall on us.²

¹ [Luke 23:13-24](#); [John 19:4, 12-16](#)

² [Isa. 53:4-5](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 3:13](#)

39 Q. Is it significant that he was “crucified” instead of dying some other way?

- A. Yes.
This death convinces me
that he shouldered the curse
which lay on me,

¹ [1 Tim. 2:5-6](#); [Heb. 9:13-15](#)

² [Rom. 8:3-4](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 4:4-5](#); [1 Pet. 1:18-19](#)

Lord's Day 15

37 Q. What do you understand by the word “suffered”?

- A. That during his whole life on earth, but especially at the end, Christ sustained
in body and soul
the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race.¹

This he did in order that,
by his suffering as the only atoning sacrifice,²
he might deliver us, body and soul,
from eternal condemnation,³
and gain for us
God's grace,
righteousness,
and eternal life.⁴

¹ [Isa. 53](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#); [3:18](#)

² [Rom. 3:25](#); [Heb. 10:14](#); [1 John 2:2](#); [4:10](#)

³ [Rom. 8:1-4](#); [Gal. 3:13](#)

⁴ [John 3:16](#); [Rom. 3:24-26](#)

38 Q. Why did he suffer “under Pontius Pilate” as judge?

- A. So that he,
though innocent,
might be condemned by an earthly judge,¹
and so free us from the severe judgment of God
that was to fall on us.²

¹ [Luke 23:13-24](#); [John 19:4, 12-16](#)

² [Isa. 53:4-5](#); [2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 3:13](#)

39 Q. Is it significant that he was “crucified” instead of dying some other way?

- A. Yes.
By this death I am convinced
that he shouldered the curse
which lay on me,

since death by crucifixion was accursed by God.¹

¹ Gal. 3:10-13 (Deut. 21:23)

Lord's Day 16

40 Q. Why did Christ have to go all the way to death?

A. Because God's justice and truth demand it: ¹ only the death of God's Son could pay for our sin.²

¹ Gen. 2:17

² Rom. 8:3-4; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 2:9

41 Q. Why was he "buried"?

A. His burial testifies that he really died.¹

¹ Isa. 53:9; John 19:38-42; Acts 13:29; 1 Cor. 15:3-4

42 Q. Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die?

A. Our death does not pay the debt of our sins. Rather, it puts an end to our sinning and is our entrance into eternal life.²

¹ Ps. 49:7

² John 5:24; Phil. 1:21-23; 1 Thess. 5:9-10

43 Q. What further advantage do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?

A. Through Christ's death our old selves are crucified, put to death, and buried with him,¹ so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us,² but that instead we may dedicate ourselves as an offering of gratitude to him.³

¹ Rom. 6:5-11; Col. 2:11-12

² Rom. 6:12-14

³ Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:1-2

44 Q. Why does the creed add, "He descended to hell"?

A. To assure me in times of personal crisis and temptation that Christ my Lord,

since death by crucifixion was cursed by God.¹

¹ Gal. 3:10-13 (Deut. 21:23)

Lord's Day 16

40 Q. Why did Christ have to suffer death?

A. Because God's justice and truth require it: ¹ nothing else could pay for our sins except the death of the Son of God.²

¹ Gen. 2:17

² Rom. 8:3-4; Phil. 2:8; Heb. 2:9

41 Q. Why was he "buried"?

A. His burial testifies that he really died.¹

¹ Isa. 53:9; John 19:38-42; Acts 13:29; 1 Cor. 15:3-4

42 Q. Since Christ has died for us, why do we still have to die?

A. Our death is not a payment for our sins,¹ but only a dying to sins and an entering into eternal life.²

¹ Ps. 49:7

² John 5:24; Phil. 1:21-23; 1 Thess. 5:9-10

43 Q. What further benefit do we receive from Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross?

A. By his power our old man is crucified, put to death, and buried with him,¹ so that the evil desires of the flesh may no longer rule us,² but that instead we may offer ourselves as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to him.³

¹ Rom. 6:5-11; Col. 2:11-12

² Rom. 6:12-14

³ Rom. 12:1; Eph. 5:1-2

44 Q. Why does the creed add, "He descended to hell"?

A. To assure me during attacks of deepest dread and temptation that Christ my Lord,

by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul,
especially on the cross but also earlier,
has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.¹

¹ Isa. 53; Matt. 26:36-46; 27:45-46; Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7-10

Lord's Day 17

45 Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?

A. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death,
so that he might make us share in the righteousness
he won for us by his death.¹

Second, by his power we too
are already now resurrected to a new life.²

Third, Christ's resurrection
is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection.³

¹ Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:16-20; 1 Pet. 1:3-5

² Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-4

³ Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:12-23; Phil. 3:20-21

Lord's Day 18

46 Q. What do you mean by saying, "He ascended to heaven"?

A. That Christ,
while his disciples watched,
was lifted up from the earth into heaven¹
and will be there for our good
until he comes again
to judge the living and the dead.³

¹ Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11

² Rom. 8:34; Eph. 4:8-10; Heb. 7:23-25; 9:24

³ Acts 1:11

47 Q. But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us?¹

A. Christ is true man and true God.
In his human nature Christ is not now on earth;²

by suffering unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul,
_____ on the cross but also earlier,
has delivered me from hellish anguish and torment.¹

¹ Isa. 53; Matt. 26:36-46; 27:45-46; Luke 22:44; Heb. 5:7-10

Lord's Day 17

45 Q. How does Christ's resurrection benefit us?

A. First, by his resurrection he has overcome death,
so that he might make us share in the righteousness
he obtained for us by his death.¹

Second, by his power we too
are already raised to a new life.²

Third, Christ's resurrection
is a sure pledge to us of our blessed
resurrection.³

¹ Rom. 4:25; 1 Cor. 15:16-20; 1 Pet. 1:3-5

² Rom. 6:5-11; Eph. 2:4-6; Col. 3:1-4

³ Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:12-23; Phil. 3:20-21

Lord's Day 18

46 Q. What do you mean by saying, "He ascended to heaven"?

A. That Christ,
while his disciples watched,
was taken up from the earth into heaven¹
and remains there on our behalf²
until he comes again
to judge the living and the dead.³

¹ Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9-11

² Rom. 8:34; Eph. 4:8-10; Heb. 7:23-25; 9:24

³ Acts 1:11

47 Q. But isn't Christ with us until the end of the world as he promised us?¹

A. Christ is true man and true God.
In his human nature Christ is not now on earth;²

but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit
he is not absent from us for a moment.³

¹ [Matt. 28:20](#)

² [Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21](#)

³ [Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:16-19](#)

48 Q. If his humanity is not present wherever his divinity is, then aren't the two natures of Christ separated from each other?

A. Certainly not.
Since divinity
is not limited
and is present everywhere,¹
it is evident that
Christ's divinity is surely beyond the
bounds of
the humanity that has been taken on,
but at the same time his divinity is in
and remains personally united to
his humanity.²

¹ [Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 7:48-49 \(Isa. 66:1\)](#)

² [John 1:14; 3:13; Col. 2:9](#)

49 Q. How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

A. First, he pleads our cause
in heaven
in the presence of his Father.¹

Second, we have our own flesh in heaven –
a guarantee that Christ our head
will also take us, his members,
to himself in heaven.²

Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth
as a further guarantee.³
By the Spirit's power
we make the goal of our lives,
not earthly things,
but the things above where Christ is,
sitting at God's right hand.⁴

¹ [Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1](#)

² [John 14:2; 17:24; Eph. 2:4-6](#)

³ [John 14:16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5](#)

⁴ [Col. 3:1-4](#)

but in his divinity, majesty, grace, and Spirit
he is never absent from us __.³

¹ [Matt. 28:20](#)

² [Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21](#)

³ [Matt. 28:18-20; John 14:16-19](#)

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and remains personally united to
his humanity.²

¹ [Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 7:48-49 \(Isa. 66:1\)](#)

² [John 1:14; 3:13; Col. 2:9](#)

49 Q. How does Christ's ascension to heaven benefit us?

A. First, he is our advocate
in heaven
in the presence of his Father.¹

Second, we have our own flesh in heaven
as a sure pledge that Christ our head
will also take us, his members,
up to himself.²

Third, he sends his Spirit to us on earth
as a corresponding pledge.³
By the Spirit's power
we seek not earthly things
but the things above, where Christ is,
sitting at God's right hand.⁴

¹ [Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1](#)

² [John 14:2; 17:24; Eph. 2:4-6](#)

³ [John 14:16; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; 5:5](#)

⁴ [Col. 3:1-4](#)

Lord's Day 19

- 50 Q. Why the next words:
“and sitteth at the right hand of God”?**
- A. Christ ascended to heaven,
there to show that he is head of his church,¹
And that the Father rules all things through
him.²

¹ Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18

² Matt. 28:18; John 5:22-23

- 51 Q. How does this glory of Christ our head
benefit us?**

- A. First, through his Holy Spirit
he pours out his gifts from heaven
upon us his members.¹
Second, by his power
he defends us and keeps us safe
from all enemies.²

¹ Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7-12

² Ps. 110:1-2; John 10:27-30; Rev. 19:11-16

- 52 Q. How does Christ's return
“to judge the living and the dead”
comfort you?**

- A. In all my distress and persecution,
I turn my eyes to the heavens
and confidently await as judge the very One
who has already stood trial in my place
before God
and so has removed the whole curse from
me.¹
All his enemies and mine
he will condemn to everlasting punishment:
but me and all his chosen ones
he will take along with him
into the joy and glory of heaven.²

¹ Luke 21:28; Rom. 8:22-25; Phil. 3:20-21; Tit. 2:13-14

² Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-10

Lord's Day 20

- 53 Q. What do you believe
concerning “the Holy Spirit”?**

Lord's Day 19

- 50 Q. Why the next words:
“and sits at the right hand of God”?**
- A. Christ ascended to heaven,
there to show that he is head of his church,¹
through whom the Father governs all
things.²

¹ Eph. 1:20-23; Col. 1:18

² Matt. 28:18; John 5:22-23

- 51 Q. How does this glory of Christ our head
benefit us?**

- A. First, through his Holy Spirit
he pours out gifts from heaven
upon us his members.¹
Second, by his power
he defends us and preserves us
from all enemies.²

¹ Acts 2:33; Eph. 4:7-12

² Ps. 110:1-2; John 10:27-30; Rev. 19:11-16

- 52 Q. How does Christ's return
“to judge the living and the dead”
comfort you?**

- A. In all distress and persecution,
with uplifted head,
I confidently await the very judge
who has already offered himself to the
judgment of God
in my place and removed the whole curse
from me.¹
Christ will cast all his enemies and mine
into everlasting condemnation,
but will take me and all his chosen ones
to himself
into the joy and glory of heaven.²

¹ Luke 21:28; Rom. 8:22-25; Phil. 3:20-21; Tit. 2:13-14

² Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:6-10

Lord's Day 20

- 53 Q. What do you believe
concerning “the Holy Spirit”?**

A. First, he, as well as the Father and the Son, is eternal God.¹
 Second, that he has been given to me personally,²
 so that, by true faith,
 he makes me share in Christ and all his blessings,³
 comforts me,⁴
 and remains with me forever.⁵

¹ Gen. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4

² 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:6

³ Gal. 3:14

⁴ John 15:26; Acts 9:31

⁵ John 14:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:14

Lord's Day 21

54 Q. What do you believe concerning “the holy catholic church”?

A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word,¹
 out of the entire human race,²
 from the beginning of the world to its end,³
 gathers, protects, and preserves for himself
 a community chosen for eternal life⁴
 and united in true faith.⁵
 And of this community I am⁶ and always will
 be⁷
 a living member.

¹ John 10:14-16; Acts 20:28; Rom. 10:14-17; Col. 1:18

² Gen. 26:3b-4; Rev. 5:9

³ Isa. 59:21; 1 Cor. 11:26

⁴ Matt. 16:18; John 10:28-30; Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-14

⁵ Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:1-6

⁶ 1 John 3:14, 19-21

⁷ John 10:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 1 Pet. 1:3-5

55 Q. What do you understand by “the communion of saints”?

A. First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ
 and in all his treasures and gifts.¹

A. First, that the Spirit, with the Father and the Son,
 is eternal God.¹
 Second, that he is given also to me,²
 so that, through true faith,
 he makes me share in Christ and all his benefits,³
 comforts me,⁴
 and will remain with me forever.⁵

¹ Gen. 1:1-2; Matt. 28:19; Acts 5:3-4

² 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Gal. 4:6

³ Gal. 3:14

⁴ John 15:26; Acts 9:31

⁵ John 14:16-17; 1 Pet. 4:14

Lord's Day 21

54 Q. What do you believe concerning “the holy catholic church”?

A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word,¹
 out of the entire human race,²
 from the beginning of the world to its end,³
 gathers, protects, and preserves for himself
 a community chosen for eternal life⁴
 and united in true faith.⁵
 And of this community I am⁶ and always will
 be⁷
 a living member.

¹ John 10:14-16; Acts 20:28; Rom. 10:14-17; Col. 1:18

² Gen. 26:3b-4; Rev. 5:9

³ Isa. 59:21; 1 Cor. 11:26

⁴ Matt. 16:18; John 10:28-30; Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:3-14

⁵ Acts 2:42-47; Eph. 4:1-6

⁶ 1 John 3:14, 19-21

⁷ John 10:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; 1 Pet. 1:3-5

55 Q. What do you understand by “the communion of saints”?

A. First, that believers one and all, as members of Christ the Lord,
have communion with him
 and share in all his treasures and gifts.¹

Second, that each member should consider it his duty to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members.²

¹ Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 6:17; 12:4-7, 12-13; 1 John 1:3

² Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:20-27; 13:1-7; Phil. 2:4-8

56 Q. What do you believe concerning “the forgiveness of sins”?

- A. I believe that God, because of Christ’s atonement, will never hold against me any of my sins¹ nor my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life.² Rather, in his grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ to free me forever from judgment.³

¹ Ps. 103:3-4, 10, 12; Mic. 7:18-19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 John 1:7; 2:2

² Rom. 7:21-25

³ John 3:17-18; Rom. 8:1-2

Lord’s Day 22

57 Q. How does “the resurrection of the body” comfort you?

- A. Not only my soul will be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head,¹ but even my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul, and made like Christ’s glorious body.²

¹ Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23

² 1 Cor. 15:20, 42-46, 54; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2

58 Q. How does the article concerning “life everlasting” comfort you?

- A. Even as I already now

Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use these gifts readily and joyfully for the service and enrichment of the other members.²

¹ Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 6:17; 12:4-7, 12-13; 1 John 1:3

² Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:20-27; 13:1-7; Phil. 2:4-8

56 Q. What do you believe concerning “the forgiveness of sins”?

- A. I believe that God, because of Christ’s satisfaction, will no longer remember any of my sins¹ or my sinful nature which I need to struggle against all my life.² Rather, by his grace God grants me the righteousness of Christ that I may never come into judgment.³

¹ Ps. 103:3-4, 10, 12; Mic. 7:18-19; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; 1 John 1:7; 2:2

² Rom. 7:21-25

³ John 3:17-18; Rom. 8:1-2

Lord’s Day 22

57 Q. How does “the resurrection of the body” comfort you?

- A. Not only will my soul be taken immediately after this life to Christ its head,¹ but also my very flesh, raised by the power of Christ, will be reunited with my soul, and made like Christ’s glorious body.²

¹ Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23

² 1 Cor. 15:20, 42-46, 54; Phil. 3:21; 1 John 3:2

58 Q. How does the article concerning “life everlasting” comfort you?

- A. Even as I already now

experience in my heart
the beginning of eternal joy,¹
so after this life I will have
perfect blessedness such as
no eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no man has ever imagined:
a blessedness in which to praise God
eternally.²

¹ Rom. 14:17

² John 17:3; 1 Cor. 2:9

experience in my heart
the beginning of eternal joy,¹
so after this life I will have
perfect blessedness such as
no eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no heart has ever imagined:
a blessedness in which to praise God
eternally²

¹ Rom. 14:17

² John 17:3; 1 Cor. 2:9

Lord's Day 23

59 Q. What good does it do you, however, to believe all this?

A. In Christ I am right with God and heir to life everlasting.¹

¹ John 3:36; Rom. 1:17 (Hab. 2:4); Rom. 5:1-2

60 Q. How are you right with God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.¹
Even though my conscience accuses me
of having grievously sinned against all
God's commandments,
of never having kept any of them,²
and even though I am still inclined toward
all evil,³
nevertheless,
without my deserving it at all,⁴
out of sheer grace,⁵
God grants and credits to me
the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and
holiness of Christ,⁶
as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner,
as if I had been as perfectly obedient
as Christ was obedient for me.⁷

All I need to do
is accept this gift of God with a believing
heart.⁸

¹ Rom. 3:21-28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil 3:8-11

² Rom. 3:9-10

³ Rom. 7:23

⁴ Tit. 3:4-5

⁵ Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8

⁶ Rom. 4:3-5 (Gen. 15:6); 2 Cor. 5:17-19; 1 John 2:1-2

Lord's Day 23

59 Q. But how does it help you now that you believe all this?

A. That I am righteous in Christ before God and an heir to life everlasting.¹

¹ John 3:36; Rom. 1:17 (Hab. 2:4); Rom. 5:1-2

60 Q. How are you righteous before God?

A. Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.¹
Even though my conscience accuses me
of having grievously sinned against all
God's commandments,
of never having kept any of them,²
and of still being inclined toward all evil,³
nevertheless,
without any merit of my own,⁴
out of sheer grace,⁵
God grants and credits to me
the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and
holiness of Christ,⁶
as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner,
and as if I had been as perfectly obedient
as Christ was obedient for me.⁷
—if only I accept this gift with a believing
heart.⁸

¹ Rom. 3:21-28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil 3:8-11

² Rom. 3:9-10

³ Rom. 7:23

⁴ Tit. 3:4-5

⁵ Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8

⁶ Rom. 4:3-5 (Gen. 15:6); 2 Cor. 5:17-19; 1 John 2:1-2

⁷ Rom. 4:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:21

⁸ John 3:18; Acts 16:30-31

⁷ Rom. 4:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:21

⁸ John 3:18; Acts 16:30-31

61 Q. Why do you say that through faith alone you are right with God?

- A. It is not because of any value my faith has that God is please with me.
Only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness make me right with God.¹
And I can receive this righteousness and make it mine in no other way than by faith alone.²

¹ 1 Cor. 1:30-31

² Rom. 10:10; 1 John 5:10-12

Lord's Day 24

62 Q. Why can't the good we do make us right with God, or at least help make us right with him?

- A. Because the righteousness which can pass God's scrutiny must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law.¹
Even the very best we do in this life is imperfect and stained with sin.²

¹ Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10 (Deut. 27:26)

² Isa. 64:6

63 Q. How can you say that the good we do doesn't earn anything when God promises to reward it in this life and the next? ¹

- A. This reward is not earned; it is a gift of grace.²

¹ Matt. 5:12; Heb. 11:6

² Luke 17:10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8

61 Q. Why do you say that through faith alone you are righteous?

- A. Not because I please God by the worthiness of my faith,
for only Christ's satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness
are my righteousness before God,¹
and I can receive this righteousness and make it mine
in no other way than by faith alone.²

¹ 1 Cor. 1:30-31

² Rom. 10:10; 1 John 5:10-12

Lord's Day 24

62 Q. Why can't our good works be our righteousness before God, or at least a part of our righteousness?

- A. Because the righteousness which can pass God's judgment must be entirely perfect and must in every way measure up to the divine law.¹
But even our best works in this life are all imperfect and stained with sin.²

¹ Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10 (Deut. 27:26)

² Isa. 64:6

63 Q. How can our good works be said to merit nothing when God promises to reward them in this life and the next?¹

- A. This reward is not merited; it is a gift of grace.²

¹ Matt. 5:12; Heb. 11:6

² Luke 17:10; 2 Tim. 4:7-8

64 Q. But doesn't this teaching make people indifferent and wicked?

A. No.
It is impossible
for those grafted into Christ by true faith
not to produce fruits of gratitude.¹

¹ [Luke 6:43-45](#); [John 15:5](#)

The Sacraments

Lord's Day 25

65 Q. You confess that by faith alone you share in Christ and all his blessings: where does that faith come from?

A. The Holy Spirit produces it in our hearts¹
by the preaching of the holy gospel,²
and confirms it
through our use of the holy sacraments.³

¹ [John 3:5](#); [1 Cor. 2:10-14](#); [Eph. 2:8](#)

² [Rom. 10:17](#); [1 Pet. 1:23-25](#)

³ [Matt. 28:19-20](#); [1 Cor. 10:16](#)

66 Q. What are sacraments?

A. Sacraments are holy signs and seals for us to see. They were instituted by God so that
by our use of them
he might make us understand more clearly
the promise of the gospel,
and might put his seal on that promise.¹

And this is God's gospel promise:
to grant us forgiveness of sins and eternal
life
by grace alone
because of Christ's one sacrifice
finished on the cross.²

¹ [Gen. 17:11](#); [Deut. 30:6](#); [Rom. 4:11](#)

² [Matt. 26:27-28](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [Heb. 10:10](#)

67 Q. Are both the word and the sacraments then intended to focus our faith

64 Q. But doesn't this teaching make people indifferent and wicked?

A. No.
It is impossible
for those grafted into Christ by true faith
not to produce fruits of gratitude.¹

¹ [Luke 6:43-45](#); [John 15:5](#)

The Sacraments

Lord's Day 25

65 Q. It is by faith alone that we share in Christ and all his benefits: where then does that faith come from?

A. The Holy Spirit works it in our hearts¹
by the preaching of the holy gospel,²
and confirms it
by the use of the holy sacraments.³

¹ [John 3:5](#); [1 Cor. 2:10-14](#); [Eph. 2:8](#)

² [Rom. 10:17](#); [1 Pet. 1:23-25](#)

³ [Matt. 28:19-20](#); [1 Cor. 10:16](#)

66 Q. What are sacraments?

A. Sacraments are visible, holy signs and seals. They were instituted by God so that
by our use of them
he might make us understand more clearly
the promise of the gospel,
and seal that promise.¹

And this is God's gospel promise:
he grants us forgiveness of sins and eternal
life
by grace
because of Christ's one sacrifice
accomplished on the cross.²

¹ [Gen. 17:11](#); [Deut. 30:6](#); [Rom. 4:11](#)

² [Matt. 26:27-28](#); [Acts 2:38](#); [Heb. 10:10](#)

67 Q. Are both the word and the sacraments then intended to focus our faith

on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Right!

In the gospel the Holy Spirit teaches us and through the holy sacraments he assures us that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.¹

¹ Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 3:27

68 Q. How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?

A. Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.¹

¹ Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Lord's Day 26

69 Q. How does holy baptism remind you and assure you that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross is for you personally?

A. In this way:

Christ instituted this outward washing¹ and with it gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away my soul's impurity, in other words, all my sins.²

¹ Acts 2:38

² Matt. 3:11; Rom. 6:3-10; 1 Pet. 3:21

70 Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means that God, by grace, has forgiven our sins because of Christ's blood poured out for me in his sacrifice on the cross.¹

To be washed with Christ's Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed me and set me apart to be a member of Christ, so that more and more

on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the only ground of our salvation?

A. Yes indeed!

The Holy Spirit teaches us in the gospel and confirms by the holy sacraments that our entire salvation rests on Christ's one sacrifice for us on the cross.¹

¹ Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 3:27

68 Q. How many sacraments did Christ institute in the New Testament?

A. Two: holy baptism and the holy supper.¹

¹ Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Lord's Day 26

69 Q. How does holy baptism remind and assure you that Christ's one sacrifice on the cross benefits you personally?

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Christ instituted this outward washing¹ and with it promised that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away my soul's impurity, that is, all my sins.²

¹ Acts 2:38

² Matt. 3:11; Rom. 6:3-10; 1 Pet. 3:21

70 Q. What does it mean to be washed with Christ's blood and Spirit?

A. To be washed with Christ's blood means that God, by grace, has forgiven our sins because of Christ's blood poured out for us in his sacrifice on the cross.¹

To be washed with Christ's Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed and sanctified us to be members of Christ, so that more and more we die to sin and live holy and blameless lives.²

I become dead to sin
and increasingly live a holy and blameless
life.²

¹ [Zech. 13:1](#); [Eph. 1:7-8](#); [Heb. 12:24](#); [1 Pet. 1:2](#); [Rev. 1:5](#)

² [Ezek. 36:25-27](#); [John 3:5-8](#); [Rom. 6:4](#); [1 Cor. 6:11](#); [Col. 2:11-12](#)

¹ [Zech. 13:1](#); [Eph. 1:7-8](#); [Heb. 12:24](#); [1 Pet. 1:2](#); [Rev. 1:5](#)

² [Ezek. 36:25-27](#); [John 3:5-8](#); [Rom. 6:4](#); [1 Cor. 6:11](#); [Col. 2:11-12](#)

**71 Q. Where does Christ promise
that we are washed with his blood and
Spirit as surely as we are washed
with the water of baptism?**

- A.** In the institution of baptism, where he says:
“Go therefore and make disciples of all
nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father
and of the Son
and of the Holy Spirit.”¹
“He who believes and is baptized will be
saved;
but he who does not believe will be
condemned.”²
This promise is repeated when Scripture calls
baptism
“the water of regeneration”³ and
the washing away of sins.⁴

¹ [Matt. 28:19](#)

² [Mark 16:16](#)

³ [Tit. 3:5](#)

⁴ [Acts 22:16](#)

**71 Q. Where does Christ promise
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¹ [Matt. 28:19](#)

² [Mark 16:16](#)

³ [Tit. 3:5](#)

⁴ [Acts 22:16](#)

Lord’s Day 27

**72 Q. Does this outward washing with water
itself wash away sins?**

- A.** No, only Jesus Christ’s blood and the Holy
Spirit
cleans us from all sins.¹

¹ [Matt. 3:11](#); [1 Pet. 3:21](#); [1 John 1:7](#)

Lord’s Day 27

**72 Q. Does this outward washing with water
itself wash away sins?**

- A.** No, only Jesus Christ’s blood and the Holy
Spirit
cleans us from all sins.¹

¹ [Matt. 3:11](#); [1 Pet. 3:21](#); [1 John 1:7](#)

**73 Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism
the water of regeneration and
the washing away of sins?**

- A.** God has good reason for these words.
He wants to teach us that
the blood and Spirit of Christ wash away
our sins
just as water washes dirt from our bodies.¹

**73 Q. Why then does the Holy Spirit call baptism
the water of rebirth and
the washing away of sins?**

- A.** God has good reason for these words.
To begin with, he wants to teach us that
the blood and Spirit of Christ take away our
sins
just as water removes dirt from the body.¹

But more important,
he wants to assure us, by this divine pledge
and sign,
that the washing away of our sins spiritually
is as real as physical washing with water.²

¹ 1 Cor. 6:11; Rev. 1:5; 7:14

² Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27

But more importantly,
he wants to assure us, by this divine pledge
and sign,
that we are as truly washed of our sins
spiritually
as our bodies are washed with water
physically.²

¹ 1 Cor. 6:11; Rev. 1:5; 7:14

² Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:27

74 Q. Should infants, too, be baptized?

A. Yes.

Infants as well as adults
are in God's covenant and are his people.¹
They, no less than adults, are promised
The forgiveness of sin through Christ's
blood
and the Holy Spirit who produces faith.²
Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the
covenant,
Infants should be received into the Christian
church
and should be distinguished from the
children of unbelievers.³
This was done in the Old Testament by
circumcision,⁴
which was replaced in the New Testament
by baptism.⁵

¹ Gen. 17:7; Matt. 19:14

² Isa. 44:1-3; Acts 2:38-39; 16:31

³ Acts 10:47; 1 Cor. 7:14

⁴ Gen. 17:9-14

⁵ Col. 2:11-13

Lord's Day 28

**75 Q. How does the holy supper
remind and assure you
that you share in
Christ's one sacrifice on the cross
and in all his gifts?**

A. In this way:

Christ has commanded me and all believers
to eat this broken bread and to drink this cup.
With this command he gave this promise:¹
First,

74 Q. Should infants also be baptized?

A. Yes.

Infants as well as adults
are included in God's covenant and people,¹
and they, no less than adults, are promised
deliverance from sin through Christ's blood
and the Holy Spirit who works faith.²
Therefore, by baptism, the sign of the
covenant,
they too should be incorporated into the
Christian church
and distinguished from the children of
unbelievers.³
This was done in the Old Testament by
circumcision,⁴
which was replaced in the New Testament
by baptism.⁵

¹ Gen. 17:7; Matt. 19:14

² Isa. 44:1-3; Acts 2:38-39; 16:31

³ Acts 10:47; 1 Cor. 7:14

⁴ Gen. 17:9-14

⁵ Col. 2:11-13

Lord's Day 28

**75 Q. How does the holy supper
remind and assure you
that you share in
Christ's one sacrifice on the cross
and in all his benefits?**

A. In this way:

Christ has commanded me and all believers
to eat this broken bread and to drink this cup
in remembrance of him.
With this command come these promises:¹

as surely as I see with my eyes
the bread of the Lord broken for me
and the cup given to me,
so surely
his body was offered and broken for me
and his blood poured out for me
on the cross.

Second,

as surely as
I receive from the hand of him who
serves,
and taste with my mouth
the bread and cup of the Lord,
given me as sure signs of Christ's body
and blood,
so surely
he nourishes and refreshes my soul for
eternal life
with his crucified body and poured-out
blood.

¹ Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25

**76 Q. What does it mean
to eat the crucified body of Christ
and to drink his poured-out blood?**

- A. It means
to accept with a believing heart
the entire suffering and death of Christ
and by believing
to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal
life.¹

But it means more.

Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in
Christ and in us,
we are united more and more to Christ's
blessed body.²

And so, although he is in heaven³ and we
are on earth,
we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his
bone.⁴

And we forever live on and are governed
by one Spirit,
as the members of our body are by one
soul.⁵

¹ John 6:35, 40, 50-54

² John 6:55-56; 1 Cor. 12:13

³ Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 11:26; Col. 3:1

First,
as surely as I see with my eyes
the bread of the Lord broken for me
and the cup shared with me,
so surely
his body was offered and broken for me
and his blood poured out for me
on the cross.

Second,

as surely as
I receive from the hand of him who
serves,
and taste with my mouth
the bread and cup of the Lord,
given me as sure signs of Christ's body
and blood,
so surely
he nourishes and refreshes my soul for
eternal life
with his crucified body and poured-out
blood.

¹ Matt. 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25

**76 Q. What does it mean
to eat the crucified body of Christ
and to drink his poured-out blood?**

- A. It means
to accept with a believing heart
the entire suffering and death of Christ
and in this way
to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal
life.¹

But it means more.

Through the Holy Spirit, who lives both in
Christ and in us,
we are united more and more to Christ's
blessed body.²

And so, although he is in heaven³ and we
are on earth,
we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his
bone.⁴

And we forever live on and are governed
by one Spirit,
as the members of our body are by one
soul.⁵

¹ John 6:35, 40, 50-54

² John 6:55-56; 1 Cor. 12:13

³ Acts 1:9-11; 1 Cor. 11:26; Col. 3:1

⁴ 1 Cor. 6:15-17; Eph. 5:29-30; 1 John 4:13

⁵ John 6:56-58; 15:1-6; Eph. 4:15-16; 1 John 3:24

⁴ 1 Cor. 6:15-17; Eph. 5:29-30; 1 John 4:13

⁵ John 6:56-58; 15:1-6; Eph. 4:15-16; 1 John 3:24

77 Q. Where does Christ promise to nourish and refresh believers with his body and blood as surely as they eat this broken bread and drink this cup?

- A.** In the institution of the Lord's Supper:
"The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said,
 'Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you.
 Do this in remembrance of me.'
In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying,
 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
 Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."¹
This promise is repeated by Paul in these words:
"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?
Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."²

¹ 1 Cor. 11:23-26

² 1 Cor. 10:16-17

77 Q. Where does Christ promise to nourish and refresh believers with his body and blood as surely as they eat this broken bread and drink this cup?

- A.** In the institution of the Lord's Supper:
"The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said,
 'Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you.
 Do this in remembrance of me.'
In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying,
 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
 Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'
For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."¹
This promise is repeated by Paul in these words:
"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?
The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?
Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."²

¹ 1 Cor. 11:23-26

² 1 Cor. 10:16-17

Lord's Day 29

78 Q. Are the bread and wine changed into the real body and blood of Christ?

Lord's Day 29

78 Q. Do the bread and wine become the real body and blood of Christ?

A. No.

Just as the water of baptism
is not changed into Christ's blood
and does not itself wash away sins
but is simply God's sign and assurance¹,
so too the bread of the Lord's Supper
is not changed into the actual body of
Christ,²
even though it is called the body of Christ³
in keeping with the nature and language
of sacraments.⁴

¹ Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5

² Matt. 26:26-29

³ 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26-28

⁴ Gen. 17:10-11; Ex. 12:11, 13; 1 Cor. 10:1-4

**79 Q. Why then does Christ call
the bread his body
and the cup his blood,
or the new covenant in his blood?
(Paul use the words,
a participation in Christ's body and blood.)**

A. Christ has good reason for these words.

He wants to teach us that
as bread and wine nourish our temporal life,
so too his crucified body and poured-out
blood
truly nourish our souls for eternal life.¹

But more important,
he wants to assure us, by this visible sign and
pledge,

that we, through the Holy Spirit's work,
share in his true body and blood
as surely as our mouths
receive these holy signs in his
remembrance,²
and that all of his suffering and obedience
are as definitely ours
as if we personally
had suffered and paid for our sins.³

¹ John 6:51, 55

² 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26

³ Rom. 6:5-11

A. No.

Just as the water of baptism
is not changed into Christ's blood
and does not itself wash away sins
but is simply a divine sign and assurance¹ of
these things,
so too the holy bread of the Lord's Supper
does not become the body of Christ itself,²
even though it is called the body of Christ³
in keeping with the nature and language
of sacraments.⁴

¹ Eph. 5:26; Tit. 3:5

² Matt. 26:26-29

³ 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26-28

⁴ Gen. 17:10-11; Ex. 12:11, 13; 1 Cor. 10:1-4

**79 Q. Why then does Christ call
the bread his body
and the cup his blood,
or the new covenant in his blood,
and Paul use the words,
a participation in Christ's body and blood?**

A. Christ has good reason for these words.

He wants to teach us that
just as bread and wine nourish the temporal
life,
so too his crucified body and poured-out
blood
are the true food and drink of our souls for
eternal life.¹

But more important,
he wants to assure us, by this visible sign and
pledge,

that we, through the Holy Spirit's work,
share in his true body and blood
as surely as our mouths
receive these holy signs in his
remembrance,²
and that all of his suffering and obedience
are as definitely ours
as if we personally
had suffered and made satisfaction for our
sins.³

¹ John 6:51, 55

² 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:26

³ Rom. 6:5-11

Lord's Day 30

80 Q. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

- A. The Lord's Supper declares to us that our sins have been completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself finished on the cross once for all.¹

It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ,² who with his very body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father³ where he wants us to worship him.⁴

But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests.

It also teaches that Christ is bodily present in the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshiped.

Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.

¹ John 19:30; Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25-26; 10:10-18

² 1 Cor. 6:17; 10:16-17

³ Acts 7:55-56; Heb. 1:3; 8:1

⁴ Matt. 6:20-21; John 4:21-24; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3

81 Q. Who are to come to the Lord's table?

- A. Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their continuing weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more

Lord's Day 30

80 Q. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

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Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.

¹ John 19:30; Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25-26; 10:10-18

² 1 Cor. 6:17; 10:16-17

³ Acts 7:55-56; Heb. 1:3; 8:1

⁴ Matt. 6:20-21; John 4:21-24; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1-3

81 Q. Who should come to the Lord's table?

- A. Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more

to strengthen their faith
and to lead a better life.
Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant,
however,
eat and drink judgment on themselves.¹

¹ [1 Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32](#)

82 Q. Are those to be admitted to the Lord's Supper who show by what they say and do that they are unbelieving and ungodly?

- A. No, that would dishonor God's covenant and bring down God's anger upon the entire congregation.¹
Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ and his apostles,
the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people,
by the official use of the keys of the kingdom,
until they reform their lives.

¹ [1 Cor. 11:17-32; Ps. 50:14-16; Isa. 1:11-17](#)

Lord's Day 31

83 Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?

- A. The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline toward repentance. Both preaching and discipline open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.¹

¹ [Matt. 16:19; John 20:22-23](#)

84 Q. How does preaching the gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?

- A. According to the command of Christ: The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to each and every believer, that, as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith, God, because of what Christ has done, truly forgives all his sins.

to strengthen their faith
and to lead a better life.
Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant,
however,
eat and drink judgment on themselves.¹

¹ [1 Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32](#)

82 Q. Should those be admitted to the Lord's Supper who show by what they profess and how they live that they are unbelieving and ungodly?

- A. No, that would dishonor God's covenant and bring down God's wrath upon the entire congregation.¹
Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ
and his apostles,
the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people,
by the official use of the keys of the kingdom,
until they reform their lives.

¹ [1 Cor. 11:17-32; Ps. 50:14-16; Isa. 1:11-17](#)

Lord's Day 31

83 Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?

- A. The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline toward repentance. Both of them open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.¹

¹ [Matt. 16:19; John 20:22-23](#)

84 Q. How does preaching the holy gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?

- A. According to the command of Christ: The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to all believers, each and every one, that, as often as they accept the gospel promise in true faith, God, because of Christ's merit, truly forgives all their sins.

The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the anger of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this gospel testimony.¹

¹ Matt. 16:19; John 3:31-36; 20:21-23

85 Q. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by Christian discipline?

- A. According to the command of Christ: If anyone, though called Christians, professes unchristian teachings or lives an unchristian live, if after repeated brotherly counsel, he refuses to abandon his errors and wickedness, and, if after being reported to the church, that is, to its officers, he fails to respond also to their admonitions – such a one the officers exclude from the Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from him, and God himself also excludes him from the kingdom of Christ.¹ Such a person, when he promises and demonstrates genuine reform, is received again as a member of Christ and of his church.²

¹ Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:3-5, 11-13; 2 Thess. 3:14-15

² Luke 15:20-24; 2 Cor. 2:6-11

PART III: GRATITUDE

Lord's Day 32

Q & A 86

The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the wrath of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this gospel testimony.¹

¹ Matt. 16:19; John 3:31-36; 20:21-23

85 Q. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by Christian discipline?

- A. According to the command of Christ: Those who, though called Christians, profess unchristian teachings or live unchristian lives, and who after repeated personal and loving admonitions, refuse to abandon their errors and evil ways, and who after being reported to the church, that is, to those ordained by the church for that purpose, fail to respond also to the church's admonitions— such persons the church excludes from the Christian community by withholding the sacraments from them, and God also excludes them from the kingdom of Christ.¹ Such persons, when promising and demonstrating genuine reform, are received again as members of Christ and of his church.²

¹ Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:3-5, 11-13; 2 Thess. 3:14-15

² Luke 15:20-24; 2 Cor. 2:6-11

PART III: GRATITUDE

Lord's Day 32

Q & A 86

**86 Q. We have been delivered
from our misery
by God’s grace alone through Christ and
not because we have earned it:
why then must we still do good works?**

- A. To be sure, Christ has redeemed us by his blood.
But we do good because
Christ by his Spirit is also renewing us to
like himself,
so that
in all our living
we may show that we are thankful to God
for all that he has done for us,¹
and so that he may be praised through us.²
And we do good
So that we may be assured of our faith by its
fruits³,
And so that by our godly living
Our neighbors may be won over to Christ.⁴

¹ Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:5-10

² Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19-20

³ Matt. 7:17-18; Gal. 5:22-24; 2 Pet. 1:10-11

⁴ Matt. 5:14-16; Rom. 14:17-19; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-2

**87 Q. Can those be saved
who do not turn to God
from their ungrateful
and impenitent ways?**

- A. By no means.
Scripture tells us that
no unchaste person,
no idolater, adulterer, thief,
no covetous person,
no drunkard, slanderer, robber,
or the like
is going to inherit the kingdom of God.¹

¹ 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:1-20; 1 John 3:14

Lord’s Day 33

**88 Q. What is involved
in genuine repentance or conversion?**

- A. Two things:

**86 Q. Since we have been delivered
from our misery
by grace through Christ
without any merit of our own,
why then should we do good works?**

- A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood,
is also renewing us by his Spirit into his
image,
so that with our whole lives
we may show that we are thankful to God
for his benefits,¹
and that he may be praised through us,²
and further,
so that we may be assured of our faith by
its fruits,³
and by our godly living
our neighbors may be won over to
Christ.⁴

¹ Rom. 6:13; 12:1-2; 1 Pet. 2:5-10

² Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19-20

³ Matt. 7:17-18; Gal. 5:22-24; 2 Pet. 1:10-11

⁴ Matt. 5:14-16; Rom. 14:17-19; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-2

**87 Q. Can those be saved
who do not turn to God
from their ungrateful
and unrepentant ways?**

- A. By no means.
Scripture tells us that
no unchaste person,
no idolater, adulterer, thief,
no covetous person,
no drunkard, slanderer, robber,
or the like
will inherit the kingdom of God.¹

¹ 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:1-20; 1 John 3:14

Lord’s Day 33

**88 Q. What is involved
in genuine repentance or conversion?**

- A. Two things:

the dying-away of the old self,
and the coming-to-life of the new.¹

¹ Rom. 6:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:5-10

89 Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

- A. It is to be genuinely sorry for sin
to hate it more and more
and to run away from it.¹

¹ Ps. 51:3-4, 17; Joel 2:12-13; Rom. 8:12-13; 2 Cor. 7:10

90 Q. What is the coming-to-life of the new self?

- A. Wholehearted joy in God through Christ¹
and a delight to do every kind of good
as God wants us to.

¹ Ps. 51:8, 12; Isa. 57:15; Rom. 5:1; 14:17

² Rom. 6:10-11; Gal. 2:20

91 Q. What do we that is good?

- A. Only that which
arises out of true faith,¹
conforms to God's law,²
and is done for his glory;³
and not that which is based
on what we think is right
or on established human tradition.⁴

¹ John 15:5; Heb. 11:6

² Lev. 18:4; 1 Sam. 15:22; Eph. 2:10

³ 1 Cor. 10:31

⁴ Deut. 12:32; Isa. 29:13; Ezek. 20:18-19; Matt. 15:7-9

The Ten Commandments

Lord's Day 34

92 Q. What does the Lord say in his law?

- A. God spoke all these words:

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage,
You shall have no other gods before me.

the dying-away of the old self,
and the rising-to-life of the new.¹

¹ Rom. 6:1-11; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:5-10

89 Q. What is the dying-away of the old self?

- A. To be genuinely sorry for sin
and more and more to hate
and run away from it.¹

¹ Ps. 51:3-4, 17; Joel 2:12-13; Rom. 8:12-13; 2 Cor. 7:10

90 Q. What is the rising-to-life of the new self?

- A. Wholehearted joy in God through Christ¹
and a love and delight to live
according to the will of God
by doing every kind of good work.²

¹ Ps. 51:8, 12; Isa. 57:15; Rom. 5:1; 14:17

² Rom. 6:10-11; Gal. 2:20

91 Q. But what are good works?

- A. Only those which
are done out of true faith,¹
conform to God's law,²
and are done for his glory;³
and not those based
on our own opinion
or human tradition.⁴

¹ John 15:5; Heb. 11:6

² Lev. 18:4; 1 Sam. 15:22; Eph. 2:10

³ 1 Cor. 10:31

⁴ Deut. 12:32; Isa. 29:13; Ezek. 20:18-19; Matt. 15:7-9

The Ten Commandments

Lord's Day 34

92 Q. What is God's law?

- A. God spoke all these words:

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of slavery;
you shall have no other gods before me.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

You shall not make for yourself a graven image,
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is in the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth;
you shall not bow down to them or serve them;
for I the Lord your God am a jealous God,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,
but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor, and do all your work;
but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God;
in it you shall not do any work—
you, or your son or your daughter,
your manservant, or your maidservant,
or your cattle,
or the sojourner who is within your gates;
for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea,
and all that is in them,
and rested the seventh day;
therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Honor your father and your mother,
that your days may be long
in the land that the Lord your God gives you.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

You shall not make for yourself an idol,
whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is on the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth.
You shall not bow down to them or worship them;
for I the Lord your God am a jealous God,
punishing children for the iniquity of parents,
to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me,
but showing love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
Six days you shall labor and do all your work.
But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God;
you shall not do any work—
you, your son or your daughter,
your male or female servant,
your livestock,
or the alien resident in your towns.
For in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea,
and all that is in them,
but rested the seventh day;
therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

Honor your father and your mother,
so that your days may be long
in the land that the Lord your God is giving to you.

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not kill.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not commit adultery.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, or ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbor's.¹

¹ Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21

93 Q. How are these commandments divided?

- A. Into two tables.
The first has four commandments, teaching us what our relation to God should be.
The second has six commandments, teaching us what we owe our neighbor.¹

¹ Matt. 22:37-39

94 Q. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?

- A. That I, not wanting to endanger my very salvation, avoid and shun all idolatry,¹ magic, superstitious rites, and prayer to saints or to other creatures.³ That I sincerely acknowledge the only true God,⁴ trust him alone,⁵ look to God for every good thing⁶ humbly⁷ and patiently,⁸

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not murder.

THE SEVENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not commit adultery.

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not steal.

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

THE TENTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female servant, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.¹

¹ Ex. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21

93 Q. How are these commandments divided?

- A. Into two tables.
The first has four commandments, teaching us how we should live in relation to God.
The second has six commandments, teaching us what we owe our neighbor.¹

¹ Matt. 22:37-39

94 Q. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?

- A. That I, not wanting to endanger my own salvation, avoid and shun all idolatry,¹ sorcery, superstitious rites, and prayer to saints or to other creatures.³ That I rightly know the only true God,⁴ trust him alone,⁵ and look to God for every good thing⁶ humbly⁷ and patiently,⁸ and love,⁹ fear,¹⁰ and honor¹¹ him

love,⁹ fear,¹⁰ and honor¹¹ him
with all my heart.

In short,
that I give up anything
rather than go against God's will in any
way.¹²

¹ 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 10:5-14; 1 John 5:21

² Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9-12

³ Matt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9

⁴ John 17:3

⁵ Jer. 17:5, 7

⁶ Ps. 104:27-28; James 1:17

⁷ 1 Pet. 5:5-6

⁸ Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:36

⁹ Matt. 22:37 (Deut. 6:5)

¹⁰ Prov. 9:10; 1 Pet. 1:17

¹¹ Matt. 4:10 (Deut. 6:13)

¹² Matt. 5:29-30; 10:37-39

with all my heart.

In short,
that I renounce all created things
rather than go against God's will in any
way.¹²

¹ 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 10:5-14; 1 John 5:21

² Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9-12

³ Matt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9

⁴ John 17:3

⁵ Jer. 17:5, 7

⁶ Ps. 104:27-28; James 1:17

⁷ 1 Pet. 5:5-6

⁸ Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:36

⁹ Matt. 22:37 (Deut. 6:5)

¹⁰ Prov. 9:10; 1 Pet. 1:17

¹¹ Matt. 4:10 (Deut. 6:13)

¹² Matt. 5:29-30; 10:37-39

95 Q. What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is

having or inventing something in which one
trusts
in place of or alongside of the only true
God,
who has revealed himself in his Word.¹

¹ 1 Chron. 16:26; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 5:5; Phil. 3:19

95 Q. What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is

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in place of or alongside of the only true
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who has revealed himself in his Word.¹

¹ 1 Chron. 16:26; Gal. 4:8-9; Eph. 5:5; Phil. 3:19

Lord's Day 35

**96 Q. What is God's will for us
in the second commandment?**

A. That we in no way make any image of God¹
nor worship him in any other way
Than he has commanded in his Word.²

¹ Deut. 4:15-19; Isa. 40:18-25; Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22-23

² Lev. 10:1-7; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; John 4:23-24

**96 Q. What is God's will for us
in the second commandment?**

A. That we in no way make any image of God¹
nor worship him in any other way
than has been commanded in God's Word.²

¹ Deut. 4:15-19; Isa. 40:18-25; Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:22-23

² Lev. 10:1-7; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; John 4:23-24

**97 Q. May we then not make
any image at all?**

A. God can not and may not
be visibly portrayed in any way.
Although creatures may be portrayed,
yet God forbids making or having such
images

**97 Q. May we then not make
any image at all?**

A. God cannot and may not
be visibly portrayed in any way.
Although creatures may be portrayed,
yet God forbids making or having such
images

if one's intention is to worship them
or serve God through them.¹

¹ Ex. 34:13-14, 17; 2 Kings 18:4-5

98 Q. But may not images be permitted in the churches as teaching aids for the unlearned?

A. No, we should not try to be wiser than God. He wants his people instructed by the living preaching of his Word—¹ not by idols that cannot even talk.²

¹ Rom. 10:14-15, 17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19

² Jer. 10:8; Hab. 2:18-20

Lord's Day 36

99 Q. What is God's will for us in the third commandment?

A. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing,¹ perjury,² or unnecessary oaths,³ nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.⁴ In a word, it requires that we use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe,⁵ so that we may properly confess him,⁶ pray to him,⁷ and praise him in everything we do and say.⁸

¹ Lev. 24:10-17

² Lev. 19:12

³ Matt. 5:37; James 5:12

⁴ Lev. 5:1; Prov. 29:24

⁵ Ps. 99:1-5; Jer. 4:2

⁶ Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10

⁷ Ps. 50:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:8

⁸ Col. 3:17

100 Q. Is blasphemy of God's name by swearing and cursing really such serious sin that God is angry also with those who do not do all they can to help prevent and forbid it?

in order to worship them
or serve God through them.¹

¹ Ex. 34:13-14, 17; 2 Kings 18:4-5

98 Q. But may not images, as books for the unlearned, be permitted in churches?

A. No, we should not try to be wiser than God. He wants the Christian community instructed by the living preaching of his Word—¹ not by idols that cannot even talk.²

¹ Rom. 10:14-15, 17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:19

² Jer. 10:8; Hab. 2:18-20

Lord's Day 36

99 Q. What is God's will for us in the third commandment?

A. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing,¹ perjury,² or unnecessary oaths,³ nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.⁴ In summary, we must use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe,⁵ so that we may properly confess him,⁶ call upon him,⁷ and praise him in everything we do and say.⁸

¹ Lev. 24:10-17

² Lev. 19:12

³ Matt. 5:37; James 5:12

⁴ Lev. 5:1; Prov. 29:24

⁵ Ps. 99:1-5; Jer. 4:2

⁶ Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 10:9-10

⁷ Ps. 50:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:8

⁸ Col. 3:17

100 Q. Is blasphemy of God's name by swearing and cursing really such serious sin that God is angry also with those who do not do all they can to help prevent and forbid it?

A. Yes, indeed.¹
No sin is greater
no sin makes God more angry
than blaspheming his name.
That is why he commanded the death penalty
for it.²

¹ Lev. 5:1

² Lev. 24:10-17

Lord's Day 37

101 Q. But may we swear an oath in God's name if we do it reverently?

A. Yes, when the government demands it,
or when necessity requires it,
in order to maintain and promote truth and
trustworthiness
for God's glory and our neighbor's good.
Such oaths are approved in God's Word¹
and were rightly used by Old and New
Testaments believers.²

¹ Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Jer. 4:1-2; Heb. 6:16

² Gen. 21:24; Josh. 9:15; 1 Kings 1:29-30; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23

102 Q. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?

A. No.
A legitimate oath means calling upon God
as the one who knows my heart
to witness to my truthfulness
and to punish me if I swear falsely.¹
No creature is worthy of such honor.²

¹ Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23

² Matt. 5:34-37; 23:16-22; James 5:12

Lord's Day 38

103 Q. What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

A. First,
that the gospel ministry and education for it
be maintained,¹
and that, especially on the festive day of
rest,

A. Yes, indeed.¹
No sin is greater
or provokes God's wrath more
than blaspheming his name.
That is why he commanded it to be punished
with death.²

¹ Lev. 5:1

² Lev. 24:10-17

Lord's Day 37

101 Q. But may we swear an oath in God's name if we do it reverently?

A. Yes, when the government demands it,
or when necessity requires it,
in order to maintain and promote truth and
trustworthiness
for God's glory and our neighbor's good.
Such oath-taking is grounded in God's Word¹
and was rightly used by the saints
in the Old and New Testaments.²

¹ Deut. 6:13; 10:20; Jer. 4:1-2; Heb. 6:16

² Gen. 21:24; Josh. 9:15; 1 Kings 1:29-30; Rom. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:23

102 Q. May we also swear by saints or other created things?

A. No.
A legitimate oath is calling upon God
as the one who knows my heart
to witness to the truth
and to punish me if I swear falsely.¹
No created thing is worthy of such honor.²

¹ Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:23

² Matt. 5:34-37; 23:16-22; James 5:12

Lord's Day 38

103 Q. What is God's will for you in the fourth commandment?

A. First,
that the gospel ministry and schools for it be
maintained,¹
and that, especially on the festive day of
rest,

I regularly attend the assembly of God's people²
to learn what God's Word teaches,³
to participate in the sacraments,⁴
to pray to God publicly,⁵
and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.⁶

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.⁷

¹ Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25; 1 Cor. 9:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:13-17; Tit. 1:5

² Deut. 12:5-12; Ps. 40:9-10; 68:26; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25

³ Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 14:31-32; 1 Tim. 4:13

⁴ 1 Cor. 11:23-25

⁵ Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:1

⁶ Ps. 50:14; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9

⁷ Isa. 66:23; Heb. 4:9-11

I diligently attend the assembly of God's people²
to learn what God's Word teaches,³
to participate in the sacraments,⁴
to pray to the Lord publicly,⁵
and to bring Christian offerings for the poor.⁶

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 in this life
the eternal Sabbath.⁷

¹ Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25; 1 Cor. 9:13-14; 2 Tim. 2:2; 3:13-17; Tit. 1:5

² Deut. 12:5-12; Ps. 40:9-10; 68:26; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25

³ Rom. 10:14-17; 1 Cor. 14:31-32; 1 Tim. 4:13

⁴ 1 Cor. 11:23-25

⁵ Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:1

⁶ Ps. 50:14; 1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8 & 9

⁷ Isa. 66:23; Heb. 4:9-11

Lord's Day 39

104 Q. What is God's will for you in the fifth commandment?

- A. That I honor, love, and be loyal to my father and mother
and all those in authority over me;
That I obey and submit to them, as is proper,
when they correct and punish me;¹
and also that I be patient with their failings—²
for through them God chooses to rule us.³

¹ Ex. 21:17; Prov. 1:8; 4:1; Rom. 13:1-2; Eph. 5:21-22; 6:1-9; Col. 3:18-4:1

² Prov. 20:20; 23:22; 1 Pet. 2:18

³ Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-8; Eph. 6:1-9; Col. 3:18-21

Lord's Day 40

105 Q. What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?

- A. I am not to belittle, insult, hate or kill my neighbor—

Lord's Day 39

104 Q. What is God's will for you in the fifth commandment?

- A. That I show honor, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother
and all those in authority over me;
submit myself with proper obedience
to all their good teaching and discipline;¹
and also that I be patient with their failings—²
for by their hand God wills to rule us.³

¹ Ex. 21:17; Prov. 1:8; 4:1; Rom. 13:1-2; Eph. 5:21-22; 6:1-9; Col. 3:18-4:1

² Prov. 20:20; 23:22; 1 Pet. 2:18

³ Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-8; Eph. 6:1-9; Col. 3:18-21

Lord's Day 40

105 Q. What is God's will for you in the sixth commandment?

- A. I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—

not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture,
and certainly not by actual deeds—
and I am not to be party to this in others;¹
rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge.²
I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either.³

Prevention of murder is also why government is armed with the sword.⁴

¹ Gen. 9:6; Lev. 19:17-18; Matt. 5:21-22; 26:52

² Prov. 25:21-22; Matt. 18:35; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:26

³ Matt. 4:7; 26:52; Rom. 13:11-14

⁴ Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:14; Rom. 13:4

not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture,
and certainly not by actual deeds—
and I am not to be party to this in others;¹
rather, I am to put away all desire for revenge.²
I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself either.³

Prevention of murder is also why government is armed with the sword.⁴

¹ Gen. 9:6; Lev. 19:17-18; Matt. 5:21-22; 26:52

² Prov. 25:21-22; Matt. 18:35; Rom. 12:19; Eph. 4:26

³ Matt. 4:7; 26:52; Rom. 13:11-14

⁴ Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:14; Rom. 13:4

106 Q. Does this commandment refer only to killing?

- A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vindictiveness.¹
In God's sight all such are murder.²

¹ Prov. 14:30; Rom. 1:29; 12:19; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 John 2:9-11

² 1 John 3:15

106 Q. Does this commandment refer only to murder?

- A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vengefulness.¹
In God's sight all such are disguised forms of murder.²

¹ Prov. 14:30; Rom. 1:29; 12:19; Gal. 5:19-21; 1 John 2:9-11

² 1 John 3:15

107 Q. Is it enough then that we do not kill our neighbor in any such way?

- A. No.
By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God tells us
to love our neighbor as ourselves,¹
to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly to him,²
to protect them from harm as much as we can,
and to do good even to our enemies.³

¹ Matt. 7:12; 22:39; Rom. 12:10

² Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 6:36; Rom. 12:10, 18; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:8

³ Ex. 23:4-5; Matt. 5:44-45; Rom. 12:20-21 (Prov. 25:21-22)

107 Q. Is it enough then that we do not murder our neighbor in any such way?

- A. No.
By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us
to love our neighbors as ourselves,¹
to be patient, peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them,²
to protect them from harm as much as we can,
and to do good even to our enemies.³

¹ Matt. 7:12; 22:39; Rom. 12:10

² Matt. 5:3-12; Luke 6:36; Rom. 12:10, 18; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 3:8

³ Ex. 23:4-5; Matt. 5:44-45; Rom. 12:20-21 (Prov. 25:21-22)

108 Q. What is God's will for us in the seventh commandment?

- A. God condemns all unchastity,¹

108 Q. What is God's will for us in the seventh commandment?

- A. That God condemns all unchastity,¹

We should therefore thoroughly detest it² and, married or single, live decent and chaste lives.³

¹ Lev. 18:30; Eph. 5:3-5

² Jude 22-23

³ 1 Cor. 7:1-9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Heb. 13:4

109 Q. Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

- A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why he forbids everything which incites unchastity,¹ whether it be actions, looks talks, thoughts, or desires.²

¹ 1 Cor. 15:33; Eph. 5:18

² Matt. 5:27-29; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; Eph. 5:3-4

Lord's Day 42

110 Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?

- A. He forbids not only outright theft and robbery, punishable by law,¹ but in God's sight theft also includes cheating and swindling our neighbour by schemes made to appear legitimate,² such as: inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God.³ In addition God forbids all greed⁴ and pointless squandering of his gifts.⁵

¹ Ex. 22:1; 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:9-10

² Mic. 6:9-11; Luke 3:14; James 5:1-6

³ Deut. 25:13-16; Ps. 15:5; Prov. 11:1; 12:22; Ezek. 45:9-12; Luke 6:35

⁴ Luke 12:15; Eph. 5:5

⁵ Prov. 21:20; 23:20-21; Luke 16:10-13

and that we should therefore detest it wholeheartedly² and live decent and chaste lives,³ within or outside of the holy state of marriage.

¹ Lev. 18:30; Eph. 5:3-5

² Jude 22-23

³ 1 Cor. 7:1-9; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; Heb. 13:4

109 Q. Does God, in this commandment, forbid only such scandalous sins as adultery?

- A. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, body and soul, and God wants both to be kept clean and holy. That is why God forbids all unchaste actions, looks, talk, thoughts, or desires,¹ and whatever may incite someone to them.²

¹ Matt. 5:27-29; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; Eph. 5:3-4

² 1 Cor. 15:33; Eph. 5:18

Lord's Day 42

110 Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?

- A. He forbids not only outright theft and robbery, which governing authorities punish,¹ but in God's sight theft also includes all evil tricks and schemes designed to get our neighbor's goods for ourselves, whether by force or means that appear legitimate,² such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; excessive interest; or any other means forbidden by God.³ In addition God forbids all greed⁴ and pointless squandering of his gifts.⁵

¹ Ex. 22:1; 1 Cor. 5:9-10; 6:9-10

² Mic. 6:9-11; Luke 3:14; James 5:1-6

³ Deut. 25:13-16; Ps. 15:5; Prov. 11:1; 12:22; Ezek. 45:9-12; Luke

6:35

⁴ Luke 12:15; Eph. 5:5

⁵ Prov. 21:20; 23:20-21; Luke 16:10-13

111 Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?

- A. That I do whatever I can
for my neighbor's good,
that I treat him
as I would like others to treat me,
and that I work faithfully
so that I may share with those in need.¹

¹ Isa. 58:5-10; Matt. 7:12; Gal. 6:9-10; Eph. 4:28

111 Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?

- A. That I do whatever I can and may
for my neighbor's good,
that I treat others
as I would like them to treat me,
and that I work faithfully
so that I may help the needy in their
hardship.¹

¹ Isa. 58:5-10; Matt. 7:12; Gal. 6:9-10; Eph. 4:28

Lord's Day 43

112 Q. What is God's will for you in the ninth commandment?

- A. God's will is that I
never give false testimony against anyone,
twist no one's words,
not gossip or slander,
nor join in condemning anyone
without a hearing or without a just cause.¹

Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should
avoid lying and deceit of every kind;
these are devices the devil himself uses,
and they would call down on me God's
intense anger,²

I should love the truth,
speak it candidly,
and openly acknowledge it.³

And I should do what I can
to guard and advance my neighbor's good
name.⁴

¹ Ps. 15; Prov. 19:5; Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37; Rom. 1:28-32

² Lev. 19:11-12; Prov. 12:22; 13:5; John 8:44; Rev. 21:8a>

³ 1 Cor. 13:6; Eph. 4:25

⁴ 1 Pet. 3:8-9; 4:8

Lord's Day 44

113 Q. What is God's will for you in the tenth commandment?

Lord's Day 43

112 Q. What is God's will for you in the ninth commandment?

- A. That I
never give false testimony against anyone,
twist no one's words,
not gossip or slander,
nor join in condemning anyone
rashly or without a hearing.¹

Rather, I should avoid, under penalty of God's
wrath,²

every kind of lying and deceit
as the very works the devil;
and, in court and everywhere else,

I should love the truth,
speak it candidly,
and openly acknowledge it.³

And I should do what I can
to defend and advance my neighbor's honor
and reputation.⁴

¹ Ps. 15; Prov. 19:5; Matt. 7:1; Luke 6:37; Rom. 1:28-32

² Lev. 19:11-12; Prov. 12:22; 13:5; John 8:44; Rev. 21:8a>

³ 1 Cor. 13:6; Eph. 4:25

⁴ 1 Pet. 3:8-9; 4:8

Lord's Day 44

113 Q. What is God's will for you in the tenth commandment?

- A. That not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any one of God's commandments should ever arise in my heart.

Rather, with all my heart
I should always hate sin
and take pleasure in whatever is right.¹

¹ Ps. 19:7-14; 139:23-24; Rom. 7:7-8

114 Q. But can those converted to God obey these commandments perfectly?

- A. No.
In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience.¹

Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God's commandments.²

¹ Eccles. 7:20; Rom. 7:14-15; 1 Cor. 13:9; 1 John 1:8-10

² Ps. 1:1-2; Rom. 7:22-25; Phil. 3:12-16

115 Q. No one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, why then does God want them preached so pointedly?

- A. First, so that the longer we live
The more we may come to know our sinfulness
and the more eagerly look to Christ
for forgiveness of sins and
righteousness.¹

Second, so that
while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit,
we may never stop striving
to be renewed more and more after God's image,
until after this life we reach our goal:
perfection.²

- A. That not even the slightest desire or thought contrary to any one of God's commandments should ever arise in our hearts.

Rather, with all our hearts
we should always hate sin
and delight in all righteousness.¹

¹ Ps. 19:7-14; 139:23-24; Rom. 7:7-8

114 Q. But can those converted to God keep these commandments perfectly?

- A. No.
In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience.¹

Nevertheless, with all seriousness of purpose, they do begin to live according to all, not only some, of God's commandments.²

¹ Eccles. 7:20; Rom. 7:14-15; 1 Cor. 13:9; 1 John 1:8-10

² Ps. 1:1-2; Rom. 7:22-25; Phil. 3:12-16

115 Q. Since no one in this life can keep the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God want them preached so pointedly?

- A. First, so that all our life long
we may more and more come to know our sinful nature
and thus more eagerly seek the forgiveness of sins
and righteousness in Christ.¹

Second, so that
we may never stop striving
and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit,
so that we may be renewed more and more after God's image,
until after this life we reach our goal:
perfection.²

¹ Ps. 32:5; Rom. 3:19-26; 7:7, 24-25; 1 John 1:9

² 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 John 3:1-3

¹ Ps. 32:5; Rom. 3:19-26; 7:7, 24-25; 1 John 1:9

² 1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 John 3:1-3

The Lord's Prayer

Lord's Day 45

116 Q. Why do Christians need to pray?

- A. Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us.¹ And also because God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking him for them.²

¹ Ps. 50:14-15; 116:12-19; 1 Thess. 5:16-18

² Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-13

117 Q. How does God want us to pray so that he will listen to us?

- A. First, we must pray from the heart to no other than the one true God, who has revealed himself in his Word, asking for everything he has commanded us to ask for.¹

Second, we must acknowledge our need and misery, hiding nothing and humble ourselves in his majestic presence.²

Third, we must rest on this unshakable foundation: even though we do not deserve it, God will surely listen to our prayer because of Christ our Lord.

That is what he promised us in his Word.³

¹ Ps. 145:18-20; John 4:22-24; Rom. 8:26-27; James 1:5; 1 John 5:14-15

² 2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 2:11; 34:18; 62:8; Isa. 66:2; Rev. 4

³ Dan. 9:17-19; Matt. 7:8; John 14:13-14; 16:23; Rom. 10:13; James 1:6

118 Q. What did God command us to pray for?

- A. Everything we need, spiritually and physically,¹ as embraced in the prayer Christ our Lord himself taught us.

¹ James 1:17; Matt. 6:33

The Lord's Prayer

Lord's Day 45

116 Q. Why do Christians need to pray?

- A. Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us.¹ And also because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who continually and with heartfelt longing ask God for these gifts and thank him for them.²

¹ Ps. 50:14-15; 116:12-19; 1 Thess. 5:16-18

² Matt. 7:7-8; Luke 11:9-13

117 Q. How does God want us to pray so that he will listen to us?

- A. First, we must pray from the heart to no other than the one true God, who has revealed himself to us in his Word, asking for everything he has commanded us to ask of him.¹

Second, we must fully recognize our need and misery, so that we humble ourselves in God's majestic presence.²

Third, we must rest on this unshakable foundation:

even though we do not deserve it, God will surely listen to our prayer because of Christ our Lord, as he has promised us in his Word.³

¹ Ps. 145:18-20; John 4:22-24; Rom. 8:26-27; James 1:5; 1 John 5:14-15

² 2 Chron. 7:14; Ps. 2:11; 34:18; 62:8; Isa. 66:2; Rev. 4

³ Dan. 9:17-19; Matt. 7:8; John 14:13-14; 16:23; Rom. 10:13; James 1:6

118 Q. What has God commanded us to ask of him?

- A. Everything we need, spiritually and physically,¹ as embraced in the prayer Christ our Lord himself taught us.

¹ James 1:17; Matt. 6:33

119 Q. What is this prayer?

- A. Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
And leads us not into temptation,
But delivers us from the evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory, forever.
Amen.¹

¹ Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4

Lord’s Day 46

120 Q. Why did Christ command us to call God “our Father”?

- A. At the very beginning of our prayer Christ wants to kindle in us what is basic to our prayer—the childlike awe and trust that God through Christ has become our Father.

Our fathers do not refuse us the things of this life; God our Father will even less refuse to give us what we ask in faith.¹

¹ Matt. 7:9-11; Luke 11:11-13

121 Q. Why the words “who art in heaven”?

- A. These words teach us not to think of God’s heavenly majesty as something earthly,¹ and to expect everything for body and soul from his almighty power everything needed for body and soul.²

¹ Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-25

² Matt. 6:25-34; Rom. 8:31-32

119 Q. What is this prayer?

- A. Our Father who is in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory, forever.
Amen.¹

¹ Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4

Lord’s Day 46

120 Q. Why has Christ commanded us to address God as “our Father”?

- A. To awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer what should be basic to our prayer—a childlike reverence and trust that through Christ God has become our Father,
and will much less refuse to give us what we ask in faith than will our parents refuse us the things of this life.¹

¹ Matt. 7:9-11; Luke 11:11-13

121 Q. Why the words “who is in heaven”?

- A. These words teach us not to think of God’s heavenly majesty in an earthly way,¹ and to expect from his almighty power everything needed for body and soul.²

¹ Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-25

² Matt. 6:25-34; Rom. 8:31-32

Lord's Day 47

122 Q. What does the first request mean?

- A. "Hallowed be thy name" means:
Help us to really know you,¹
to bless, worship, and praise you
for all your works
and for all that shines forth from them:
your almighty power, wisdom, kindness,
justice, mercy, and truth.²

And it means,

Help us to direct all our living—
what we think, say, and do—
so that your name will never be blasphemed
because of us
but always honored and praised.³

¹ Jer. 9:23-24; 31:33-34; Matt. 16:17; John 17:3

² Ex. 34:5-8; Ps. 145; Jer. 32:16-20; Luke 1:46-55, 68-75; Rom. 11:33-36

³ Ps. 115:1; Matt. 5:16

Lord's Day 48

123 Q. What does the second request mean?

- A. "Thy kingdom come" means:
Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a
way
that more and more we submit to you.¹

Keep your church strong, and add to it.²

Destroy the devil's work;
destroy every force which revolts against you
and every conspiracy against your Word.³
Do this until your kingdom is so complete and
perfect
that in it you are
all in all.⁴

¹ Ps. 119:5, 105; 143:10; Matt. 6:33

² Ps. 122:6-9; Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:42-47

³ Rom. 16:20; 1 John 3:8

⁴ Rom. 8:22-23; 1 Cor. 15:28; Rev. 22:17, 20

Lord's Day 47

122 Q. What does the first petition mean?

- A. "Hallowed be your name" means:
Help us to truly know you,¹
to honor, glorify, and praise you
for all your works
and for all that shines forth from them:
your almighty power, wisdom, kindness,
justice, mercy, and truth.²

And it means,

Help us to direct all our living—
what we think, say, and do—
so that your name will never be blasphemed
because of us
but always honored and praised.³

¹ Jer. 9:23-24; 31:33-34; Matt. 16:17; John 17:3

² Ex. 34:5-8; Ps. 145; Jer. 32:16-20; Luke 1:46-55, 68-75; Rom. 11:33-36

³ Ps. 115:1; Matt. 5:16

Lord's Day 48

123 Q. What does the second petition mean?

- A. "Your kingdom come" means:
Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a
way
that more and more we submit to you.¹

Preserve and increase your church.²

Destroy the devil's work;
destroy every force which revolts against you
and every conspiracy against your holy
Word.³

Do all this until your kingdom fully comes,
when you will be
all in all.⁴

¹ Ps. 119:5, 105; 143:10; Matt. 6:33

² Ps. 122:6-9; Matt. 16:18; Acts 2:42-47

³ Rom. 16:20; 1 John 3:8

⁴ Rom. 8:22-23; 1 Cor. 15:28; Rev. 22:17, 20

Lord's Day 49

124 Q. What does the third request mean?

A. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" means:

Help us and all men
to reject our own wills
and to obey your will without any back talk.
Your will alone is good.¹

Help everyone carry out the work he is called to,²
as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.³

¹ Matt. 7:21; 16:24-26; Luke 22:42; Rom. 12:1-2; Tit. 2:11-12

² 1 Cor. 7:17-24; Eph. 6:5-9

³ Ps. 103:20-21

Lord's Day 49

124 Q. What does the third petition mean?

A. "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" means:

Help us and all people
to renounce our own wills
and without any back talk to obey your will,
for it alone is good.¹

Help everyone carry out his office and calling,²
as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven.³

¹ Matt. 7:21; 16:24-26; Luke 22:42; Rom. 12:1-2; Tit. 2:11-12

² 1 Cor. 7:17-24; Eph. 6:5-9

³ Ps. 103:20-21

Lord's Day 50

125 Q. What does the fourth request mean?

A. "Give us this day our daily bread" means:
Do take care of all our physical needs¹
so that we come to know
that you are the only source of everything good,²
and that neither our work and worry
nor your gifts
can do us any good without your blessing.³

And so help us to give up our trust in creatures
and to put trust in you alone.⁴

¹ Ps. 104:27-30; 145:15-16; Matt. 6:25-34

² Acts 14:17; 17:25; James 1:17

³ Deut. 8:3; Ps. 37:16; 127:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:58

⁴ Ps. 55:22; 62; 146; Jer. 17:5-8; Heb. 13:5-6

Lord's Day 50

125 Q. What does the fourth petition mean?

A. "Give us this day our daily bread" means:
Provide for all our physical needs¹
so that we may recognize
that you are the only source of everything good,²
and that neither our care and work
nor your gifts
can do us any good without your blessing.³
Therefore may we withdraw our trust from all
creatures
and place it in you alone.⁴

¹ Ps. 104:27-30; 145:15-16; Matt. 6:25-34

² Acts 14:17; 17:25; James 1:17

³ Deut. 8:3; Ps. 37:16; 127:1-2; 1 Cor. 15:58

⁴ Ps. 55:22; 62; 146; Jer. 17:5-8; Heb. 13:5-6

Lord's Day 51

126 Q. What does the fifth request mean?

A. "Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors" means:

Lord's Day 51

126 Q. What does the fifth petition mean?

A. "Forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors" means:

Because of Christ's blood,
do not hold against us, poor sinners that we
are,
any of the sins we do
or the evil that constantly clings to us.¹

Forgive us just as we are fully determined,
as evidence of your grace in us,
to forgive our neighbors.²

¹ Ps. 51:1-7; 143:2; Rom. 8:1; 1 John 2:1-2

² Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35

Because of Christ's blood,
do not impute to us, poor sinners that we are,
any of the transgressions we do
or the evil that constantly clings to us.¹
Forgive us just as we are fully determined,
as evidence of your grace in us,
wholeheartedly to forgive our neighbors.²

¹ Ps. 51:1-7; 143:2; Rom. 8:1; 1 John 2:1-2

² Matt. 6:14-15; 18:21-35

Lord's Day 52

127 Q. What does the sixth request mean?

- A. "And lead us not into temptation but delivers us from evil means:
By ourselves we are to weak
to hold our own even for a moment.¹

And our sworn enemies—
the devil,² the world,³ and our own flesh—⁴
never stop attacking us.

And so, Lord,
uphold us and make us strong
with the strength of your Holy Spirit,
so that we may not go down to defeat
in this spiritual struggle,⁵
but may firmly resist our enemies
until we finally win the complete victory.⁶

¹ Ps. 103:14-16; John 15:1-5

² 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:10-13; 1 Pet. 5:8

³ John 15:18-21

⁴ Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:17

⁵ Matt. 10:19-20; 26:41; Mark 13:33; Rom. 5:3-5

⁶ 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23

128 Q. What does your conclusion to this prayer mean?

- A. "For thine is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory forever" means:

We have made all these requests of you
because, as our all-powerful king,

Lord's Day 52

127 Q. What does the sixth petition mean?

- A. "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" means:
We are so weak that we cannot stand
on our own for a moment,¹
and our sworn enemies—
the devil,² the world,³ and our own flesh—⁴
never stop attacking us.

And so, Lord,
uphold us and make us strong
by the power of your Holy Spirit,
so that we may not be defeated
in this spiritual fight,⁵
but may firmly resist our enemies
until we finally win the complete victory.⁶

¹ Ps. 103:14-16; John 15:1-5

² 2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:10-13; 1 Pet. 5:8

³ John 15:18-21

⁴ Rom. 7:23; Gal. 5:17

⁵ Matt. 10:19-20; 26:41; Mark 13:33; Rom. 5:3-5

⁶ 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Thess. 3:13; 5:23

128 Q. How do you conclude this prayer?

- A. "For yours is the kingdom
and the power
and the glory forever."

This means
we have made all these petitions of you
because, as our all-powerful king,

you not only want to,
but are able to give us all that is good;¹
and because your holy name,
and not we ourselves,
should receive all the praise, forever.²

¹ Rom. 10:11-13; 2 Pet. 2:9

² Ps. 115:1; John 14:13

**129 Q. What does that little word “Amen”
express?**

A. “Amen” means:

This is sure to be!

It is even more sure
that God listens to my prayer
than that I really desire
what I pray for.¹

¹ Isa. 65:24; 2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:13

you are both willing and able
to give us all that is good;¹
and because your holy name,
and not we ourselves,
should receive all the praise, forever.²

¹ Rom. 10:11-13; 2 Pet. 2:9

² Ps. 115:1; John 14:13

**129 Q. What does that little word “Amen”
express?**

A. “Amen” means:

This shall truly and surely be!

For it is much more certain
that God has heard my prayer
than I feel in my heart
that I desire such things from him.¹

¹ Isa. 65:24; 2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:13

The Canons of Dort

Formally Titled

The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands Previous Version The First Main Point of Doctrine Divine Election and Reprobation

The Judgment Concerning Divine Predestination Which the Synod Declares to Be in Agreement with the Word of God and Accepted Till Now in the Reformed Churches, Set Forth in Several Articles

Article 1: God's Right to Condemn All People

Since all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death, God would have done no one an injustice if it had been his will to leave the entire human race in sin and under the curse, and to condemn them on account of their sin. As the apostle says: "The whole world is liable to the condemnation of God" (Rom. 3:19), "All have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23).*

Article 2: The Manifestation of God's Love

But this is how God showed his love: he sent his only begotten Son into the world, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (1 John 4:9; John 3:16).

Article 3: The Preaching of the Gospel

In order that people may be brought to faith, God mercifully sends proclaimers of this very joyful message to the people he wishes and at the time he wishes. By this ministry people are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified. For "how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without someone preaching? And how shall they preach unless they have been sent?" (Rom. 10:14-15).

Article 4: A Twofold Response to the Gospel

God's anger remains on those who do not believe this gospel. But those who do receive it and embrace Jesus the Savior with a true and living faith are delivered through him from God's anger and from destruction, and receive the gift of eternal life.

Article 5: The Sources of Unbelief and of Faith

The cause or blame for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is not at all in God, but in man. Faith in Jesus Christ, however, and salvation through him is a free gift of God. As Scripture says, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves; it is a gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Likewise: "It has been freely given to you to believe in Christ" (Phil. 1:29).

* All quotations from Scripture are translations of the original Latin manuscript

Article 6: God's Eternal Decision

The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from his eternal decision. For "all his works are known to God from eternity" (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decision he graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of his chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by his just judgment he leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us his act—unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just—of distinguishing between people equally lost. This is the well-known decision of election and reprobation revealed in God's Word. This decision the wicked, impure, and unstable distort to their own ruin, but it provides holy and godly souls with comfort beyond words.

Article 7: Election

Election [or choosing] is God's unchangeable purpose by which he did the following:

Before the foundation of the world, by sheer grace, according to the free good pleasure of his will, he chose in Christ to salvation a definite number of particular people out of the entire human race, which had fallen by its own fault from its original innocence into sin and ruin. Those chosen were neither better nor more deserving than the others, but lay with them in the common misery. He did this in Christ, whom he also appointed from eternity to be the mediator, the head of all those chosen, and the foundation of their salvation. And so he decided to give the chosen ones to Christ to be saved, and to call and draw them effectively into Christ's fellowship through his Word and Spirit. In other words, he decided to grant them true faith in Christ, to justify them, to sanctify them, and finally, after powerfully preserving them in the fellowship of his Son, to glorify them.

God did all this in order to demonstrate his mercy, to the praise of the riches of his glorious grace.

As Scripture says, "God chose us in Christ, before the foundation of the world, so that we should be holy and blameless before him with love; he predestined us whom he adopted as his children through Jesus Christ, in himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, by which he freely made us pleasing to himself in his beloved" (Eph. 1:4-6). And elsewhere, "Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

Article 8: A Single Decision of Election

This election is not of many kinds; it is one and the same election for all who were to be saved in the Old and the New Testament. For Scripture declares that there is a single good pleasure, purpose, and plan of God's will, by which he chose us from eternity both to grace and to glory, both to salvation and to the way of salvation, which he prepared in advance for us to walk in.

Article 9: Election Not Based on Foreseen Faith

This same election took place, not on the basis of foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather for the purpose of faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on. Accordingly, election is the source of each of the benefits of salvation. Faith, holiness, and the other saving gifts, and at last eternal life itself, flow forth from election as its fruits and effects. As the apostle says, “He chose us” (not because we were, but) “so that we should be holy and blameless before him in love” (Eph. 1:4).

Article 10: Election Based on God’s Good Pleasure

But the cause of this undeserved election is exclusively the good pleasure of God. This does not involve his choosing certain human qualities or actions from among all those possible as a condition of salvation, but rather involves his adopting certain particular persons from among the common mass of sinners as his own possession. As Scripture says, “When the children were not yet born, and had done nothing either good or bad..., she” (Rebecca) was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Rom. 9:11-13). Also, “All who were appointed for eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

Article 11: Election Unchangeable

Just as God himself is most wise, unchangeable, all-knowing, and almighty, so the election made by him can neither be suspended nor altered, revoked, or annulled; neither can his chosen ones be cast off, nor their number reduced.

Article 12: The Assurance of Election

Assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election to salvation is given to the chosen in due time, though by various stages and in differing measure. Such assurance comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God’s Word—such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for righteousness, and so on.

Article 13: The Fruit of This Assurance

In their awareness and assurance of this election God’s children daily find greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of his mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to him who first so greatly loved them. This is far from saying that this teaching concerning election, and reflection upon it, make God’s children lax in observing his commandments or carnally self-assured. By God’s just judgment this does usually happen to those who casually take for granted the grace of election or engage in idle and brazen talk about it but are unwilling to walk in the ways of the chosen.

Article 14: Teaching Election Properly

Just as, by God’s wise plan, this teaching concerning divine election has been proclaimed through the prophets, Christ himself, and the apostles, in Old and New Testament times, and has subsequently been committed to writing in the Holy Scriptures, so also today in God’s church, for which it was specifically intended, this teaching must be set forth—with a spirit of discretion, in a godly and holy manner, at the appropriate time and place, without inquisitive searching into the ways of the Most High. This must be done for the glory of God’s most holy name, and for the lively comfort of his people.

Article 15: Reprobation

Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God’s eternal election— those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decision:

to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish them (having been left in their own ways and under his just judgment), not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice.

And this is the decision of reprobation, which does not at all make God the author of sin (a blasphemous thought!) but rather its fearful, irreproachable, just judge and avenger.

Article 16: Responses to the Teaching of Reprobation

Those who do not yet actively experience within themselves a living faith in Christ or an assured confidence of heart, peace of conscience, a zeal for childlike obedience, and a glorying in God through Christ, but who nevertheless use the means by which God has promised to work these things in us—such people ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to count themselves among the reprobate; rather they ought to continue diligently in the use of the means, to desire fervently a time of more abundant grace, and to wait for it in reverence and humility. On the other hand, those who seriously desire to turn to God, to be pleasing to him alone, and to be delivered from the body of death, but are not yet able to make such progress along the way of godliness and faith as they would like—such people ought much less to stand in fear of the teaching concerning reprobation, since our merciful God has promised that he will not snuff out a smoldering wick and that he will not break a bruised reed. However, those who have forgotten God and their Savior Jesus Christ and have abandoned themselves wholly to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh— such people have every reason to stand in fear of this teaching, as long as they do not seriously turn to God.

Article 17: Children of Believers Who Die in Infancy

Since we must make judgments about God's will from his Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but by virtue of the gracious covenant in which they together with their parents are included, godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in infancy.

Article 18: The Proper Attitude Toward Election and Reprobation To those who complain about this grace of an undeserved election and about the severity of a just reprobation, we reply with the words of the apostle, "Who are you, O man, to talk back to God?" (Rom. 9:20), and with the words of our Savior, "Have I no right to do what I want with my own?" (Matt. 20:15). We, however, with reverent adoration of these secret things, cry out with the apostle: "Oh, the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways beyond tracing out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen" (Rom. 11:33-36).

Rejection of Errors

Rejection of the Errors by Which the Dutch Churches Have for Some Time Been Disturbed

Having set forth the orthodox teaching concerning election and reprobation, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I

Who teach that the will of God to save those who would believe and persevere in faith and in the obedience of faith is the whole and entire decision of election to salvation, and that nothing else concerning this decision has been revealed in God's Word.

For they deceive the simple and plainly contradict Holy Scripture in its testimony that God does not only wish to save those who would believe, but that he has also from eternity chosen certain particular people to whom, rather than to others, he would within time grant faith in Christ and perseverance. As Scripture says, I have revealed your name to those whom you gave me (John 17:6). Likewise, All who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48), and He chose us before the foundation of the world so that we should be holy... (Eph. 1:4).

II

Who teach that God's election to eternal life is of many kinds: one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and the latter in turn either incomplete, revocable, nonperemptory (or conditional), or else complete, irrevocable, and peremptory (or absolute). Likewise, who teach that there is one election to faith and another to salvation, so that there can be an election to justifying faith apart from a peremptory election to salvation.

For this is an invention of the human brain, devised apart from the Scriptures, which distorts the teaching concerning election and breaks up this golden chain of salvation: Those whom he predestined, he also called; and those whom he called, he also justified; and those whom he justified, he also glorified (Rom. 8:30).

III

Who teach that God's good pleasure and purpose, which Scripture mentions in its teaching of election, does not involve God's choosing certain particular people rather than others, but involves God's choosing, out of all possible conditions (including the works of the law) or out of the whole order of things, the intrinsically unworthy act of faith, as well as the imperfect obedience of faith, to be a condition of salvation; and it involves his graciously wishing to count this as perfect obedience and to look upon it as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For by this pernicious error the good pleasure of God and the merit of Christ are robbed of their effectiveness and people are drawn away, by unprofitable inquiries, from the truth of undeserved justification and from the simplicity of the Scriptures. It also gives the lie to these words of the apostle: God called us with a holy calling, not in virtue of works, but in virtue of his own purpose and the grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time (2 Tim. 1:9).

IV

Who teach that in election to faith a prerequisite condition is that man should rightly use the light of nature, be upright, unassuming, humble, and disposed to eternal life, as though election depended to some extent on these factors.

For this smacks of Pelagius, and it clearly calls into question the words of the apostle: We lived at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in transgressions, made us alive with Christ, by whose grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with him and seated us with him in heaven in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages we might show the surpassing riches of his grace, according to his kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith (and this not from yourselves; it is the gift of God) not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 2:3-9).

V

Who teach that the incomplete and nonperemptory election of particular persons to salvation occurred on the basis of a foreseen faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness, which has just begun or continued for some time; but that complete and peremptory election occurred on the basis of a foreseen perseverance to the end in faith, repentance, holiness, and godliness. And that this is the gracious and evangelical worthiness, on account of which the one who is chosen is more worthy than the one who is not

chosen. And therefore that faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits or effects of an unchangeable election to glory, but indispensable conditions and causes, which are prerequisite in those who are to be chosen in the complete election, and which are foreseen as achieved in them.

This runs counter to the entire Scripture, which throughout impresses upon our ears and hearts these sayings among others: Election is not by works, but by him who calls (Rom. 9:11-12); All who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48); He chose us in himself so that we should be holy (Eph. 1:4); You did not choose me, but I chose you (John 15:16); If by grace, not by works (Rom. 11:6); In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son (1 John 4:10).

VI

Who teach that not every election to salvation is unchangeable, but that some of the chosen can perish and do in fact perish eternally, with no decision of God to prevent it.

By this gross error they make God changeable, destroy the comfort of the godly concerning the steadfastness of their election, and contradict the Holy Scriptures, which teach that the elect cannot be led astray (Matt. 24:24), that Christ does not lose those given to him by the Father (John 6:39), and that those whom God predestined, called, and justified, he also glorifies (Rom. 8:30).

VII

Who teach that in this life there is no fruit, no awareness, and no assurance of one's unchangeable election to glory, except as conditional upon something changeable and contingent.

For not only is it absurd to speak of an uncertain assurance, but these things also militate against the experience of the saints, who with the apostle rejoice from an awareness of their election and sing the praises of this gift of God; who, as Christ urged, rejoice with his disciples that their names have been written in heaven (Luke 10:20); and finally who hold up against the flaming arrows of the devil's temptations the awareness of their election, with the question Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? (Rom. 8:33).

VIII

Who teach that it was not on the basis of his just will alone that God decided to leave anyone in the fall of Adam and in the common state of sin and condemnation or to pass anyone by in the imparting of grace necessary for faith and conversion.

For these words stand fast: He has mercy on whom he wishes, and he hardens whom he wishes (Rom. 9:18). And also: To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given (Matt. 13:11). Likewise: I give glory to you, Father, Lord of heaven

and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, and have revealed them to little children; yes, Father, because that was your pleasure (Matt. 11:25-26).

IX

Who teach that the cause for God's sending the gospel to one people rather than to another is not merely and solely God's good pleasure, but rather that one people is better and worthier than the other to whom the gospel is not communicated.

For Moses contradicts this when he addresses the people of Israel as follows: Behold, to Jehovah your God belong the heavens and the highest heavens, the earth and whatever is in it. But Jehovah was inclined in his affection to love your ancestors alone, and chose out their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day (Deut. 10:14-15). And also Christ: Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! for if those mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes (Matt. 11:21).

The Second Main Point of Doctrine

Christ's Death and Human Redemption Through It

Article 1: The Punishment Which God's Justice Requires God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. His justice requires (as he has revealed himself in the Word) that the sins we have committed against his infinite majesty be punished with both temporal and eternal punishments, of soul as well as body. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is given to God's justice.

Article 2: The Satisfaction Made by Christ

Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God's anger, God in his boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.

Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ's Death

This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

Article 4: Reasons for This Infinite Value

This death is of such great value and worth for the reason that the person who suffered it is—as was necessary to be our Savior—not only a true and perfectly holy man, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Another reason is that this death was accompanied by the experience of God's anger and curse, which we by our sins had fully deserved.

Article 5: The Mandate to Proclaim the Gospel to All

Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel.

Article 6: Unbelief Man's Responsibility

However, that many who have been called through the gospel do not repent or believe in Christ but perish in unbelief is not because the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross is deficient or insufficient, but because they themselves are at fault.

Article 7: Faith God's Gift

But all who genuinely believe and are delivered and saved by Christ's death from their sins and from destruction receive this favor solely from God's grace—which he owes to no one—given to them in Christ from eternity.

Article 8: The Saving Effectiveness of Christ's Death

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all his chosen ones, in order that he might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that he should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death); that he should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.

Article 9: The Fulfillment of God's Plan

This plan, arising out of God's eternal love for his chosen ones, from the beginning of the world to the present time has been powerfully carried out and will also be carried out in the future, the gates of hell seeking vainly to prevail against it. As a result the chosen are gathered into one, all in their own time, and there is always a church of believers founded on Christ's blood, a church which steadfastly loves, persistently worships, and—here and in all eternity—praises him as her Savior who laid down his life for her on the cross, as a bridegroom for his bride.

Rejection of Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I

Who teach that God the Father appointed his Son to death on the cross without a fixed and definite plan to save anyone by name, so that the necessity, usefulness, and worth of what Christ's death obtained could have stood intact and altogether perfect, complete and whole, even if the redemption that was obtained had never in actual fact been applied to any individual.

For this assertion is an insult to the wisdom of God the Father and to the merit of Jesus Christ, and it is contrary to Scripture. For the Savior speaks as follows: I lay down my life for the sheep, and I know them (John 10:15, 27). And Isaiah the prophet says concerning the Savior: When he shall make himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand (Isa. 53:10). Finally, this undermines the article of the creed in which we confess what we believe concerning the Church.

II

Who teach that the purpose of Christ's death was not to establish in actual fact a new covenant of grace by his blood, but only to acquire for the Father the mere right to enter once more into a covenant with men, whether of grace or of works.

For this conflicts with Scripture, which teaches that Christ has become the guarantee and mediator of a better—that is, a new—covenant (Heb. 7:22; 9:15), and that a will is in force only when someone has died (Heb. 9:17).

III

Who teach that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, did not certainly merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation, but only acquired for the Father the authority or plenary will to relate in a new way with men and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of these conditions depends on the free choice of man; consequently, that it was possible that either all or none would fulfill them.

For they have too low an opinion of the death of Christ, do not at all acknowledge the foremost fruit or benefit which it brings forth, and summon back from hell the Pelagian error.

IV

Who teach that what is involved in the new covenant of grace which God the Father made with men through the intervening of Christ's death is not that we are justified before God and saved through faith, insofar as it accepts Christ's merit, but rather that God, having withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, counts faith itself, and the imperfect obedience

of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For they contradict Scripture: They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ, whom God presented as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood (Rom. 3:24-25). And along with the ungodly Socinus, they introduce a new and foreign justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church.

V

Who teach that all people have been received into the state of reconciliation and into the grace of the covenant, so that no one on account of original sin is liable to condemnation, or is to be condemned, but that all are free from the guilt of this sin.

For this opinion conflicts with Scripture which asserts that we are by nature children of wrath.

VI

Who make use of the distinction between obtaining and applying in order to instill in the unwary and inexperienced the opinion that God, as far as he is concerned, wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits which are gained by Christ's death; but that the distinction by which some rather than others come to share in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depends on their own free choice (which applies itself to the grace offered indiscriminately) but does not depend on the unique gift of mercy which effectively works in them, so that they, rather than others, apply that grace to themselves.

For, while pretending to set forth this distinction in an acceptable sense, they attempt to give the people the deadly poison of Pelagianism.

VII

Who teach that Christ neither could die, nor had to die, nor did die for those whom God so dearly loved and chose to eternal life, since such people do not need the death of Christ.

For they contradict the apostle, who says: Christ loved me and gave himself up for me (Gal. 2:20), and likewise: Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died, that is, for them (Rom. 8:33-34). They also contradict the Savior, who asserts: I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:15), and My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15:12-13).

The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine

Human Corruption, Conversion to God, and the Way It Occurs

Article 1: The Effect of the Fall on Human Nature

Man was originally created in the image of God and was furnished in his mind with a true and salutary knowledge of his Creator and things spiritual, in his will and heart with righteousness, and in all his emotions with purity; indeed, the whole man was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by his own free will, he deprived himself of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place he brought upon himself blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his emotions.

Article 2: The Spread of Corruption

Man brought forth children of the same nature as himself after the fall. That is to say, being corrupt he brought forth corrupt children. The corruption spread, by God's just judgment, from Adam to all his descendants—except for Christ alone—not by way of imitation (as in former times the Pelagians would have it) but by way of the propagation of his perverted nature.

Article 3: Total Inability

Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform.

Article 4: The Inadequacy of the Light of Nature

There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways he completely distorts this light, whatever its precise character, and suppresses it in unrighteousness. In doing so he renders himself without excuse before God.

Article 5: The Inadequacy of the Law

In this respect, what is true of the light of nature is true also of the Ten Commandments given by God through Moses specifically to the Jews. For man cannot obtain saving grace through the Decalogue, because, although it does expose the magnitude of his sin and increasingly convict him of his guilt, yet it does not offer a remedy or enable him to escape from his misery, and, indeed, weakened as it is by the flesh, leaves the offender under the curse.

Article 6: The Saving Power of the Gospel

What, therefore, neither the light of nature nor the law can do, God accomplishes by the power of the Holy Spirit, through the Word or the ministry of reconciliation. This is the gospel about the Messiah, through which it has pleased God to save believers, in both the Old and the New Testament.

Article 7: God's Freedom in Revealing the Gospel

In the Old Testament, God revealed this secret of his will to a small number; in the New Testament (now without any distinction between peoples) he discloses it to a large number. The reason for this difference must not be ascribed to the greater worth of one nation over another, or to a better use of the light of nature, but to the free good pleasure and undeserved love of God. Therefore, those who receive so much grace, beyond and in spite of all they deserve, ought to acknowledge it with humble and thankful hearts; on the other hand, with the apostle they ought to adore (but certainly not inquisitively search into) the severity and justice of God's judgments on the others, who do not receive this grace.

Article 8: The Serious Call of the Gospel

Nevertheless, all who are called through the gospel are called seriously. For seriously and most genuinely God makes known in his Word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to him. Seriously he also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to him and believe.

Article 9: Human Responsibility for Rejecting the Gospel The fact that many who are called through the ministry of the gospel do not come and are not brought to conversion must not be blamed on the gospel, nor on Christ, who is offered through the gospel, nor on God, who calls them through the gospel and even bestows various gifts on them, but on the people themselves who are called. Some in self-assurance do not even entertain the Word of life; others do entertain it but do not take it to heart, and for that reason, after the fleeting joy of a temporary faith, they relapse; others choke the seed of the Word with the thorns of life's cares and with the pleasures of the world and bring forth no fruits. This our Savior teaches in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13).

Article 10: Conversion as the Work of God

The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to man, as though one distinguishes himself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity he chose his own in Christ, so within time he effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance, and, having rescued them from the dominion of darkness, brings them into the kingdom of his Son, in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light, and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture.

Article 11: The Holy Spirit's Work in Conversion

Moreover, when God carries out this good pleasure in his chosen ones, or works true conversion in them, he not only sees to it that the gospel is proclaimed to them outwardly, and enlightens their minds powerfully by the Holy Spirit so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God, but, by the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit, he also penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised. He infuses new qualities into the will, making the dead will alive, the evil one good, the unwilling one willing, and the stubborn one compliant; he activates and strengthens the will so that, like a good tree, it may be enabled to produce the fruits of good deeds.

Article 12: Regeneration a Supernatural Work

And this is the regeneration, the new creation, the raising from the dead, and the making alive so clearly proclaimed in the Scriptures, which God works in us without our help. But this certainly does not happen only by outward teaching, by moral persuasion, or by such a way of working that, after God has done his work, it remains in man's power whether or not to be reborn or converted. Rather, it is an entirely supernatural work, one that is at the same time most powerful and most pleasing, a marvelous, hidden, and inexpressible work, which is not lesser than or inferior in power to that of creation or of raising the dead, as Scripture (inspired by the author of this work) teaches. As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unfailingly, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, man himself, by that grace which he has received, is also rightly said to believe and to repent.

Article 13: The Incomprehensible Way of Regeneration In this life believers cannot fully understand the way this work occurs; meanwhile, they rest content with knowing and experiencing that by this grace of God they do believe with the heart and love their Savior.

Article 14: The Way God Gives Faith

In this way, therefore, faith is a gift of God, not in the sense that it is offered by God for man to choose, but that it is in actual fact bestowed on man, breathed and infused into him. Nor is it a gift in the sense that God bestows only the potential to believe, but then awaits assent - the act of believing - from man's choice; rather, it is a gift in the sense that he who works both willing and acting and, indeed, works all things in all people produces in man both the will to believe and the belief itself.

Article 15: Responses to God's Grace

God does not owe this grace to anyone. For what could God owe to one who has nothing to give that can be paid back? Indeed, what could God owe to one who has nothing of his own to give but sin and falsehood? Therefore the person who receives this grace owes and gives eternal thanks to God alone; the person who does not receive it either does not care at all

about these spiritual things and is satisfied with himself in his condition, or else in self-assurance foolishly boasts about having something which he lacks. Furthermore, following the example of the apostles, we are to think and to speak in the most favorable way about those who outwardly profess their faith and better their lives, for the inner chambers of the heart are unknown to us. But for others who have not yet been called, we are to pray to the God who calls things that do not exist as though they did. In no way, however, are we to pride ourselves as better than they, as though we had distinguished ourselves from them.

Article 16: Regeneration's Effect

However, just as by the fall man did not cease to be man, endowed with intellect and will, and just as sin, which has spread through the whole human race, did not abolish the nature of the human race but distorted and spiritually killed it, so also this divine grace of regeneration does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back. As a result, a ready and sincere obedience of the Spirit now begins to prevail where before the rebellion and resistance of the flesh were completely dominant. It is in this that the true and spiritual restoration and freedom of our will consists. Thus, if the marvelous Maker of every good thing were not dealing with us, man would have no hope of getting up from his fall by his free choice, by which he plunged himself into ruin when still standing upright.

Article 17: God's Use of Means in Regeneration

Just as the almighty work of God by which he brings forth and sustains our natural life does not rule out but requires the use of means, by which God, according to his infinite wisdom and goodness, has wished to exercise his power, so also the aforementioned supernatural work of God by which he regenerates us in no way rules out or cancels the use of the gospel, which God in his great wisdom has appointed to be the seed of regeneration and the food of the soul. For this reason, the apostles and the teachers who followed them taught the people in a godly manner about this grace of God, to give him the glory and to humble all pride, and yet did not neglect meanwhile to keep the people, by means of the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline. So even today it is out of the question that the teachers or those taught in the church should presume to test God by separating what he in his good pleasure has wished to be closely joined together. For grace is bestowed through admonitions, and the more readily we perform our duty, the more lustrous the benefit of God working in us usually is and the better his work advances. To him alone, both for the means and for their saving fruit and effectiveness, all glory is owed forever. Amen.

Rejection of Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I

Who teach that, properly speaking, it cannot be said that original sin in itself is enough to condemn the whole human race or to warrant temporal and eternal punishments.

For they contradict the apostle when he says: Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death passed on to all men because all sinned (Rom. 5:12); also: The guilt followed one sin and brought condemnation (Rom. 5:16); likewise: The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

II

Who teach that the spiritual gifts or the good dispositions and virtues such as goodness, holiness, and righteousness could not have resided in man's will when he was first created, and therefore could not have been separated from the will at the fall.

For this conflicts with the apostle's description of the image of God in Ephesians 4:24, where he portrays the image in terms of righteousness and holiness, which definitely reside in the will.

III

Who teach that in spiritual death the spiritual gifts have not been separated from man's will, since the will in itself has never been corrupted but only hindered by the darkness of the mind and the unruliness of the emotions, and since the will is able to exercise its innate free capacity once these hindrances are removed, which is to say, it is able of itself to will or choose whatever good is set before it—or else not to will or choose it.

This is a novel idea and an error and has the effect of elevating the power of free choice, contrary to the words of Jeremiah the prophet: The heart itself is deceitful above all things and wicked (Jer. 17:9); and of the words of the apostle: All of us also lived among them (the sons of disobedience) at one time in the passions of our flesh, following the will of our flesh and thoughts (Eph. 2:3).

IV

Who teach that unregenerate man is not strictly or totally dead in his sins or deprived of all capacity for spiritual good but is able to hunger and thirst for righteousness or life and to offer the sacrifice of a broken and contrite spirit which is pleasing to God.

For these views are opposed to the plain testimonies of Scripture: You were dead in your transgressions and sins (Eph. 2:1, 5); The imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is only evil all the time (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Besides, to hunger and thirst for deliverance from misery and for life, and to offer God

the sacrifice of a broken spirit is characteristic only of the regenerate and of those called blessed (Ps. 51:17; Matt. 5:6).

V

Who teach that corrupt and natural man can make such good use of common grace (by which they mean the light of nature) or of the gifts remaining after the fall that he is able thereby gradually to obtain a greater grace—evangelical or saving grace—as well as salvation itself; and that in this way God, for his part, shows himself ready to reveal Christ to all people, since he provides to all, to a sufficient extent and in an effective manner, the means necessary for the revealing of Christ, for faith, and for repentance.

For Scripture, not to mention the experience of all ages, testifies that this is false: He makes known his words to Jacob, his statutes and his laws to Israel; he has done this for no other nation, and they do not know his laws (Ps. 147:19-20); In the past God let all nations go their own way (Acts 14:16); They (Paul and his companions) were kept by the Holy Spirit from speaking God's word in Asia; and When they had come to Mysia, they tried to go to Bithynia, but the Spirit would not allow them to (Acts 16:6-7).

VI

Who teach that in the true conversion of man new qualities, dispositions, or gifts cannot be infused or poured into his will by God, and indeed that the faith [or believing] by which we first come to conversion and from which we receive the name “believers” is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man, and that it cannot be called a gift except in respect to the power of attaining faith.

For these views contradict the Holy Scriptures, which testify that God does infuse or pour into our hearts the new qualities of faith, obedience, and the experiencing of his love: I will put my law in their minds, and write it on their hearts (Jer. 31:33); I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring (Isa. 44:3); The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us (Rom. 5:5). They also conflict with the continuous practice of the Church, which prays with the prophet: Convert me, Lord, and I shall be converted (Jer. 31:18).

VII

Who teach that the grace by which we are converted to God is nothing but a gentle persuasion, or (as others explain it) that the way of God's acting in man's conversion that is most noble and suited to human nature is that which happens by persuasion, and that nothing prevents this grace of moral suasion even by itself from making natural men spiritual; indeed, that God does not produce the assent of the will except in this manner of moral suasion, and that the effectiveness of God's work by which it surpasses the work of Satan consists in the fact that God promises eternal benefits while Satan promises temporal ones.

For this teaching is entirely Pelagian and contrary to the whole of Scripture, which recognizes besides this persuasion also another, far more effective and divine way in which the Holy Spirit acts in man's conversion. As Ezekiel 36:26 puts it: I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; and I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh....

VIII

Who teach that God in regenerating man does not bring to bear that power of his omnipotence whereby he may powerfully and unfailingly bend man's will to faith and conversion, but that even when God has accomplished all the works of grace which he uses for man's conversion, man nevertheless can, and in actual fact often does, so resist God and the Spirit in their intent and will to regenerate him, that man completely thwarts his own rebirth; and, indeed, that it remains in his own power whether or not to be reborn.

For this does away with all effective functioning of God's grace in our conversion and subjects the activity of Almighty God to the will of man; it is contrary to the apostles, who teach that we believe by virtue of the effective working of God's mighty strength (Eph. 1:19), and that God fulfills the undeserved good will of his kindness and the work of faith in us with power (2 Thess. 1:11), and likewise that his divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3).

IX

Who teach that grace and free choice are concurrent partial causes which cooperate to initiate conversion, and that grace does not precede—in the order of causality—the effective influence of the will; that is to say, that God does not effectively help man's will to come to conversion before man's will itself motivates and determines itself.

For the early church already condemned this doctrine long ago in the Pelagians, on the basis of the words of the apostle: It does not depend on man's willing or running but on God's mercy (Rom. 9:16); also: Who makes you different from anyone else? and What do you have that you did not receive? (1 Cor. 4:7); likewise: It is God who works in you to will and act according to his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

The Fifth Main Point of Doctrine

The Perseverance of the Saints

Article 1: The Regenerate Not Entirely Free from Sin Those people whom God according to his purpose calls into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord and regenerates by the Holy Spirit, he also sets free from the reign and slavery of sin, though in this life not entirely from the flesh and from the body of sin.

Article 2: The Believer's Reaction to Sins of Weakness Hence daily sins of weakness arise, and blemishes cling to even the best works of God's people, giving them continual cause to humble themselves

before God, to flee for refuge to Christ crucified, to put the flesh to death more and more by the Spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of godliness, and to strain toward the goal of perfection, until they are freed from this body of death and reign with the Lamb of God in heaven.

Article 3: God's Preservation of the Converted

Because of these remnants of sin dwelling in them and also because of the temptations of the world and Satan, those who have been converted could not remain standing in this grace if left to their own resources. But God is faithful, mercifully strengthening them in the grace once conferred on them and powerfully preserving them in it to the end.

Article 4: The Danger of True Believers' Falling into Serious Sins Although that power of God strengthening and preserving true believers in grace is more than a match for the flesh, yet those converted are not always so activated and motivated by God that in certain specific actions they cannot by their own fault depart from the leading of grace, be led astray by the desires of the flesh, and give in to them. For this reason they must constantly watch and pray that they may not be led into temptations. When they fail to do this, not only can they be carried away by the flesh, the world, and Satan into sins, even serious and outrageous ones, but also by God's just permission they sometimes are so carried away—witness the sad cases, described in Scripture, of David, Peter, and other saints falling into sins.

Article 5: The Effects of Such Serious Sins

By such monstrous sins, however, they greatly offend God, deserve the sentence of death, grieve the Holy Spirit, suspend the exercise of faith, severely wound the conscience, and sometimes lose the awareness of grace for a time—until, after they have returned to the way by genuine repentance, God's fatherly face again shines upon them.

Article 6: God's Saving Intervention

For God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election does not take his Holy Spirit from his own completely, even when they fall grievously. Neither does he let them fall down so far that they forfeit the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge themselves, entirely forsaken by him, into eternal ruin.

Article 7: Renewal to Repentance

For, in the first place, God preserves in those saints when they fall his imperishable seed from which they have been born again, lest it perish or be dislodged. Secondly, by his Word and Spirit he certainly and effectively renews them to repentance so that they have a heartfelt and godly sorrow for the sins they have committed; seek and obtain, through faith and with a contrite heart, forgiveness in the blood of the Mediator; experience again the grace of a reconciled God; through faith adore his mercies; and from then on more eagerly work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Article 8: The Certainty of This Preservation

So it is not by their own merits or strength but by God's undeserved mercy that they neither forfeit faith and grace totally nor remain in their downfalls to the end and are lost. With respect to themselves this not only easily could happen, but also undoubtedly would happen; but with respect to God it cannot possibly happen, since his plan cannot be changed, his promise cannot fail, the calling according to his purpose cannot be revoked, the merit of Christ as well as his interceding and preserving cannot be nullified, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit can neither be invalidated nor wiped out.

Article 9: The Assurance of This Preservation

Concerning this preservation of those chosen to salvation and concerning the perseverance of true believers in faith, believers themselves can and do become assured in accordance with the measure of their faith, by which they firmly believe that they are and always will remain true and living members of the church, and that they have the forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Article 10: The Ground of This Assurance

Accordingly, this assurance does not derive from some private revelation beyond or outside the Word, but from faith in the promises of God which he has very plentifully revealed in his Word for our comfort, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit testifying with our spirit that we are God's children and heirs (Rom. 8:16-17), and finally from a serious and holy pursuit of a clear conscience and of good works. And if God's chosen ones in this world did not have this well-founded comfort that the victory will be theirs and this reliable guarantee of eternal glory, they would be of all people most miserable.

Article 11: Doubts Concerning This Assurance

Meanwhile, Scripture testifies that believers have to contend in this life with various doubts of the flesh and that under severe temptation they do not always experience this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance. But God, the Father of all comfort, does not let them be tempted beyond what they can bear, but with the temptation he also provides a way out (1 Cor. 10:13), and by the Holy Spirit revives in them the assurance of their perseverance.

Article 12: This Assurance as an Incentive to Godliness

This assurance of perseverance, however, so far from making true believers proud and carnally self-assured, is rather the true root of humility, of childlike respect, of genuine godliness, of endurance in every conflict, of fervent prayers, of steadfastness in crossbearing and in confessing the truth, and of well-founded joy in God. Reflecting on this benefit provides an incentive to a serious and continual practice of thanksgiving and good works, as is evident from the testimonies of Scripture and the examples of the saints.

Article 13: Assurance No Inducement to Carelessness

Neither does the renewed confidence of perseverance produce immorality or lack of concern for godliness in those put back on their feet after a fall, but it produces a much greater concern to observe carefully the ways of the

Lord which he prepared in advance. They observe these ways in order that by walking in them they may maintain the assurance of their perseverance, lest, by their abuse of his fatherly goodness, the face of the gracious God (for the godly, looking upon his face is sweeter than life, but its withdrawal is more bitter than death) turn away from them again, with the result that they fall into greater anguish of spirit.

Article 14: God's Use of Means in Perseverance

And, just as it has pleased God to begin this work of grace in us by the proclamation of the gospel, so he preserves, continues, and completes his work by the hearing and reading of the gospel, by meditation on it, by its exhortations, threats, and promises, and also by the use of the sacraments.

Article 15: Contrasting Reactions to the Teaching of Perseverance This teaching about the perseverance of true believers and saints, and about their assurance of it—a teaching which God has very richly revealed in his Word for the glory of his name and for the comfort of the godly and which he impresses on the hearts of believers—is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the spirits of error attack. The bride of Christ, on the other hand, has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that she will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen.

Rejection of Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I

Who teach that the perseverance of true believers is not an effect of election or a gift of God produced by Christ's death, but a condition of the new covenant which man, before what they call his "peremptory" election and justification, must fulfill by his free will.

For Holy Scripture testifies that perseverance follows from election and is granted to the chosen by virtue of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession: The chosen obtained it; the others were hardened (Rom. 11:7); likewise, He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not, along with him, grant us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised—who also sits at the right hand of God, and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom. 8:32-35).

II

Who teach that God does provide the believer with sufficient strength to persevere and is ready to preserve this strength in him if he performs his duty, but that even with all those things in place which are necessary to persevere in faith and which God is pleased to use to preserve faith, it still always depends on the choice of man's will whether or not he perseveres.

For this view is obviously Pelagian; and though it intends to make men free it makes them sacrilegious. It is against the enduring consensus of evangelical teaching which takes from man all cause for boasting and ascribes the praise for this benefit only to God's grace. It is also against the testimony of the apostle: It is God who keeps us strong to the end, so that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:8).

III

Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again not only can forfeit justifying faith as well as grace and salvation totally and to the end, but also in actual fact do often forfeit them and are lost forever.

For this opinion nullifies the very grace of justification and regeneration as well as the continual preservation by Christ, contrary to the plain words of the apostle Paul: If Christ died for us while we were still sinners, we will therefore much more be saved from God's wrath through him, since we have now been justified by his blood (Rom. 5:8-9); and contrary to the apostle John: No one who is born of God is intent on sin, because God's seed remains in him, nor can he sin, because he has been born of God (1 John 3:9); also contrary to the words of Jesus Christ: I give eternal life to my sheep, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand (John 10:28-29).

IV

Who teach that those who truly believe and have been born again can commit the sin that leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit).

For the same apostle John, after making mention of those who commit the sin that leads to death and forbidding prayer for them (1 John 5:16-17), immediately adds: We know that anyone born of God does not commit sin (that is, that kind of sin), but the one who was born of God keeps himself safe, and the evil one does not touch him (v. 18).

V

Who teach that apart from a special revelation no one can have the assurance of future perseverance in this life.

For by this teaching the well-founded consolation of true believers in this life is taken away and the doubting of the Romanists is reintroduced into the church. Holy Scripture, however, in many places derives the assurance not from a special and extraordinary revelation but from the marks peculiar to God's children and from God's completely reliable promises. So especially the apostle Paul: Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39); and John: They who obey his commands remain in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he remains in us: by the Spirit he gave us (1 John 3:24).

VI

Who teach that the teaching of the assurance of perseverance and of salvation is by its very nature and character an opiate of the flesh and is harmful to godliness, good morals, prayer, and other holy exercises, but that, on the contrary, to have doubt about this is praiseworthy.

For these people show that they do not know the effective operation of God's grace and the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit, and they contradict the apostle John, who asserts the opposite in plain words: Dear friends, now we are children of God, but what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he is made known, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3). Moreover, they are refuted by the examples of the saints in both the Old and the New Testament, who though assured of their perseverance and salvation yet were constant in prayer and other exercises of godliness.

VII

Who teach that the faith of those who believe only temporarily does not differ from justifying and saving faith except in duration alone.

For Christ himself in Matthew 13:20ff. and Luke 8:13ff. clearly defines these further differences between temporary and true believers: he says that the former receive the seed on rocky ground, and the latter receive it in good ground, or a good heart; the former have no root, and the latter are firmly rooted; the former have no fruit, and the latter produce fruit in varying measure, with steadfastness, or perseverance.

VIII

Who teach that it is not absurd that a person, after losing his former regeneration, should once again, indeed quite often, be reborn.

For by this teaching they deny the imperishable nature of God's seed by which we are born again, contrary to the testimony of the apostle Peter: Born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable (1 Pet. 1:23).

IX

Who teach that Christ nowhere prayed for an unailing perseverance of believers in faith.

For they contradict Christ himself when he says: I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail (Luke 22:32); and John the gospel writer when he testifies in John 17 that it was not only for the apostles, but also for all those who were to believe by their message that Christ prayed: Holy Father, preserve them in your name (v. 11); and My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you preserve them from the evil one (v. 15)

Conclusion

Rejection of False Accusations

And so this is the clear, simple, and straightforward explanation of the orthodox teaching on the five articles in dispute in the Netherlands, as well as the rejection of the errors by which the Dutch churches have for some time been disturbed. This explanation and rejection the Synod declares to be derived from God's Word and in agreement with the confessions of the Reformed churches. Hence it clearly appears that those of whom one could hardly expect it have shown no truth, equity, and charity at all in wishing to make the public believe:

- that the teaching of the Reformed churches on predestination and on the points associated with it by its very nature and tendency draws the minds of people away from all godliness and religion, is an opiate of the flesh and the devil, and is a stronghold of Satan where he lies in wait for all people, wounds most of them, and fatally pierces many of them with the arrows of both despair and self-assurance;
- that this teaching makes God the author of sin, unjust, a tyrant, and a hypocrite; and is nothing but a refurbished Stoicism, Manicheism, Libertinism, and Mohammedanism;
- that this teaching makes people carnally self-assured, since it persuades them that nothing endangers the salvation of the chosen, no matter how they live, so that they may commit the most outrageous crimes with self-assurance; and that on the other hand nothing is of use to the reprobate for salvation even if they have truly performed all the works of the saints;
- that this teaching means that God predestined and created, by the bare and unqualified choice of his will, without the least regard or consideration of any sin, the greatest part of the world to eternal condemnation; that in the same manner in which election is the source and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and ungodliness; that many infant children of believers are snatched in their innocence from their mothers' breasts and cruelly cast into hell so that neither the blood of Christ nor their baptism nor the prayers of the church at their baptism can be of any use to them; and very many other slanderous accusations of this kind which the Reformed churches not only disavow but even denounce with their whole heart.

Therefore this Synod of Dort in the name of the Lord pleads with all who devoutly call on the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to form their judgment about the faith of the Reformed churches, not on the basis of false accusations gathered from here or there, or even on the basis of the personal statements of a number of ancient and modern authorities—statements which are also often either quoted out of context or misquoted and twisted to convey a different meaning—but on the basis of the churches' own official confessions and of the present explanation of the orthodox teaching which has been endorsed by the unanimous consent of the members of the whole Synod, one and all.

Moreover, the Synod earnestly warns the false accusers themselves to consider how heavy a judgment of God awaits those who give false testimony against so many churches and their confessions, trouble the consciences of the weak, and seek to prejudice the minds of many against the fellowship of true believers.

Finally, this Synod urges all fellow ministers in the gospel of Christ to deal with this teaching in a godly and reverent manner, in the academic institutions as well as in the churches; to do so, both in their speaking and writing, with a view to the glory of God's name, holiness of life, and the comfort of anxious souls; to think and also speak with Scripture according to the analogy of faith; and, finally, to refrain from all those ways of speaking which go beyond the bounds set for us by the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures and which could give impertinent sophists a just occasion to scoff at the teaching of the Reformed churches or even to bring false accusations against it.

May God's Son Jesus Christ, who sits at the right hand of God and gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, lead to the truth those who err, silence the mouths of those who lay false accusations against sound teaching, and equip faithful ministers of his Word with a spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all they say may be to the glory of God and the building up of their hearers. Amen.

25 Canons of Dort

Prayers and Meditations

Preface

The churches of the Reformation have historically included forms of prayer alongside their songs and liturgies in their service books. The churches of Geneva, for example, had “The Form of Church Prayers and Hymns...According to the Custom of the Ancient Church” first published in 1542 and the churches of England had the Book of Common Prayer first published in 1549.

In our particular tradition, the Psalter and service book of Petrus Dathenus (1556) also contained a series of prayers. These prayers were first translated into English and included in the Christian Reformed Church’s *Psalter Hymnal* in 1934 and were included in the 1959 and 1976 editions. The following prayers use our own tradition as a foundation and also draw upon the best of the broader Reformed liturgies and prayers of England, Geneva, Heidelberg, Strasbourg, as well as Martin Luther.

These prayers are not obligatory but are for voluntary use. The Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not impose the use of prescribed forms of public prayer in worship nor do the United Reformed Churches in North America today. These prayers are offered as aids and examples for those who are called to lead in public prayer as well as for the direction and edification of our people in their daily lives. To that end they are arranged in four major sections:

- 1) Prayers for Lord’s Day Worship
- 2) Prayers for Special Services
- 3) Prayers for Ecclesiastical Assemblies
- 4) Prayers for Personal and Family Use

Prayers for Lord’s Day Worship

Opening Invocation/Declaration of Dependence

¶ *May be said responsively, with the minister saying the first line and the congregation saying the second:*

Our help is in the name of the LORD,
who made heaven and earth. —Ps. 124:8

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, from where does your help come?
Our help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. —Ps. 121:1–2

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble. —Ps. 46:1

Prayer of Invocation—1

Almighty God,
to whom our hearts are open,
our desires are known,
and from whom no secrets are hid:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the gracious power of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer of Invocation—2

Almighty and everlasting God,
you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray,
and to give more than we desire, or deserve.
Pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy;
forgiving us those things of which our conscience is convicted,
and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask,
except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession—1

Dearly loved brothers and sisters,
we are called to examine ourselves in the light of God's Law.
Let us go to God in public confession:
¶ *Prayed in unison:*
Our Father,
we are sinful and you are holy.
We recognize that we have heard in your Law difficult words,
knowing how often we have offended you in thought, word and deed,
not only by obvious violations,
but by failing to conform to its perfect commands,
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
Apart from Christ, there is nothing in us that gives us reason for hope;
for where we thought we were well, we are sick in soul.
Where we thought we were holy, we are in truth unholy and ungrateful.
Our hearts are filled with the love of the world;
our minds are dark and are assailed by doubts;
our wills are too often given to selfishness
and our bodies to laziness and unrighteousness.
By sinning against our neighbors,
we have also sinned against you,
in whose image they were created.
In this time of silent confession we bring you our particular sins.

¶ An opportunity for silent confession may be given.

¶ Prayed by the minister:

Our Father,

although you are a holy God who cannot look upon sin,
look upon Christ our Savior and forgive us for his sake.

You have promised us that if we confess our sins,
you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

For if we do sin, we have an Advocate before your throne,
Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.

Give us your pardon by your mercies, dear Father,
for you have clothed us in Christ's righteousness.

We ask also that you would give us an increase of the grace of your Holy Spirit,
so that we may learn the wisdom of your ways

and walk in your holy paths,
for your glory and the good of our neighbor.

Amen.

Prayer of Confession—2

Brothers and sisters,

the law causes us to acknowledge and confess our many sins and wickedness;
not hiding them from the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father
but confessing them

with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart

that we may obtain forgiveness, by his infinite goodness and mercy.

Therefore I urge you to join me with a pure heart and humble voice,
before the throne of grace, praying:

¶ Prayed in unison:

Almighty and most merciful Father,

we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against your holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done;
and so we are helpless without you.

O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders,

spare us, as we confess our faults,

restore us, as we are penitent,

according to your promises declared to us in Christ Jesus our Lord;

and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,

that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and devout life,
to the glory of your holy Name.

Amen.

Pastoral Prayer (Long)—I

Almighty and merciful God, we realize and confess before you that if you should take into account what we have done, we would be unworthy to lift our eyes toward heaven and present our prayers before you. Our consciences accuse us, and our sins testify against us. And yet in your fatherly goodness you have adopted us in Christ and delight to hear our prayers which we offer through his mediation. Therefore we look to no other king and seek no other advocate for the help that we need in this world and in the world to come. You call us to seek not only our own salvation and good, but that of your whole church and the world, and we do so now.

We pray especially for your benediction on your holy gospel, that it may be faithfully proclaimed and the world filled with the knowledge of your truth. To that end, please send workers into your field to plant, water, and harvest a people for your name. But frustrate the work of those who would sow weeds of heresy and discord. Pull down all of the strongholds of Satan in this world and establish your kingdom throughout the earth. Please give fatherly attention to your servants who suffer persecution for the sake of the gospel and strengthen them in mind and body by your Spirit through the means of grace. *[Specific prayers may be added for the peace, purity, and progress of the Gospel throughout the world.]*

We pray also for those who serve our common welfare in temporal affairs. Grant those you have ordained to govern us wisdom and integrity. Give them a restraining fear of you to keep them from abusing authority and give them the knowledge that they stand under your final judgment. We ask that you would use them to contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to you. May they restrain wickedness and vice, promote justice and virtue, remove every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and divine worship, so that the Word of God may have free course, the kingdom of Christ may progress, and every anti-Christian power be resisted. Dear Father, who sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike, given to us also, we pray, such humility of conduct and faithfulness in our worldly callings, that we may contribute to the good of our neighbors and live peaceable lives in all godliness and honor. *[Specific prayers may be added for civil authorities.]*

We remember also all who suffer from physical dangers, temptation, doubts, illnesses of mind or body, financial distress and especially those who are near death. Comfort, we pray, all widows and orphans and be to them a father. Show your mercy to prisoners, to those in the military or whose business takes them great distances. Guard their families and bring them back safely, we pray. May the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ your Son refresh your people in their trials and give them the grace to bear the difficulties you send them for their good. Give also to us the grace to share in their suffering and provide for their needs as we are able. *[Specific prayers may be added for members of the congregation.]*

Bless the land with fruitful harvest, and give us wisdom and patience to be good stewards of it and of the resources you graciously give us for our callings. Keep us from exploiting your good gifts for our own selfish accumulation and grant that we may be ever mindful of our duties to each other and your creation. Order our priorities and interests, so

that our callings in life will promote rather than hinder our love for you and our neighbor. We ask that you would deepen the bonds between us as spouses, parents and children and resolve conflict and strife according to your wisdom and grace. Give to those among us who are single gifts for building up the communion of saints as well as faithfulness in the face of temptation, and grant that your people may build them up in the most holy faith. Strengthen us through your means of grace that we may worship you not only with our words but with our lives, and so build us up into one body, a city in the world whose light cannot be hidden. Make each of us, we pray, a living sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving pleasing to you. For this is our reasonable service in view of that sacrifice which alone has reconciled us finally and forever with you.

We bring to your throne these intercessions on behalf of each other through that intercession of our elder brother at your right hand, even Jesus Christ your eternal Son. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer (Short)—2

O God, the Creator and Preserver of all mankind,
we humbly intercede on behalf of all people: that you would be pleased to make your ways known to them, your saving grace to all nations. [*Specific prayers may be added for missions/missionaries and church plants/church planters*]

More especially, we pray for the universal church: that it may be so guided and governed by your Holy Spirit, that all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth, and embrace the faith in the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life.

Finally, we commend to your fatherly goodness all those, who are in any ways afflicted or distressed in mind, body, or any other way; we especially pray for [*Specific needs are mentioned*]. May it please you to comfort and relieve them, according to their particular needs, giving them patience in their sufferings, and a blessed deliverance out of all their afflictions.

All this we ask for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Prayer Before the Sermon—1

Eternal Father, who has spoken in various times and in various ways to your people in the past, but in these last days in your Son, the Incarnate Word, we pray that you will open the mouth of your servant to proclaim that Word in the power of the Spirit. And we pray that this same Spirit will open the hearts of its hearers here assembled to receive your holy gospel and write on their hearts your holy law, even as you have promised. All of this, gracious Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying: "Our Father...."

Prayer Before the Sermon—2

Blessed Lord, who has caused Holy Scripture to be written for our learning; grant that we may hear, read, learn, and inwardly digest them, that through the comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer After the Sermon—1

Our merciful God, who is pleased to condescend to speak to us through your Word, grant us all grace that we may not be mere hearers of your Word, but doers also. Give us the grace of your Holy Spirit that we may believe what has been proclaimed to us. May we bring glory and honor to your name in all that we do, as you conform us to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. All of this, gracious Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying: “Our Father....”

Prayer After the Sermon—2

Almighty God, graciously grant that your Word which we have heard may be inscribed inwardly on our hearts. As we receive your Word meekly with pure affection, may our hearts be filled with love and reverence for you. Cause us to bear the fruits of the Spirit and to live in holiness, diligently following your commandments. And may it please you to use us to lead those who are lost, wandering, and confused into the way of truth. All this we pray for the honor and praise of your name, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer Before the Explanation of the Catechism—1

Almighty and everlasting God, our heavenly Father, we acknowledge that we are sinners, conceived and born in sin, unable of ourselves to do any good. But we do repent of our sins, and seek your grace to help us in our remaining weaknesses. Through the teaching of your Word, which we confess with the church throughout the ages, satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst with your refreshing truth, that we, with all our hearts, may love and serve you, together with our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit, one only true God, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Prayer Before the Explanation of the Catechism—2

Our Heavenly Father, we ask you to look upon us in grace as we look away from ourselves into the face of your Son, whom you have appointed our Mediator and Savior. As all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in your Son, guide us by your Holy Spirit into the true understanding of the doctrines of Christ. May our meditation upon his truth produce in us of all the fruits of righteousness to the glory and exaltation of his name, the instruction and edification of this congregation, and the salvation of the lost through our witness. We pray this in the name and favor of your well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in dependence on his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer After the Explanation of the Catechism—1

Gracious and merciful Father, we give you thanks for having established your covenant with believers and their children. For, as you have told us, the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself. This promise you have not only signified and sealed by holy baptism but daily prove by perfecting your praise through the mouths of children, and so putting to shame the wise and understanding of this world. Continue to establish your saints in this faith throughout their lives. So give us the grace to inwardly digest the food you have given us and to instruct our children in your knowledge and fear until they have reached complete maturity. All of this we ask in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying: “Our Father...”

Prayer After the Explanation of the Catechism—2

Our gracious God, you build your church on the foundation of the doctrine of the apostles and prophets—Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone—and so we pray that you would bless our congregation to grow in their teaching. Assist us in meditating with joy on your mighty acts; enlighten our minds more and more with the light of the everlasting gospel; kindle in our hearts a love of your truth; nourish us with the full counsel of the Word of God; enable us to contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints; and defend us from the sins of heresy and schism. And as we have heard the true doctrine proclaimed to us, by your great blessing may it be preserved among us and propagated through us by our lips and lives to the glory of the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies,

we, your unworthy servants, do give you most humble and hearty thanks
for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all people.

We thank you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;
but above all, for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord
Jesus Christ;

for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we ask you,

give us that due sense of all your mercies,
that our hearts may be sincerely thankful;
and that we may show forth your praise,

not only with our lips, but in our lives,
by giving up ourselves to your service,

and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor
and glory, world without end. Amen.

Concluding Prayer—1

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you have given us grace to offer our common prayers with one heart. You have promised to grant our requests when we ask you in Jesus' name. Fulfill now the desires of our hearts and the petitions of our mouths, as is most beneficial for us, your servants. And grant us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and Holy Spirit is eternally praised. Amen.

Concluding Prayer—2

Almighty God, who has promised to hear the petitions of those who pray in your Son's name; we ask you mercifully to incline your ear to us, who have now made our prayers and supplications to you. Grant that those things that we have faithfully asked according to your will, may be obtained, to the relief of our needs, and to the setting forth of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Prayers for Special Services

¶ These prayers are offered for the special services that the Church Order says may be called in the churches: the five evangelical feast days of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost as well as a day of prayer, the national Thanksgiving Day, New Year's Eve, New Year's Day, and services in times of great distress or blessing (article 37).

Christmas

Merciful Father, you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son. He who was rich became poor for us, the eternal Word made flesh, a great Light shining in the darkness. Only because of your Word and Spirit have we seen that Light and been drawn into its brightness. Give us the grace humbly and joyfully to receive your Son even as the shepherds and princes who welcomed him, and to look no further for our redemption than to this child lying in a manger. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Good Friday

Our Father, who so loved the world that you gave your only-begotten Son, we acknowledge and marvel at your mercy. Even while we were enemies, you reconciled us; even while we were strangers, you made us co-heirs with Christ of all eternal blessings; even while we stood condemned, you redeemed us; even while we were imprisoned, you delivered us from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. On this solemn occasion, we loathe our miserable estate and celebrate your marvelous grace. Beneath the cross of Christ, we come to know that ours is the guilt, but yours the forgiveness; ours the condemnation, but yours the gift of justification; ours the bondage, yet yours the freedom of adoption and new obedience. Even the faith with which we confess our dear Savior's sacrifice was won for us by his death. Therefore, we cry out to you in sorrow for our sins and in thanksgiving for your gift. Give us the grace, we pray, to receive again this word of the cross which alone can refresh us on our pilgrim way, and send us out again into the world as witnesses to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

Easter

Holy Father, giver of all perfect gifts, we join the heavenly choir to herald the news that you have defeated the powers of sin, death, and condemnation by the victory of Jesus Christ your Son over the grave. We confess that the circumstances of this present age often rise up to testify against the promise that you have declared in your Word. Nevertheless, we bring the experience of our hearts under your judgment: you have raised Jesus Christ from the dead as the first fruits of the whole harvest at the last day. As in his resurrection you have brought the new creation into this passing evil age, by faith in this life may we know that we have been raised up with Christ and seated at your right hand and in the life to come by sight to see the resurrection of our bodies. All of this we pray, with joy and thanksgiving, in Christ's name. Amen.

Ascension

Almighty God,
although we could not ascend to your holy place,
your Son descended to save us.
After he won our redemption,
he ascended to the seat of all authority and dominion at your right hand
to plead our cause before your throne,
to guarantee our place in heaven by taking our own flesh there in him,
and to rule over all of his and our enemies.
He did all this for our salvation and the glory of your holy name.
Help us to receive and to make known throughout the world this good news that Christ
Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
And fill our hearts with longing expectation for his return in power and glory to restore all
things.
In the name of Christ our King. Amen.

Pentecost

Our Father in heaven, we give you thanks especially on this day for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Just as you sent your Son to redeem us, you sent your Spirit to renew us after his image, and to begin even now the new creation that awaits us fully and finally at the last day. Forgive us for grieving the Spirit, forgetting the great work that he performed at Pentecost and continues to perform as he makes your Word effectual for the justification and sanctification of sinners. We give you praise for sending your Spirit of adoption into our hearts, so that we may call you Abba, Father. We thank you for his ministry of testifying to Christ, convicting the world of sin and judgment, and opening our hearts to receive the gospel of your Son. Even now, through the gospel, he is gathering from all nations a church to declare your goodness. May we be filled again with marvelous wonder at this saving operation of the Holy Spirit, who, together with you and the Son, is worshiped and glorified, one God, world without end. Amen.

Day of Prayer

O God of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, we have assembled to pray to you. Though we are fully persuaded that we are unworthy to enter into your presence, we are confident that you will certainly hear our prayer for the sake of Christ our Lord, as he has promised in his Word.

We acknowledge you as the Creator of all things in the heavens above, in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth. We adore you for the grandeur and beauty of all your works. We adore your lovingkindness, in having made all things in service to the needs and happiness of your children. What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? You have given him dominion over the works of your hands—the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea. You have given to us for food every moving thing that lives, the green plant yielding seed, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You have crowned us with steadfast love and mercy.

We adore you for your gracious promises of old to sustain your precious saints by your providence. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. You visit the earth and water it. You make springs gush forth in the valleys and flow between the hills. You cause the grass to grow for livestock, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, wine to gladden his heart, oil to make his face shine, and bread to strengthen his heart. You make the fields soft with showers; you bless their growth. The meadows are clothed with flocks; the valleys are decked with grain; they shout and sing together for joy. You crown the year with your bounty. O Lord, how manifold are your works; in wisdom you have made them all.

Our Father, we also confess that your providence is in all circumstances, not only in the riches of your bounty and compassion, but in your righteous judgments. You open your hand, and we are filled with good; you hide your face, and we are troubled. But we know, O God, that in your wrath you remember mercy; and we acknowledge your long-suffering and your loving-kindness. Give us grace to believe that whom the Lord loves he chastens; and make us ever ready to offer to you, in spirit and in truth, the prayer of the holy prophet: though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food; the flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls; yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation. For we are sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

O gracious God, we give you thanks that despite our many transgressions of your holy laws, you have constantly done good to us for the sake of Christ your Son. You have given us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. These have been among the witnesses of your great goodness, and for who believe, assurances that you are the living God. Teach us to believe with a strong faith, that you are Lord of the seasons; that you cause the earth to bring forth, and it obeys you. Accept our thanksgivings for all your blessings; fill our hearts with humility and love, with gratitude and trust. [*Specific thanksgiving may be offered*]. Gracious God, continue your loving-kindness to us and assist us to show forth the fruits of grace in a sincere obedience to your will, through whom all blessings flow, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

National Day of Thanksgiving

Our Sovereign God, who created all things for your pleasure and who gives to all life, breath, and every good thing, we thank you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. For rain and sunshine, in abundance and in lack, we acknowledge that our times are in your hands. You supply all of your creatures with your good gifts: the just and the unjust alike. Nevertheless, we especially give you praise for the surpassing greatness of your saving grace that you have shown to us in Christ Jesus our Savior. For our election in him before the foundation of the world; for our redemption by him in his life, death, and resurrection; for our effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and all of the blessings of our union with him, we give you our heartfelt thanks. And we look with great anticipation toward that day when you will raise us to life everlasting, glorified and confirmed in righteousness, so that we may sing your praises without the defilement of our present weaknesses, distractions, and sins. As you have given us these gifts, we ask that you would give us grateful hearts so that we may serve our neighbors in love. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, who taught us to pray, saying, “Our Father....”

New Year's Eve

Almighty and most gracious God, as we close the year with this day, we thank you for all your tender mercies bestowed upon us during the whole course of our lives, and especially during this past year. “Accept our thanksgivings for all your blessings; fill our hearts with humility and love, with gratitude and trust. [*Specific thanksgiving may be* offered]. For all these blessings we offer to you the sacrifice of our praises, and we acknowledge, that through your great goodness and help, we are enabled to live our lives in peace, although we have offended you in innumerable ways. O merciful God, pardon all who sincerely repent of their sins. Grant that, while our years are passing away, we may work out our salvation with fear and trembling in the time you give to us. Enable us to press onward always towards the end of our heavenly calling, even that blessed eternity, which Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, has prepared for us. Amen.

New Year's Day

Eternal and Almighty God, we humble ourselves in your presence to dedicate to you the beginning of this year, by adoration, prayer, and praise.

We come before your Supreme Majesty, and acknowledge, with gratitude, the manifold blessings which you have freely bestowed upon us, through the whole course of our lives. We thank you, that having preserved us to the present time, you have permitted us to enter upon a new year. You have not ceased, O most gracious God, to give to us the abundance of your lovingkindness. But you have especially sustained us with every spiritual blessing by keeping in the midst of us the light of your gospel. You have granted us repentance, through your mighty help, through your great goodness, and through the warnings of your Word and Spirit; and have mercifully given to us favorable opportunities to grow in grace. Despite our unworthiness, for the love of Jesus Christ, take not away from us your protection and favor.

Moved by your grace, we devote ourselves to you at the beginning of this year, desiring to employ it better than we have done in the years that are past. And since this day also warns us that our years pass away like a flood, like a dream, give us grace that we may seriously number our days that we may have a heart of wisdom; that we may discern the vanity of this life; and that we may aspire to that better life, when days, and months, and years, shall be counted no more, forever. While we continue in the flesh, may we more and more live not according to its desires, but according to your will. And grant, O God, that when our years shall come to an end, and the day of our death arrives, we may depart in the peace that passes all understanding and in the sure hope of life everlasting. Favorably hear us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Opening Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Heavenly Father, eternal and merciful God, it has pleased you according to your infinite wisdom to gather a church to yourself out of the nations of all the earth, and to govern it through weak servants. Called by you to watch over your flock purchased by your Son's precious blood, we call upon your name now for this solemn assembly, gathered here according to the example of the apostolic churches. Faced with many weighty issues concerning the care of your people, we ask that you would make us truly mindful of your purposes for your church. Draw our minds and hearts away from vanity and pride, discord and pettiness, and do not let these sins which still cling to us distract us from advancing your great cause in this world. Refresh us, we pray, in the joyful commission of bringing your good news to the ends of the earth. Make us more faithful stewards of the mysteries of the gospel and more zealous ambassadors of reconciliation. We ask that your Spirit would be present among us to guide us into all truth, bringing us to agreement on the matters before us. May Scripture reign in our hearts, just as the Living Word reigns over your church, for we acknowledge only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. All of this we ask because Christ is our Mediator and Advocate, who with you and the Holy Spirit, the only God, deserves eternal praise and glory. Amen.

Closing Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we give you heartfelt thanks for gathering a church in our land and for using us as the ambassadors and guardians of your kingdom. As those who are receiving your kingdom, make us ever mindful that it is not our labors but your electing, redeeming, justifying, and sanctifying grace alone that renders your church indestructible and victorious against all adversaries. We give you praise for your providence in preserving liberty in this land for the free proclamation of the gospel and ask that you would, by your Holy Spirit, fill us with joy to make diligent use of such opportunity. Your Spirit, who leads your church into all truth, has been present in our assembly, giving us wisdom in our deliberations. We pray that he would also give us the strength to bless the efforts that we purpose to put forth and finish the work that he has begun. Continue to draw the remnant of the nations to your heavenly Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven and maintain the peace and purity of your church, we ask. Strengthen us with a mighty zeal for the ministry of Word and sacrament, as well as for the care of your flock in body and soul. As you hold Christ Jesus ever above and before

us as the Mediator for sinners, may our churches faithfully proclaim this good news to those who have never heard it. Give strength, humility, and boldness to your under-shepherds, we pray: to ministers, elders, and deacons. We also ask that you would give prudence to our civil rulers, so that they may act with justice and wise restraint. Grant that their rule may contribute to the advancement of a society that is pleasing to you. May through their labors every obstacle to the preaching of the gospel and divine worship be removed. May it be given to us to lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honor. As you have promised to be present with us even to the end of the age, we ask you to enlighten, guide, awaken, convict and console us by your Word and Spirit. Hear us, dear Father, through your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit, the only true God, is worthy of eternal praise and glory. Amen.

Opening Prayer for the Meetings of Deacons

Merciful God and Father, you have not only declared that there will always be those in need among us, but have also commanded us to bear their burdens with them. For this reason, you have established the office of deacon. We ask that you would give us wisdom to faithfully discharge the duties of our office. We acknowledge that in your kingdom each member supplies what is lacking in the other, so that your name may be exalted and your people drawn together with ever-stronger cords of love and affection. Equip us to stir up your people to such love and good deeds. And since we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from your mouth, help us to assist our brothers and sisters in such a way that they may look to these offerings and services as tokens of your covenant faithfulness. May they together with us give you everlasting thanks in this age until that age when our trials will end and the everlasting rest you have prepared for us from the foundation of the world. In the name of Christ our Savior we ask this. Amen.

Prayers and Meditations for Personal and Family Use

Morning Prayer

Merciful God, thank you for keeping watch over us last night. As we face a new day, may we fix our eyes on Christ as our only hope and your glory as our only aim. You alone are worthy of this glory because you are the very author of our life, the Creator and sustainer of all that exists. The heavens declare to all your wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness. Yet our highest praise is reserved for the great deeds of redemption that you have worked for us poor sinners. Bound in our sin, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, by nature children of wrath even as the rest, we have nevertheless heard the good news that you have delivered us from slavery, freed us from the condemnation of your just law, and brought us new life from above. Even as we face our ordinary tasks this day, recall to our hearts the extraordinary comfort of your promise. Grant also, we pray, the strength of your Spirit to live out the callings you have given us and to all people as creatures made in your image. Make us fit vessels for your work in this world this day—a sacrifice of thanksgiving well pleasing in your sight and a light that shines before our neighbors. All of this we ask in the name of your Son, who taught us to pray, “Our Father...”

Evening Prayer

Merciful God, we come to you now at the end of this day in the name of our Savior, that Light shining in the darkness, dispelling the night of our sins and the blindness of our hearts. Lord of our labor, now be Lord of our rest. Free us of doubts, anxieties, and temptations and continue to work your sanctifying grace in us even as we sleep. Remembering that we are not only frail but sinful, we ask you to defend us from all dangers, but especially from the assaults of the world and the devil as well as from the disease of our own hearts. We confess that we have not spent this day without grievously sinning against you, to whom all hearts are open and no wickedness is hidden. Yet, clothed in the righteousness of your dear Son, we call on your name and claim your salvation. Give us repentant and believing hearts that delight in following your ways. We ask also that you would be with those who are afflicted with grief, pain, temptation, doubts, and especially for *[specific requests]*. Together with them preserve us all in one communion and body until we enter at last your everlasting rest. In the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.

A Child's Prayer at Bed [Adapted from Luther's Small Catechism]

Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for protecting me today. Please forgive all my sins. Preserve my body and soul tonight and give me rest. In Jesus' name. Amen.

A Child's Prayer at Bed [Using the following hymn]

All praise to thee, my God, this night,
for all the blessings of the light:
keep me, O keep me, King of kings,
beneath thine own almighty wings.

Forgive me, Lord, for thy dear Son,
the ill that I this day have done;
that with the world, myself, and thee,
I, ere I sleep, at peace may be.

O may my soul on thee repose,
and with sweet sleep mine eyelids close;
sleep that shall me more vigorous make
to serve my God when I awake.

Prayer Before Meals

Our gracious heavenly Father, the eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. You attend to our every need through the creatures you have made, especially through our neighbors, whose vocations serve to bring these provisions to our table, and so we ask a special blessing on those who have prepared it for us. If not even a sparrow can fall from the sky or a hair fall from our head apart from your fatherly care and wisdom, we cannot fail to look to you alone for security in this life as also in the life to come. So give us grateful hearts as we pray, saying, "Our Father..."

A Child's Prayer Before Meals—1 [Martin Luther]

Come Lord Jesus, be our guest,
and let these gifts to us be blessed.
May our souls by you be fed,
ever on the living bread. Amen.

A Child's Prayer Before Meals—2 [Johann Habermann (d. 1590)]

Jesus, bless what you have given,
Feed our souls with bread from heaven;
Guide and lead us all the way,
In all that we may do and say. Amen.

Prayer After Meals

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever. We thank you, Lord, for your good gifts of food and drink. We thank you for your providential care that causes the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate. And so we give thanks for all those who have served us by preparing what we have just enjoyed. And as we give thanks for the gift of this food, we praise you above all else for your greatest gift, your Son Jesus Christ, who is the food and drink of our souls. [*Specific prayers may be added*] Amen.

A Child's Prayer After Meals [Johann Habermann (1516–1590)]

We thank you, Lord, for this our food,
We thank you more for Jesus' blood,
Let manna to our souls be given,
The bread of life sent down from heaven. Amen.

Prayer for the Persecuted/Persecuted Church [Adapted from a section in the “Prayer for all the Needs of Christendom” in the *Psalter Hymnal*, pp. 182–183]

O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, we cry out on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are suffering affliction because of persecution. In particular we pray for [*Specific intercessions added here*]. We pray with the church in heaven, how long before you will judge and avenge their blood on those who dwell on the earth? Grant them courage to know that you are their refuge and strength, a very present help in time of need. Bring comfort to their hearts that they are not left as orphans by the ministry of your Holy Spirit. Deliver them out of all their afflictions. But should it be your will that persecuted Christians must by their death witness to your truth, grant them to know that their trial comes as from your hand. Permit not the memory of your name to be removed from the earth, but may the blood of the martyrs be the seed of the church, and thus cause persecutors to become your people. In the name of Jesus, the faithful witness, who died but rose again. Amen.

Prayer for All in Civil Authority

Almighty God, whose kingdom alone is everlasting and whose power alone is infinite; have mercy upon our land. Grant to [*Specific name mentioned here*], and to all others in authority, wisdom, righteousness, and strength to know and to do your will. So rule their hearts that they, knowing whose servants they are, may above all things seek your honor and glory. Enable us to know whose authority they bear and therefore faithfully and obediently honor them according to your blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns ever, one God, world without end.

Amen.

Prayer for Missions—1 [Adapted from the Book of Common Prayer]

O God the Father, whose Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the Desire of all nations and who came down from heaven to seek and to save the lost; grant your blessing upon your missionary servants who are carrying the light of your gospel into the darkness. We pray particularly for [*Specific missions/missionaries, church plants/church planters mentioned*]. Preserve them from every danger to which they may be exposed; from perils by land and sea, from persecution and pestilence, from discouragement in their labors, and from the devices of the adversary. May they see your work prospering through their words and deeds. Hasten the fullness of your kingdom; pour out your Spirit upon all flesh; cause multitudes of those who neglect your salvation to seek after you and find you and so gather multitudes into your church; and when those in every land shall be converted to you. Lord Jesus, with the Father and the Holy Spirit we give you all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Prayer Before Communion

Eternal and Almighty Father, we commemorate today the death of your Son in the celebration of the holy Supper. He ordained it as a pledge of his love to us and for our remembrance of his sufferings that have ransomed us from our sins. Although we are sinners who are unworthy in ourselves to be partakers of your holy sacraments, we are invited to this sacred meal not because we are worthy in ourselves, but because we are clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness. And as we come to you in repentance from our sins and in faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that you would further sanctify us by your Holy Spirit, that we may serve you acceptably in showing forth with faith and joy the death of our Savior, and that we may glorify you by holy lives; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer after Communion—2

Heavenly Father, we give you eternal praise and thanks that you have granted so great a benefit to us poor sinners, having drawn us into the communion of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. You delivered him to death for us and you give him to us as the food and drink of life eternal. Now grant us this other benefit: that you will never allow us to forget these truths; but having them written on our hearts, may we grow and increase daily in the faith which is at work in every good deed. Thus may we order and pursue all our life to the

exaltation of your glory and the edification of our neighbors; through Jesus Christ, who in the unity of the Holy Spirit lives and reigns with you, O God, forever. Amen.

Prayer for the Sick and the Spiritually Distressed—1

Eternal God, the only Creator, Preserver, Judge and Savior of the world, you alone hold the powers of life and death. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he had conquered death and hell, announced, I was dead, but I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to death and Hades in my hand. Yet often our circumstances seem to testify against your promise. What we see does not appear to agree with what we have heard. Yet, even at the cross, where you seemed so absent and your Son so cruelly and unjustly abandoned by you, we have been taught that he was thereby fulfilling your purposes to redeem us from the power of darkness. We confess that our hearts are so bound to the realities that we see with our eyes in the moment that we easily forget the greater realities that we hear with our ears through your word.

Teach us through these trials to number our days, recognizing that we are but fading in this age, but will flourish in the age to come. We know that these struggles are not tokens of your wrath, but are part of your plan to save us, sanctify us, and glorify yourself. While we may fear the circumstances, we no longer fear the condemnation of the law, the sting of death, or the sharp arrows of Satan. For we know that your Son gained victory for us by his cross and resurrection. We ask that you would, even through these tests, deepen our confidence to appear before you clothed not in the filthy rags of our own works, but in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ our Savior. Continue to look upon us in him, for we pray in his name, who taught us to pray, “Our Father...”

Prayer for the Sick and the Spiritually Distressed—2 (Adapted from Psalter Hymnal)

Eternal and merciful God and Father, the eternal salvation of the living and the eternal life of the dying, you alone have life and death in your hands. You continually care for us in such a way that neither health nor sickness, neither good or evil can befall us—indeed not even a hair can fall from our heads—without your will. You order all things for the good of believers.

We ask that you will grant us the grace of the Holy Spirit, that he may teach us to know truly our miseries, and to bear patiently your chastisements, which as far as our merits are concerned might have been ten thousand times more severe. We know that they are not tokens of your wrath but of your fatherly love towards us, that we might not be condemned with the world.

Increase our faith by your Holy Spirit that we may become more and more united with Christ, to whom you desire to conform us both in suffering and glory. Lighten our cross so that we in our weakness may be able to bear it. We submit ourselves without reserve to your holy will, regardless whether you leave our souls here in these earthly tabernacles or whether you take them home to yourself. We have no fear because we belong to Christ, and therefore shall not perish. We even desire to depart from this weak body in the hope of a blessed resurrection, knowing that then it will be restored to us in a much more glorious form.

Grant that we may experience the blessed comfort of the remission of sins and justification in Christ. May we with that defense overcome all the assaults of Satan. May Jesus’ innocent blood wash away our stain and may his righteousness cover our

unrighteousness in your judgment at last. Arm us with faith and hope, that we may not be put to shame by any fear of death. May the eyes of our soul be fixed upon you when the eyes of our body become dim. When you take from us the power of speech, may our hearts never cease to call upon you. O Lord, we commit our souls into your hands; do not forsake us in the hour of death. This we pray only for the sake of Christ, who taught us to say: “Our Father...”

Prayer for the Sick and the Spiritually Distressed—3 (Adapted from Psalter Hymnal)

O Almighty, eternal, and righteous God, our merciful Father: you are the Lord of life and death; without your will nothing happens in heaven or on earth. We are not worthy to call upon your name, nor to hope that you will listen to us, when we consider how we have spent our time in this life. Yet we pray that you will, according to your mercy, look upon us in Christ who has taken upon himself all our infirmities. We acknowledge that on account of who we are apart from him, we deserve far more than this affliction.

But Lord, we are your people and you are our God. Your mercy, which you have never withheld from those who turn to you, is our only refuge. Therefore we pray, count not our sins against us, but impute to us the wisdom, righteousness, and holiness of our Savior. For His sake deliver us from this suffering in order that the evil one may not regard us as forsaken of God. And if it pleases you to prolong our trial, give us patience and strength to bear it all according to your will; and may it in your wisdom be for our edification.

Rather chastise us here, Lord, than that we should have to perish with the world hereafter. Grant that we may die to this world and to all earthly things, that we may be renewed daily after the image of Jesus Christ. Permit us never to be separated from your love, but draw us daily closer and closer to you, that at last we may enter with joy upon the end of our divine calling, which is to die with Christ, rise with him triumphantly, and live with him eternally. We also believe that you will hear us through Jesus Christ, who has taught us to pray, saying: “Our Father...”

Twenty-One Meditations to Instruct in Faith and the Way of Salvation and Prepare Believers to Die Willingly.¹

1. Since Adam was created just and good, that is to say, holy, righteous, and immortal, and dominion given him over all the creatures which God had created; and whereas he did not long remain in this state, but has through the subtlety of the devil and his own rebellion fallen from this excellent glory, whereby he brought upon us the misery of temporal and eternal death—this is the original sin of which David speaks in the 51st Psalm, saying, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Ps. 51:5). In like manner Paul says to the Romans, “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

¹ “*The Consolation of the Sick*” (*De Ziekentroost*) was published in 1571 by Cornelis van Hille (1540-1598) and has been included with the forms and prayers in many psalters since the sixteenth century. This work includes two appendices: 1) a series of Scripture verses for those who are dying and 2) a further list of texts for those who are seriously ill. It is included here for the edification and consolation of the body of Christ.

2. For as soon as Adam was thus fallen, he immediately came under a certain curse, as we read in Genesis, where God says, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life . . . By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:17, 19). Whence we certainly know that all things which receive life must once die. This David clearly testifies, saying, “What man can live and never see death?” (Ps. 89:48). For Solomon says, “For the living know that they will die” (Eccl. 9:5). And to the Hebrews, “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Heb. 13:14); “It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment” (Heb. 9:27). For as the Scripture says: “We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again” (2 Sam. 14:14); for our days, says Job, are like the days of a hireling, and “swifter than a runner” (Job 9:25). And we pass away, says David, like a stream, indeed, like a leaf which the wind drives away, and a withered stalk and a garment moth-eaten. For “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7); as Job says, We are ashes and must return to ashes (Job 30:19). Likewise James says that man’s life is “a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes” (James 4:14). Indeed, our time passes away as a cloud and is consumed like a mist, and vanishes as a shadow. And Peter also says, quoting from Isaiah, “For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls” (1 Pet. 1:24). The covenant from the beginning is, you shall die—the one today and the other tomorrow, like as green leaves upon a tree, some fall off, and others grow again. Thus it goes with mankind, some die and some are born. As Solomon says, “For everything there is a season . . . a time to be born, and a time to die” (Eccl. 3:1–2).

3. And this time is in the hands of the Lord, as Job says, “His days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass” (Job 14:5). Which Paul also says, that God has “determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26). And David says, “Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Surely a man goes about as a shadow! (Ps. 39:5). For “my days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle . . . they flee away” (Job 7:6, 9:25). Moreover, we are here only “strangers and exiles on the earth” for a short time (Heb. 11:13). For “the years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone off, and we fly away” (Ps. 90:10). And when we live long we live a hundred years. As drops of water are to the sea, so are our years to eternity. And Peter says, “That with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8), even so are our years to eternity.

4. Whereas then we must all die, according to holy Scripture, who would not earnestly wish for death, when we behold in what state and ruin we are plunged through Adam, namely, in all unrighteousness, misery and trouble; inasmuch that we are wicked, and inclined to wickedness from our very infancy. For as Paul says, “We were by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3), “unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:16), having nothing of ourselves but sin. And David also says, “They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good” (Ps. 14:1). “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:19) by reason of sin that dwells in us. Of this

inherent sin, David witnesses that we are conceived and born in sin, and proceed in the same (Ps. 51). For the inclination of men's hearts is to do evil from their youth.

5. Since we thus lie under the wrath of God, and in "the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4), indeed in hell and damnation, therefore Christ "the light of the world" (John 8:12) appeared unto us, and "the sun of righteousness is risen" (Mal. 4:2): "Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25), and has also "made alive" us "who were dead" in sin, and has "forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us;" "this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14); whereby he has triumphed over all our enemies (Col. 2:15)—death, Satan, hell, and the curse of the law, as God has spoken, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55, 57); who has also (according to the promise of God) bruised the head of the Devil (Gen. 3:15), in whose power we were kept captives, by reason of the transgressions of sin.

6. God, to the end that he might deliver us from there, has given us his dearest pledge, namely his only beloved Son in whom the Father is "well pleased" and commands us to "listen to him" (Matt. 17:5) whom he has given for a propitiation and a ransom. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son; that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Also "in this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). "And this is life eternal," says Christ, "that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). He is the true Messiah, who came into the world in "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4), true God to crush the power of the Devil; and true man to be our mediator before God, that he might "redeem those who were under the law" (Gal. 4:5). He is that "lamb without blemish" (1 Pet. 1:19), that was "wounded" and offered "for our transgressions," to be a propitiation for all our sins, as Isaiah clearly testifies (Isa. 53:5). And "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor. 8:9), for he has given unto us, all his goods, all his benefits, all his righteousness, merits and holiness. Therefore we must embrace him in faith, and be thankful to him with love and obedience. And who would not love him who first loved us? (1 John 4:10). In that "while we were enemies" he delivered and reconciled us, how "much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life?" (Rom. 5:8). For how can one have "greater love" than to lay "down his life for his friends?" (John 15:13) Which Christ as a "good shepherd" (John 10:11) has done, who has been "obedient" to his Father, "to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8), and was "made lower than the angels . . . crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). Also he is the true Samaritan who has poured oil and wine in our wounds (Luke 10:34), that is to say, he has poured out his precious blood for our sins, and bought us with such a precious price. For we are not, says Peter, "ransomed . . . with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (1 Pet. 1:18–19). For we are not redeemed "by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood" when "he entered once for all into the holy places . . . securing an eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12); who "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and

transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13–14).

7. Since we certainly know that we only obtain eternal salvation, without our merits—for we have none; “we are unworthy servants” (Luke 17:10)— through the death and resurrection of Christ, we must therefore “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). And since we always stand in need of help, we must go to him; for he says, by the Prophet David, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you” (Ps. 50:15). And although a mother might forsake her child, yet “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). Christ himself says in the gospel: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28–29). “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Life is made manifest in him. He is that heavenly manna, which eternally satisfies our souls, that heavenly bread of which he that eats through faith “shall not hunger” and whoever drinks of his blood “shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

8. Again, Christ says by the Apostle John, “Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev. 22:17); “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of this heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38), which are the operations of the Holy Spirit; “Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14). As God has said by the Prophet Isaiah, “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isa. 55:1). Therefore let us go to this fountain for our refreshment, and not to broken wells that contain no water, for “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:16–17).

9. He is the true mediator who stands between God and us, to be our advocate against all our accusers: “There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5); “Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant” (Heb. 9:15). Therefore, “he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25); with which the Apostle John agreeing, says, “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2), namely for all peoples and nations of the whole world, who sincerely repent and turn themselves to God. For the lamb was slain, from the beginning of the world for believers (Rev. 13:8), as Christ himself says, “Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad” (John 8:56).

10. Thus we see that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). For God is not only the God of the Jews, but of the Gentiles also; he is a God who “will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (Rom. 3:29–30). He has justified us by faith, without the deeds of the law, after which manner David also speaks, that salvation only

comes to the man to whom God imputes righteousness without works, where he says, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity” (Ps. 32:1–2).

11. “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 5:1), by whom we have a certain access into the holy place, by his blood, whereby he has made peace between God and us; for he is our true peace, wherefore we have nothing to fear. For Paul says, “If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?” (Rom. 8:31, 33–35). Therefore though we have the daily actual and other sins remaining in us, we must not despair. For the Prophet Isaiah says, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isa. 1:18). And this is done through Jesus Christ, who has washed away our sins by his blood, of which baptism is a sign; and the Lord's Supper is a token unto us, that we are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ once offered on the cross, “who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1 Thes. 1:10), and all iniquity; “to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14), by which the Lord may be praised.

12. We then knowing for certain, that we are reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, ought, according to the word of God, to have an earnest desire of being delivered from this mortal body, by which we must come to that glorious inheritance of all the children of God, which is prepared for us in heaven. This, Paul, that chosen vessel of God, desired, when he says, “Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:24). Moreover he says, “We know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:1–2, 6, 8). Again Paul says, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:22–23). And since we are pilgrims and strangers, who would not desire to be at home in his native country? For here “we walk” in absence, “by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12), and “shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). Who would not long after this sight, since we see that the holy men of God have craved after it? As we read in the 42nd Psalm, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God! My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually say to me, ‘Where is your God?’” (Ps. 42:1–3). This unutterable glorious sight of God is so great, as the prophet says, that “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9). Again David says that “a day in your courts

is better than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84:10). “How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise” (Ps. 84:1, 4). And, “They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life, in your light do we see light” (Ps. 36:8–9); this is the delightful room, of which Christ spoke by John, “In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:2–3); namely in the new Jerusalem, which “has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb” (Rev. 21:23). There God “will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more” (Rev. 21:4), which is “the last enemy” that God will trample under his feet (1 Cor. 15:26). There, God has prepared a glorious wedding, where we shall sit at the table of the Lord together with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Matt. 8:11); and “blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9).

13. We cannot come to this supper by any other means than through death, therefore Paul says, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21). And as soon as the faithful depart from here, they enter into eternal rest, as Christ says, “Where I am, there will my servant be also” (John 12:26); again, “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). Which is also plainly to be observed in the thief on the cross, when he prayed and said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” upon which Christ answered him, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:42–43). Therefore Paul justly said, agreeable to this, “My desire is to depart and be with Christ” (Phil. 1:23). Solomon likewise says that, “Dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). Which also evidently appears in the example of Enoch and Elijah, who were both taken up into heaven, where “our citizenship is” and from where “we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body” (Phil. 3:20–21).

14. And we cannot arrive to this state of glory, unless through such tribulation, of which Peter speaks: “And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Pet. 5:10). Again, Paul says, “Provided we suffer with him in order that we also may be glorified with him. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:17–18). “For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17). And David said, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning” (Ps. 30:5). “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:13). “So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured” (Heb. 13:12–13). “Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Again, Peter says, “Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased

from sin” (1 Pet. 4:1). Moreover, the Apostle James also says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds” (Jam. 1:2). And Paul likewise says, “We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame” (Rom. 5:3–5). For which reason we must not despise the chastening of the Lord, when he rebukes us; “for the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb. 12:6), which may be seen at large in the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. “Be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord” (Jam. 5:8–11), which has left us an example of perseverance. For we see that Christ “because of the suffering of death” has been “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb. 2:9). Therefore Christ also says, “The one who endures to the end will be saved” (Matt. 10:22). And the Apostle Paul says, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7–8). Likewise James says, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him” (Jam. 1:12).

15. To obtain this crown of righteousness, we must manfully fight against all our enemies, who attack us on all sides; particularly against “the schemes of the devil,” against which we must “put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand” against the Devil and all his might (Eph. 6:11). Peter, speaking of his fight says, “The devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith” and he will flee from you (1 Pet. 5:8–9). This victory and resistance we have from God through Christ, who tramples the Devil under our feet, in whose power and bonds we were bound. He is the prince of this world whom Christ has cast out; and we have likewise through him obtained the victory, and are also through faith made partakers of him. He is “that ancient serpent” (Rev. 12:9) who seeks to devour us as he did devour our first parents, and who still bites us in the heel, wherefore he is called “a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44).

16. Therefore we must be diligent on our guard against his wiles as Peter says, “Be sober-minded; be watchful” (1 Pet. 4:8). For as Christ says, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour” (Matt. 25:13); but know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful” (Luke 12:39–40, 45–46). For we certainly know that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief” (2 Pet. 3:10) in the night, when we shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction will come upon us, as travail upon a woman with child. “But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with

dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:34–36).

17. But this worthiness to stand before the Son of Man consists in a pure undefiled and immovable “faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6), by which we receive and embrace Christ with all his merits and benefits. Which faith we must show by a pure life, as James says. And of this purity Christ speaks by Matthew, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8). And the principal purity lies in the heart, for as Christ says, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person” (Matt. 15:19–20). Therefore the fruits of the Spirit follow, which are, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23). Therefore “unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God” (Matt. 3:3). As Christ says, “Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it” (Mark 10:14). “But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false” (Rev. 21:27).

18. Since then the Law of God requires this perfection of us, as it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law” (Gal. 3:10); as James also says, “Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it” (Jam. 2:10). Again, “The one who does them shall live by them” (Gal. 3:12). But we do not keep the least commandment perfectly. As the wise man says, when we imagine to have done we only begin (and in case we did do it, we only do our duty), wherefore we are by the law condemned in God’s righteous judgment; for this we have a sure remedy and cure, namely Christ, who has “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13), and has satisfied the righteousness of God for us, making reconciliation; and who has “broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances” (Eph. 2:14–15), and “forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Col. 2:13–14). For this great love of Christ, we ought also to love him, and to be thankful to him, with good works, and truly to believe in him, for the gift of these excellent benefits: “For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Heb. 11:6); for “the righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4). “For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28); and although we suffer a little with Christ, we must not despair, for we see that Christ himself when he was struck for our sins, did not strike again, but suffered patiently.

19. And if the ungodly live in great prosperity, as David and the prophets testify, we must not marvel, neither stumble, but comfort ourselves, being assured that their end is everlasting death. He lets them go as sheep to the slaughter, therefore it is to be wondered at that the faithful meet with still more crosses in comparison to the glorious joy which is prepared for them, and on the contrary, that the ungodly have still more prosperity, than they have, in comparison to the dreadful damnation which attends them. Therefore if the trial of believers is not alike, so neither shall the resurrection of the dead be alike.

20. And in this we have great comfort, that all believers will rise at the last day; of which Paul reasoning, says, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God” (1 Cor. 15:13–15). The manner of our resurrection we may read in the 37th chapter of Ezekiel, how we shall arise with flesh and bones. And Job also says, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:25–26). Likewise the earth and the sea shall give up the dead that have slept in them (Rev. 20:13), for Christ is the resurrection, the first of them that slept (John 11:25; 1 Cor. 15:20). “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:13–17).

21. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil (2 Cor. 5:10). Then Christ “will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right” (Matt. 25:32–33), who shall hear the delightful voice, “Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). There we shall stand with greater confidence against those who have distressed us; then we shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father, there we shall come to the hope of an innumerable company of angels. There we shall reign from eternity to eternity, Amen. Blessed are they whose names are written in the Book of Life. Amen

Some Comforting Declarations of Scripture for those near death

O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath!

Psalm 38:1

O LORD, restore my soul, lead me in paths of righteousness, and be with me.

Psalm 23:3, 4

Be gracious to me, O LORD; see my affliction from those who hate me, O you who lift me up from the gates of death.

Psalm 9:13

Be not far from me; for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

Psalm 22:11

O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me.
Psalm 25:2

Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.
Psalm 25:16

For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me.
Psalm 31:3

When I call upon you, I know that you are my God who delivers my soul from death.
Psalm 119:46, 140:6, 116:8

Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.
Psalm 25:18

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.
Psalm 51:9

O LORD, hide not your face from your servant, for I am in distress; make haste to answer me; draw near to my soul; redeem me.
Psalm 69:17–18

In the day of my trouble I call upon you, for you answer me. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant.
Psalm 86:7, 16

The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul.
Psalm 116:3–4

Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.
Psalm 143:2

Some Comforting Declarations of Scripture for those seriously ill

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest . . . and you will find rest for your souls.
Matthew 11:28, 29

Let us now be watchful with him for one hour, lest we enter into temptation.
Matthew 26:40–41

You must now drink the cup which Christ drank—a cup for which he sweat drops of blood in order that it might pass by him; he prayed, however, that his Father's will be done.
Matthew 26:39

Say presently with the thief on the cross: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”
Luke 23:42

O God, be merciful to me a sinner!
Luke 18:13

Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David!
Matthew 15:22

Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!
Acts 7:59

I yearn for you, when shall I behold your lovely face? For my soul thirsts for you as a dry
and thirsty land.
Psalms 63:1

O Lord, you are my life, and death is gain to me
Philippians 1:21

It is my desire to depart and be with you.
Philippians 1:23

Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
Romans 7:24

It is better for me to die than to live.
Philippians 1:23

Nevertheless, Lord, your will be done!
Matthew 26:39

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.
Luke 23:46

BAPTISM OF INFANTS

Form Number 1

Dear Congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ: What the Lord has revealed to us in his Word about holy baptism can be summarized in this way:

First: Baptism teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. This means that we are by nature children of wrath, and for that reason cannot be members of his kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. By this we are admonished to detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and turn to God for our cleansing and salvation.

Second: Baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. For this reason we are baptized into the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us as his children and heirs. Therefore, he promises to provide us with everything good and protect us from all evil or turn it to our profit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Son, God the Son seals to us that he washes us in his blood from all our sins. Christ incorporates us to himself so that we share in his death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he makes his home within us and will sanctify us as members of Christ. He will impart to us what we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. As a result of his work within us, we shall finally be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: The covenant of grace contains both promises and obligations. Having considered the promises, we now consider the obligations. Through baptism God calls us and places us under obligation to live in new obedience to him. This means we must cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must trust in him and love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must renounce the sinful way of life. We must put to death our old nature and show by our lives that we belong to God. If we through weakness should fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy, nor use our weakness as an excuse to keep sinning. Baptism is a seal and totally reliable witness that we have an eternal covenant with God.

Our children should not be excluded from baptism because of their inability to understand its meaning. Just as without their knowledge, they share in Adam's condemnation; so they are, without their knowledge, received to grace in Christ.

God's gracious attitude toward us and our children is revealed in what he said to Abraham, the father of all believers: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your*

offspring after you (Gen. 17:7). The apostle Peter also testifies to this with these words: *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore God formerly commanded that children be circumcised as a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness that comes by faith. Christ also recognized that children are members of the covenant people when he embraced them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Col. 2:11-13), our children should be baptized as heirs of God's kingdom and of his covenant.

As the children grow up, their parents are responsible for teaching them the meaning of baptism.

In order that we may now administer this holy sacrament of God to his glory, for our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon his holy Name.

Almighty, eternal God, long ago you severely punished an unbelieving and unrepentant world in holy judgment by sending a flood. But in your great mercy you saved and protected believing Noah and his family. You also drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his whole army in the Red Sea, and you brought your people Israel through the sea on dry ground. Thus, you revealed the meaning of baptism and the mercies of your covenant in saving your people, who of themselves deserved your condemnation.

We therefore pray that in your infinite mercy you will graciously look upon this your child and bring him/her into union with your Son, Jesus Christ, through your Holy Spirit. May he/she be buried with Christ into death and be raised with him to walk in newness of life. We pray that he/she may follow Christ day by day, may joyfully bear his/her cross, and may cling to him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love.

Comfort him/her in your grace so that when he/she leaves this life and its constant struggle against the power of sin, he/she may appear before the judgment seat of Christ your Son without fear. We ask this in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent(s)

Beloved in Christ the Lord, as you have now heard, baptism is given to us by God to seal his covenant to us and our children. We must, therefore, use the sacrament for the purpose that God intended and not out of superstition or mere custom. That it may be clear that you are doing what God commands, you are to answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, who are conceived and born in sin, and subject to the misery which sin brings, even the condemnation of God, are sanctified in Christ and so as members of his Church ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarized in the Apostles' Creed, and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you sincerely promise to do all that you can to teach this child, and to have him/her taught, this doctrine of salvation?

¶ *The parents answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

¶ Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:

_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Optional:

¶ *The minister addresses the congregation:* Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive this child in love, pray for him/her, help care for his/her instruction in the faith, and encourage and sustain him/her in the fellowship of believers?

¶ *The congregation responds:* We do, God helping us.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. You received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us as your children. You sealed and confirmed this to us by holy baptism.

We earnestly pray, through your beloved Son, that you will always govern this child by your Holy Spirit. May he/she be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness and grow and develop in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that he/she may see your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to him/her and to us all. May he/she live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ. Give him/her the courage to fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion. May he/she forever praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Baptism of Infants: Form 2

The Institution

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

As we celebrate holy baptism let, us first hear our Lord Jesus Christ's institution of this sacrament. After he had risen victorious from the grave, Jesus said to his disciples:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:18–20).

In obedience to this command the church has always baptized believers and their children.

The Promises

Let us hear the promises of God which are confirmed in baptism. The Lord made this great promise to Abraham: *"I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you"* (Gen. 17:7).

Generations later, though Israel was unfaithful to God's covenant with them, God renewed his promise through the prophet: *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"* (Jer. 31:33, 34).

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4), our Lord Jesus Christ, to give pardon and peace through the blood of the cross, the *"blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matt. 26:28).

After Jesus had risen from the dead, the apostles proclaimed: *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself"* (Acts 2:38–39).

Anticipating the fulfillment of God's promises, Paul assures us, *"If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him ... if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself"* (2 Tim. 2:11b–12a, 13).

These are the unfailing promises of our Lord to those who are baptized.

The Instruction

Hear also the teaching of Scripture concerning the sacrament of baptism.

The water of baptism signifies the washing away of our sin by the blood of Christ and the renewal of our lives by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). It also signifies that we are buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4). From this we learn that our sin has been condemned by God, that we are to hate it, and that we must consider ourselves as having died to it. Moreover, the water of baptism signifies that we are raised with Christ (Col. 2:12). From this we learn that we are to walk with Christ in newness of life. All this tells us that God

has adopted us as his children, “*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*” (Rom. 8:17).

Thus in baptism God seals the promises he gave when he made his covenant with us, calling us and our children to put our trust for life and death in Christ our Savior, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him in obedience and love.

God also graciously includes our children in his covenant, and all his promises are for them as well as us (Gen. 17:7, Acts 2:39). Jesus demonstrated this when he embraced little children and blessed them (Mark 10:16). The apostle Paul said that children of believers are holy (1 Cor. 7:14). So, just as the children of the old covenant received the sign of circumcision, our children in the new covenant are given the sign of baptism (Col. 2:11–12). We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God’s own children, and because of that, they are to repent of their sins and embrace God’s promise of forgiveness in Christ by faith.

The Prayer of Preparation

Let us pray:

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will never destroy us in our sin as you once did with the flood upon the world, but save us as believing Noah and his family, and spare us as the Israelites who walked safely through the Sea. We pray that Jesus Christ, who went down into the Jordan River and came up to receive the Holy Spirit, who sank deep into death and was raised up Lord of life, will always keep us and our little ones in the grip of his hand. We pray, O holy Father, that your Spirit will separate us from sin and openly mark us with a faith that can stand the light of day and endure the dark of night. Prepare us now, O Lord, to respond with glad hope to your promises so that we, and all entrusted to our care, may drink deeply from the well of living water. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Vows

The minister then addresses the parents:

Since you, _____, have presented this child for holy baptism, you are asked to answer the following questions sincerely before God and his people:

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, who are conceived and born in sin, and subject to the misery which sin brings, even the condemnation of God, are sanctified in Christ and so as members of his Church ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarized in the Apostles’ Creed, and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you sincerely promise to do all that you can to teach this child, and to have him/her taught, this doctrine of salvation?

The parents respond: We do, God helping us.

The Sacrament

Our Lord said: “*Let the children come to me; do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God*” (Mark 10:14).

_____, I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Optional:

¶ *The minister addresses the congregation:* Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive this child in love, pray for him/her, help care for his/her instruction in the faith, and encourage and sustain him/her in the fellowship of believers?

A Triumphant Hymn

The Baptismal Prayer

O Lord our gracious God, forever faithful to your promises, we thank you for assuring us again in the sacrament of baptism that you forgive us and receive us as your children in Christ. Grant wisdom and love to the parents and to us all as we carry out the vows just made. We pray that you will guide our little ones throughout their lives. Enable all of them to respond in faith to the gospel. Fill them with your Spirit and make their lives fruitful. Uphold them in their hour of trial, and when Christ returns let them celebrate with all the people of God your greatness and goodness forever in the joy of your new creation. Amen.

Profession of Faith: Form 1

We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. We praise him for working faith in your heart so that you now desire publicly to profess your faith in the presence of God and his holy church, and enter into the privileges of full communion with the people of God.

Vows

_____, you are now requested to answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God to continue steadfastly in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you despise and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to die to your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become wayward either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

¶ Each individual then answers: I do.

Charge

I charge you, then, beloved, that you, by the diligent use of the means of grace and with the assistance of your God, continue in the profession which you have just made. In the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord, I now welcome you to full communion with the people of God. Rest assured that all the privileges of such communion are now yours. *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen* (1 Peter 5:10–11).

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have from the beginning embraced in your covenant the children together with their parents. We thank you that you from the first included these your servants in the Christian Church, and granted them all the many blessings of the covenant community. We praise you that in their case you added the

special grace of your Holy Spirit, so that of their own will they come here today to profess your truth and to consecrate their lives to your service. We earnestly pray that you will continue to carry on the good work you have begun in them until the day of complete redemption. Increase in them daily the many gifts of your grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Grant them the happiness of promoting the glory of their Lord and the edification of His people. Deliver them in the temptations of this life and in the final trial of death. And in that day when you make up your jewels, set also these your servants in your crown, that they may shine as stars, to your praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Public Profession of Faith: Form 2

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

We thank the Lord our God for the grace given us by adopting us to be his children and receiving us into his covenant. We acknowledge His love and power, by which He instills in his children the desire to publicly profess their faith in him in the presence of his holy church and thereby receive all the responsibilities as well as the privileges of communion with the people of God.

Today we are privileged to welcome into the full life of the church's fellowship those who wish to confess their faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. When they were baptized, God made clear his claim on them as his own, and they were received into the church. Now they wish to share fully in the life of this congregation and of the whole church of God. And so today they will publicly accept and confirm what was sealed in their baptism, confess their faith in the Lord Jesus, and commit themselves to God as his willing servants. We thank God for having given them this desire and pray that as we now hear their confession, he will favor us with the presence and guidance of his Holy Spirit.

Vows

_____, will you now stand, and in the presence of God and his people answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God to continue steadfastly in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you despise and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to die to your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become wayward either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

¶ *Each individual then answers:* I do.

Reception

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I now welcome you to all the privileges of full communion. I welcome you to full participation in the life of the church. I welcome you to its responsibilities, its joys and its sufferings. May you, by the diligent use of the means of grace and with the assistance of your God, continue in the profession which you have just made. *“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good, that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (Heb. 13:20-21).

¶ The minister may ask the congregation to rise, and say: Let us together confess what we believe:

¶ Congregation:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Prayer

Lord, our God, we thank you that by your Word and Spirit we know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. May those who confessed your name today never cease to wonder at what you have done for them. Help them to continue firmly in the faith, to bear witness to your love, and to let the Holy Spirit shape their lives. Take them, good Shepherd, into your care, that they may loyally endure opposition in serving you. May we, with all your children, live together in the joy and power of your Holy Spirit. We ask this in the hope of Christ's coming. Amen.

Baptism of Adults: Form 1

¶ When adults who have not been baptized desire to receive baptism, they shall first be thoroughly instructed in the doctrines of the Christian religion. And when they have made a good profession in the presence of the consistory, they shall be permitted to make public profession and receive holy baptism, in the administration of which the following form shall be used.

Dear congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ: What the Lord has revealed to us in his Word about holy baptism can be summarized in this way:

First: Baptism teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. This means that we are by nature children of wrath, and for that reason cannot be members of his kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. By this we are admonished to detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and turn to God for our cleansing and salvation.

Second: Baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. For this reason we are baptized into the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us as his children and heirs. Therefore, he promises to provide us with everything good and protect us from all evil or turn it to our profit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Son, God the Son seals to us that he washes us in his blood from all our sins. Christ incorporates us to himself so that we share in his death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he makes his home within us and will sanctify us as members of Christ. He will impart to us what we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. As a result of his work within us, we shall finally be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: The covenant of grace contains both promises and obligations. Having considered the promises, we now consider the obligations. Through baptism God calls us and places us under obligation to live in new obedience to him. This means we must cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must trust in him and love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must renounce the sinful way of life. We must put to death our old nature and show by our lives that we belong to God. If we through weakness should fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy, nor use our weakness as an excuse to keep sinning. Baptism is a seal and totally reliable witness that we have an eternal covenant with God.

And although the children of Christians, despite their inability to understand these things, must be baptized by virtue of the covenant, yet it is not lawful to baptize adults, unless they first confess and repent of their sins, and make a profession of their faith in Christ. For this reason, according to the command of God, John the Baptist preached a baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4, 5 and Luke 3:3), but also our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt. 28:19). This promise is confirmed by Paul: *Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name* (Acts 22:16). According to this rule, as we see in the book of Acts, the apostles baptized no other adults but those who confessed and repented of their sins and who made a profession of faith. Therefore it is not lawful now to baptize any other adults than those who have learned and understand, from the preaching of the holy gospel, the mysteries of holy baptism, and are able to give an account of their faith and profess that faith publicly.

That we therefore may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call on his holy Name:

Almighty, eternal God, long ago you severely punished an unbelieving and unrepentant world in holy judgment by sending a flood. But in your great mercy you saved and protected believing Noah and his family. You also drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his whole army in the Red Sea, and you brought your people Israel through the sea on dry ground. Thus you revealed the meaning of baptism and the mercies of your covenant in saving your people, who of themselves deserved your condemnation.

We therefore pray that in your infinite mercy you will graciously look upon this your child and bring him/her into union with your Son, Jesus Christ, through your Holy Spirit. May he/she be buried with Christ into death and be raised with him to walk in newness of life. We pray that he/she may follow Christ day by day, may joyfully bear his/her cross, and may cling to him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love.

Comfort him/her in your grace so that when he/she leaves this life and its constant struggle against the power of sin, he/she may appear before the judgment seat of Christ your Son without fear. We ask this in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Person to be Baptized

_____, since, then, you desire to receive holy baptism, that it may be to you a seal of your incorporation in the Church of God and that it may now appear that you not only believe and embrace the Christian religion, in which you have been instructed by us but also that you intend to direct your life accordingly, you are to answer these questions sincerely before God and His church:

First: Do you believe in the only true God, distinct in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who of nothing has made heaven and earth and all that is in them, and still upholds and governs them, so that nothing comes to pass, either in heaven or on earth, without his divine will?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Second: Do you believe that you are conceived and born in sin and therefore are by birth and by nature a child of wrath, totally incapable in yourself of doing any good and prone to all evil; and that you, in thought, word, and deed, have frequently transgressed the commandments of the Lord; and do you sincerely repent of these your sins?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Third: Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who is both true and eternal God and very man, who assumed his human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, is given you of God as a Savior; and that you by this faith receive remission of sins in his blood, and that you by the power of the Holy Spirit have become a member of Jesus Christ and of his Church?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Fourth: Do you believe that the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God; do you assent to all the articles of the Christian religion, and of the Reformed Faith, as they are taught here in this Christian church from the Word of God, and are you determined to continue in the same doctrine to the end of your life; and do you also reject all heresies and errors conflicting with this doctrine?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Fifth: In love for Christ do you firmly resolve always to lead a Christian life, and to forsake the world and its evil lusts; and do you desire, as well, to show your love to Christ in seeking the fellowship of His Church, availing yourself diligently of the means of grace given to her, and cheerfully submitting to the government, admonition, and discipline of the Church?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

The good and great God mercifully grant you his grace and blessing in this your holy purpose, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

¶ *Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:*

_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Optional:

¶ *The minister addresses the congregation:*

Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive _____ into your fellowship as members of the body of Christ, and do you promise to encourage them in the Christian faith and help them in doing the work of the Lord?

¶ *Congregation:* We do, God helping us.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of your dear Son Jesus Christ. You received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us as your children. You sealed and confirmed this to us by holy baptism.

We earnestly pray, through your beloved Son, that you will always govern this brother/sister by your Holy Spirit. May he/she continue to mature in the Christian faith and in godliness and grow and develop in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that he/she may see your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to him/her and to us all. May he/she live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ. Give him/her the courage to fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion. May he/she forever praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Baptism of Adults: Form 2

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Just as the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7, 10), so too it is our joy as a congregation to receive new believers into our fellowship. At a recent consistory meeting _____, declared his/her faith in Christ and expressed his/her desire to receive the sacrament of baptism. Today we are happy that he/she will confess his/her faith before us all and receive the sacrament of holy baptism.

The Vows

_____, will you now, and in the presence of God and his people, respond to the following questions:

First: Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to redeem the world, do you love and trust him as the One who saves you from your sin, and do you with repentance and joy embrace him as Lord of your life?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Second: Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and his redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Third: Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, receiving thankfully and partaking diligently of the means of grace given to her, and honoring and submitting to her authority; and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord everywhere?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

(The response may be asked after the last question only).

The Institution

Let us hear our Lord's command concerning the sacrament of holy baptism. After he had risen victorious from the grave, Jesus said to his disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

The Promises

Now listen to the promises of God which are confirmed in baptism.

The Lord made this great promise to Abraham: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you (Genesis 17:7).*

Generations later, though Israel was unfaithful to this covenant, the Lord renewed His promise through the prophet: *This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more* (Jeremiah 31:33, 34).

When the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4) God came to earth in Jesus Christ to give pardon and peace through the blood of the cross, the *blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Matthew 26:28).

After Jesus had risen from the dead, the apostles proclaimed: *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself* (Acts 2:38–39).

Anticipating the fulfillment of all God’s promises, Paul assures us, *If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him*” (2 Timothy 2:11–12).

These are the unfailing promises of our Lord to those who are baptized.

The Instruction

Finally, recall the teaching of Holy Scripture concerning the sacrament of baptism.

The water of baptism signifies the washing away of our sin by the blood of Christ and the renewal of our lives by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). It also signifies that we are buried with Christ (Romans 6:4). From this we learn that our sin has been condemned by God, that we are to hate it and and that we must consider ourselves as having died to it. Moreover, the water of baptism signifies that we are raised with Christ (Colossians 2:12). From this we learn that we are to walk with Christ in newness of life. All this tells us that God has adopted us as his children, *“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”* (Romans 8:17).

Thus in baptism God seals the promises He gave when He made His covenant of grace with us, calling us and our children to put our trust for life and death in Christ our Savior, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him in obedience and love.

Prayer of Preparation

Let us pray:

Father in heaven, we pray that you will never destroy us in our sin as with the flood, but save us as believing Noah and his family, and spare us as the Israelites who walked safely through the Sea.

We pray that Christ, who went down into the Jordan and came up to receive the Spirit, who sank deep into death and was raised up Lord of life, will always keep us and our little ones in the grip of His hand.

We pray O holy Father, that your Spirit will separate us from sin and openly mark us with a faith that can stand the light of day and endure the dark of night.

Prepare us now, O Lord, to respond with glad hope to your promises so that we, and all entrusted to our care, may drink deeply from the well of living water. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

The Sacrament

¶ The minister addresses the confessor(s), standing near the water:

Do you now wish to be baptized in the name of the Triune God, and will you embrace your baptism as a sign and seal that God receives you as his own in Christ, forgives all your sins, and incorporates you into his church?

¶ I do, with all my heart. (To be said by each confessor, if there are more than one)

¶ In administering the sacrament the minister shall say: _____, I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I now welcome you to all the privileges of full communion. I welcome you to full participation in the life of the church. I welcome you to its responsibilities, its privileges, its sufferings, and its joys.

Optional:

¶ The minister addresses the congregation:

Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive _____ into your fellowship as members of the body of Christ, and do you promise to encourage them in the Christian faith and help them in doing the work of the Lord?

¶ Congregation: We do, God helping us.

¶ A triumphant song may be sung

The Baptismal Prayer

Let us pray:

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for Jesus Christ, for the new life given in him, and for the one faith, one hope, and one baptism which your people have shared through the ages. We rejoice that _____ is now one with your church and that we may receive him/her as a member of this congregation. Guide him/her in the Christian life of discipleship and sustain us all in the fellowship and service of our Lord. Amen.

Reception of Families

¶ This form has been prepared for use on those occasions when an entire family is received into membership, when the parent(s) make profession of faith and there is infant/child baptism.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ:

Concerning the covenant of grace, the Apostle Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, *The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore, when converts such as Lydia (Acts 16:15) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31) professed faith in Jesus Christ, their whole households were baptized and added to Christ's church. Ever since the days of the apostles, Christ has been pleased to add to his church both individuals and families.

We rejoice in the grace of God when those who have received the sign and the seal of the covenant are made desirous of professing their faith publicly, and of obtaining the privileges of full communion with the people of God. By this public profession of faith they acknowledge God's goodness toward them and pledge their lives to him in grateful devotion.

What God has revealed to us in his Word about holy baptism can be summarized in this way:

First: Baptism teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. This means that we are by nature children of wrath, and for that reason we cannot be members of his kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. By this we are admonished to detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and turn to God for our cleansing and salvation.

Second: Baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. For this reason we are baptized into the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us as his children and heirs. Therefore, he promises to provide us with everything good and protect us from all evil or turn it to our profit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Son, God the Son seals to us that he washes us in his blood from all our sins. Christ incorporates us to himself so that we share in his death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he makes his home within us and will sanctify us as members of

Christ. He will impart to us what we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. As a result of his work within us, we shall finally be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: The covenant of grace contains both promises and obligations. Having considered the promises, we now consider the obligations. Through baptism God calls us and places us under obligation to live in new obedience to him. This means we must cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must trust in him and love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must renounce the sinful way of life. We must put to death our old nature and show by our lives that we belong to God. If we through weakness should fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy, nor use our weakness as an excuse to keep sinning. Baptism is a seal and totally reliable witness that we have an eternal covenant with God.

Our children should not be excluded from baptism because of their inability to understand its meaning. Just as without their knowledge they share in Adam's condemnation; so they are, without their knowledge, received to grace in Christ.

God's gracious attitude toward us and our children is revealed in what he said to Abraham, the father of all believers: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you* (Gen. 17:7). The apostle Peter also testifies to this with these words: *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore God formerly commanded that children be circumcised as a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness that comes by faith. Christ also recognized that children are members of the covenant people when he embraced them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Col. 2:11-13), our children should be baptized as heirs of God's kingdom and of his covenant.

As the children grow up, their parents are responsible for teaching them the meaning of baptism.

In order that we may now witness this profession of faith and administer this holy sacrament of God to his glory, for our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon his Holy Name.

Almighty, eternal God, long ago you severely punished an unbelieving and unrepentant world in holy judgment by sending a flood. But in your great mercy you saved and protected believing Noah and his family. You also drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his whole army in the Red Sea, and you brought your people Israel through the sea on dry ground. Thus you revealed the meaning of baptism and the mercies of your covenant in saving your people, who of themselves deserved your condemnation.

We therefore pray that in your infinite mercy you will graciously look upon this family. For the sake of Jesus Christ receive these parents as they testify to their

faith in him. Bring the children into union with your Son, Jesus Christ, through your Holy Spirit. May they be buried with Christ into death and be raised with him to walk in newness of life. We pray that by your grace this family may follow Christ day by day, may joyfully bear their cross, and may cling to him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love.

Comfort them in your grace so that when they leave this life and its constant struggle against the power of sin, they may appear before the judgment seat of Christ your Son without fear. We ask this in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Profession of Faith

Address to the parents:

First: Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you despise and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become wayward either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

¶ *Each individual then answers: I do.*

Baptism of Infants and Children

Address to Parent/s

Beloved in Christ the Lord, you have heard that baptism is an institution of God to seal to us and our seed his covenant; therefore it must be used for that end, and not out of superstition or mere custom. That it may, then, be clear to all that you are in agreement, you are to sincerely answer these questions

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, even to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ and therefore, as members of his church, ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you promise and intend to instruct this child, as soon as he/she is able to understand, in the doctrine that you have professed, to the utmost of your power?

¶ *The parents then answer:* We do (or in case only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

¶ *Then the minister of Word and Sacrament, in baptizing, will say:*

_____, I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. You received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us as your children. You sealed and confirmed this to us by holy baptism.

We earnestly pray, through your beloved Son, that you will always govern this family by your Holy Spirit. May the child/children be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness and grow and develop in the Lord Jesus Christ. May the parent(s) lead by example and show by word and deed their submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that they all may see your fatherly goodness and mercy which you have shown to them and to us all. May they live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ. Give them the courage to fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion. May they forever praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Household Baptism

¶ This form has been prepared for use on those occasions when an entire family is received into membership, when the parents make profession of faith and the entire household is baptized.

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Concerning the covenant of grace, the Apostle Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, *the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore, when converts such as Lydia (Acts 16:15) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33) professed faith in Jesus Christ, their whole households were baptized and added to Christ's church. Ever since the days of the apostles, Christ has been pleased to add to his church both individuals and families.

We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God that has been given to you in Christ Jesus. We praise him for working faith in your heart so that you now desire publicly to profess your faith in the presence of God and his holy church, to enter into the privileges of full communion with the people of God, and to present your children for baptism.

Instruction

What God has revealed to us in his Word about holy baptism can be summarized in this way:

First: Baptism teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. This means that we are by nature children of wrath, and for that reason we cannot be members of his kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. By this we are admonished to detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and turn to God for our cleansing and salvation.

Second: Baptism signifies and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. For this reason we are baptized into the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us as his children and heirs. Therefore, he promises to provide us with everything good and protect us from all evil or turn it to our profit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Son, God the Son seals to us that he washes us in his blood from all our sins. Christ incorporates us to himself so that we share in his death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he makes his home within us and will sanctify us as members of Christ. He will impart to us what we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. As a result of his work within us, we shall finally be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: The covenant of grace contains both promises and obligations. Having considered the promises, we now consider the obligations. Through baptism God calls us and places us under obligation to live in new obedience to him. This means we must cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must trust in him and love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must renounce the sinful way of life. We must put to death our old nature and show by our lives that we belong to God. If we through weakness should fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy, nor use our weakness as an excuse to keep sinning. Baptism is a seal and totally reliable witness that we have an eternal covenant with God.

Our children should not be excluded from baptism because of their inability to understand its meaning. Just as, without their knowledge, they share in Adam's condemnation; so they are, without their knowledge, received to grace in Christ.

God's gracious attitude toward us and our children is revealed in what he said to Abraham, the father of all believers: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you* (Gen. 17:7). The apostle Peter also testifies to this with these words: *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore God formerly commanded that children be circumcised as a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness that comes by faith. Christ also recognized that children are members of the covenant people when he embraced them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Col. 2:11-13), our children should be baptized as heirs of God's kingdom and of his covenant, and as they grow up, the parents shall be bound to give them further instruction in these things

It is not lawful to baptize adults unless they first confess and repent of their sins, and make a profession of their faith in Christ. For this reason, according to the command of God, John the Baptist preached a baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4, 5 and Luke 3:3), but also our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt. 28:19). This promise is confirmed by Paul: *Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name* (Acts 22:16). According to this rule, as we see in the book of Acts, the apostles baptized no other adults but those who confessed and repented of their sins and who made a profession of faith. Therefore it is not lawful now to baptize any other adults than those who have learned and understand, from the preaching of the holy gospel, the mysteries of holy baptism, and are able to give an account of their faith and profess that faith publicly.

Prayer

In order that we may now administer this holy sacrament of God to his glory, for our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon his holy Name.

Almighty, eternal God, long ago you severely punished an unbelieving and unrepentant world in holy judgment by sending a flood. But in your great mercy you saved and protected believing Noah and his family. You also drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his whole army in the Red Sea, and you brought your people Israel through the sea on dry ground. Thus you revealed the meaning of baptism and the mercies of your covenant in saving people, who of themselves deserved your condemnation.

We therefore pray that in your infinite mercy you will graciously look upon this family and bring them into union with your Son, Jesus Christ, through your Holy Spirit. May they be buried with Christ into death and be raised with him to walk in newness of life. We pray that they may follow Christ day by day, may joyfully bear their cross, and cling to him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love.

Comfort them in your grace so that when they leave this life and its constant struggle against the power of sin, they may appear before the judgment seat of Christ your Son without fear. We ask this in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent/s

Beloved in Christ the Lord, as you have now heard, baptism is given to us by God to seal His covenant to us and our children. We must, therefore, use the sacrament for the purpose that God intended and not out of superstition or mere custom. That it may be clear that you are doing what God commands, you are to answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you believe in the only true God, distinct in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who of nothing has made heaven and earth and all that is in them, and still upholds and governs them, so that nothing comes to pass, either in heaven or on earth, without his divine will?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Second: Do you believe that you are conceived and born in sin and therefore by nature are a child of wrath, totally incapable of doing any good and prone to all evil; and that you, in thought, word, and deed, have frequently transgressed the commandments of the Lord; and do you sincerely repent of these your sins?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Third: Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who is both true and eternal God and very man, who assumed his human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, is given you of God as a Savior; and that you by this faith receive remission of sins in his blood, and that you by the power of the Holy Spirit have become a member of Jesus Christ and of his Church?

¶ Answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Fourth: Do you wholeheartedly believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God to continue steadfastly in this profession?

¶ Answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Fifth: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your desire to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, to die to your old nature, and to lead a godly life; and do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become wayward either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

¶ Answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Sixth: Do you acknowledge that our children, who are conceived and born in sin, and subject to the misery which sin brings, even the condemnation of God, are sanctified in Christ and so as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

¶ Answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Seventh: Do you sincerely promise to do all you can to teach this child, and to have him/her taught, this doctrine of salvation? ¶ Answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

The good and great God mercifully grant you His grace and blessing in this your holy purpose, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

¶ Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say: _____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. You received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us as your children. You sealed and confirmed this to us by holy baptism.

We earnestly pray, through your beloved Son, that you will always govern this family by your Holy Spirit. May the child/children be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness and grow and develop in the Lord Jesus Christ. May the parent(s) lead by example and show by word and deed their submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that they all may see your fatherly goodness and mercy which you have shown to them and to us all. May they live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ. Give them the courage to fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion. May they forever praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper: Form 1

The Institution of the Supper

Dear congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us give full attention to the words of the institution of the holy supper of our Lord, as they are delivered by the Apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself (1 Cor. 11:23–29).

That we may now celebrate the supper of the Lord to our comfort, it is necessary to examine ourselves fully; and further to consider carefully that purpose for which Christ has ordained and instituted this sacrament—namely, his remembrance.

The Call to Self-Examination

The true examination of ourselves consists of three parts:

First: Let everyone carefully consider their sins and ungodliness, that they may hate their sins and humble themselves before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great that he, rather than leaving it unpunished, has punished it in his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.

Second: Let everyone examine their heart whether they also believe this sure promise of God that all their sins are forgiven them only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the complete righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given them as their own—indeed, so completely as if they personally had satisfied for all their sins and fulfilled all righteousness.

Third: Let everyone carefully examine their own conscience to see if they are fully determined to show true thankfulness to God in every area of life, and to walk sincerely before His face; and also whether they, with full sincerity, strive to lay aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, and earnestly resolve from this day forward to live in true love and unity with their neighbor.

All those, then, who are of this mind, God will certainly receive in grace and count as worthy partakers of the table of His Son Jesus Christ. On the contrary, those who do not sincerely believe this testimony in their hearts eat and drink judgment upon themselves.

According to the command of Christ and the apostle Paul, those who know themselves to be engaging in the following sins without repentance, have no part in the kingdom of Christ and should therefore abstain from coming to the table of the Lord: idolaters; those who call upon deceased saints, angels or any other creature; those who revere images; those who engage in witchcraft, fortune-telling, or occult practices, or other forms of superstition; all those who despise God, his word, and his holy sacraments; all blasphemers, those who seek to cause discord, factions, and dissension in church or in the state; all perjurers; all who are disobedient to their parents and those in lawful authority; all murderers, contentious people, and those who live in hatred and envy against their neighbors; all adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, thieves, the greedy, robbers, gamblers, covetous people, and all who lead offensive lives. All those who continue in such sins shall abstain from the Lord's Supper, so that they feel the weight of God's judgment and condemnation.

But this warning is not intended to discourage those believers with contrite hearts, as if no one might come to the Lord's Supper unless they are without sin. We do not come to this supper to testify about our own perfection and righteousness, but, on the contrary, we come seeking life in Jesus Christ apart from ourselves. We come confessing our misery, admitting that we do have many shortcomings, that we do not have perfect faith. We also confess that we do not serve God with sufficient zeal, but that we must struggle daily with the weakness of our faith and struggle against the evil lusts of our flesh. However, the grace of the Holy Spirit makes us sorry for our shortcomings, gives us the desire to live according to God's commandments, and helps us to fight against unbelief. Therefore we can rest assured that no sin or weakness which still remains in us against our will can prevent us from being received by God's grace and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink.

Celebrating Our Salvation in Christ

Let us also consider the purpose for which our Lord has instituted his supper: that we should do this in remembrance of him. And this is how we remember him by it:

First, let us be fully persuaded in our hearts that our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the promises made to our forefathers in the Old Testament, was sent by the Father into this world; that he assumed our flesh and blood; that he has taken upon himself for us the wrath of God under which we should have perished eternally; that from the beginning of his incarnation until the end of his life on earth he has fulfilled for us all obedience and righteousness of the divine law. This was especially evident when the weight of our sins and of the wrath of God caused him to sweat drops of blood in the garden. He was bound that we might be loosed from our sins, and afterward, he suffered countless insults that we might never be put to shame. Let us confidently believe that he was innocent, yet put to death that we might be acquitted on the Day of Judgment; that he even allowed his own blessed body to be nailed to the cross so as to cancel *the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross* (Col. 2:15). In doing so, he took from us the curse and bore it himself that he might fill us with his blessing. He humbled himself to the very deepest reproach and anguish of hell, in body and soul, on the cross, when he cried out with a loud voice: *My God, my God, why have*

you forsaken me? (Matt. 27:46). He did all of this so that we might be accepted by God, never to be rejected by him. Indeed with his death and the shedding of his blood, he has confirmed the new and eternal covenant, the covenant of grace and of reconciliation, when he said, *It is finished* (John 19:30).

In order that we might firmly believe that we belong to his covenant of grace, during his last supper *Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matt. 26:26–28). That is: 'As often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, as a sure reminder and pledge you shall be admonished and assured of my great love and faithfulness toward you. Because you otherwise would have suffered eternal death, I give my body and blood for you in my death on the cross.' And, 'As certainly as this bread is broken before you, and this cup is given to you, and with your mouth you eat and drink in remembrance of me, so surely do I nourish and refresh for everlasting life your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood.'

From the institution of this holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that he directs our faith to his perfect sacrifice, once offered on the cross, as the only foundation of our salvation. By this sacrifice he has become to our hungry and thirsty souls the true food and drink of life eternal. For by his death he has taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, our sin. He has also obtained for us the life-giving Spirit, who dwells in Christ our head and enables us, who are his members, to have communion with him and be made partakers of his riches, including eternal life, righteousness, and glory.

Besides, by this same Spirit we are also united as members of one body in true Christian love, as the apostle Paul says: *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17). As many grains are ground to prepare one loaf of bread, and as many grapes are pressed together to produce wine, we who by true faith are incorporated into Christ shall be one body, through Christian love, for the sake of our dear Savior Christ. He loved us so greatly in order that we might show his love toward one another, not only in words but also in deeds.

May the almighty, merciful God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us in this, through his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Dependence

That we may obtain all these blessings, let us humble ourselves before God and with true faith implore him for His grace:

Merciful God and Father, we cherish the blessed memory of the death and sufferings of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. We ask that in this supper you will so work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that with true confidence, we might give ourselves up, more and more, unto your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that this

might allow our burdened and contrite hearts to be nourished and refreshed with the true body and blood of him who is true God and true man, the only heavenly bread. Empower us to no longer live in our sins, knowing that he lives in us, and we in him. May we truly be partakers of the new and everlasting covenant of grace. May we not doubt that you will forever be our gracious Father, who does not impute the guilt of our sins to us, and who provides us with all that we need for body and soul, as your dear children and heirs. Grant us also your grace, that we may take up our cross cheerfully, deny ourselves, confess our Savior, and in all tribulation—with uplifted head—expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven. There he will make our mortal bodies like unto his glorified body, and take us to be with him in eternity. Answer us, O God and merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper

By this holy supper, may we also be strengthened in the catholic, undoubted, Christian faith, of which we make profession with heart and mouth, saying:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. Amen.

That we may be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not cling with our hearts to external things, like bread and wine, but lift our hearts to heaven, where our advocate, Jesus Christ, is, at the right hand of his heavenly Father, where the articles of our Christian faith direct us. Let us not doubt that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls, with his body and blood, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of him.

¶ *In breaking and distributing the bread, the minister shall say:*

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

¶ *And when he gives the cup:*

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

¶ *During the communion a Psalm may be sung, or some portion of Scripture may be read, in remembrance of the passion of Christ; such as Isaiah 53, John 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, or 18.*

The Response of Thanksgiving and Praise

¶ *After the communion the minister shall say:*

Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord has now nourished our souls at his table, let us together praise his holy name with thanksgiving; and let everyone say in his heart:

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy*

...

*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.*

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him (Ps. 103:1–4, 8–13).

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:32).

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Rom. 5:8–10).

Therefore my mouth and heart shall show forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth for evermore. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

O merciful God and Father, we thank you with all our heart that of your boundless mercy you have given us your only begotten Son for a Mediator, the sacrifice for our sins, and as our food and drink unto life eternal. We also thank you that you give us a true faith, whereby we become partakers of these benefits. You have united us to Christ and to each other in the communion of saints. You have given your Son for us and to us and have proclaimed his saving death to the whole world. Having signified and sealed the atoning sacrifice of your Son for us, we ask that you would by your Spirit also make us witnesses to this good news among our neighbors. Strengthen us in faith to live gratefully in this present age as we await our Savior's return in glory. In his name we pray. Amen.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper: Form 2

Preparatory Exhortation

¶ If the Preparatory Exhortation and the communion Formulary are combined for use in the communion service, the following changes should be made:

“...since we hope next Lord's Day,” should be changed to “since it is our privilege this day”

The paragraph beginning, “And since it is necessary for us...” should be omitted.

Dear congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, since we hope next Lord's Day to celebrate the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are called to prepare our hearts by rightly examining ourselves. For the Apostle Paul has written: *Whoever...eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup* (1 Cor. 11:27–28).

Therefore, you should examine your life and, considering your own sin and the wrath of God on it, be sure that you humble yourself in repentance before God. Examine your heart to be sure that you trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation—believing your sins are forgiven wholly by grace for the sake of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. Finally, examine your conscience to be sure that you resolve to live in faith and obedience before your Lord, and in love and peace with your neighbor.

Warning & Invitation

God will surely receive at the table of his Son all who truly repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and desire to do his will. All those, however, who do not repent, who do not put their trust in the Lord Jesus, and who have no desire to lead a godly life, are warned, according to the command of God, to keep themselves from the holy sacrament. If any one of us is living in disobedience to Christ and in enmity with his neighbor, he must repent of his sin and reconcile himself to his neighbor before he comes to the Lord's Table. *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself* (1 Cor. 11:29).

This solemn warning is not designed, however, to discourage penitent sinners from coming to the holy sacrament. We do not come to the Supper as though we were righteous in ourselves, but rather to testify that we are sinners and that we look to Jesus Christ for our salvation. Although we do not have perfect faith, do not serve and love God with all our hearts, and do not love our neighbors as we ought, we are confident that the Savior accepts us at his Table when we come in humble faith, with sorrow for our sins, and with a will to follow him as he commands.

And since it is necessary for us to come to the sacrament in good conscience, we urge any who lack this confidence to seek from the minister or any elder of this church such counsel as may quiet his conscience or lead to the conversion of his life.

All, then, who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who earnestly desire to lead a godly life, ought to accept the invitation now given and come with gladness to the Table of their Lord.

Prayer

Let us pray:

Almighty God, who has given us the gospel of Jesus Christ and provided a most wonderful communion with him through the mystery of the sacrament, we need your grace to enable us to prepare our hearts for the reception of Holy Communion. To all who sincerely believe in your Son and truly repent of their sins, grant assurance of your gracious readiness to receive and bless them in the Supper of their Lord. To all who have not yet repented and have not put their trust in the Lord Jesus, grant a restraining fear of this Supper, lest their condemnation be greater. But have mercy upon these, and grant them grace to repent of their sins and seek their salvation in your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We confess, O Father, that we have all offended your majesty and deserved your judgment. We have transgressed in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Truly there is no strength in us. Be merciful, O God, and grant us your pardon. And let us come to the sacrament in the joy of your forgiving love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who, with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Formulary

Beloved, hear now the words of the Apostle Paul concerning the institution of the Holy Supper:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

When our Lord said, *Do this in remembrance of me*, he ordained this Holy Supper as a constant memorial and visible proclamation of his death. The Apostle Paul also teaches us that *as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup we proclaim the Lord's death*. As we partake, therefore, we bear witness that our Lord Jesus was sent by the Father into the world to take upon himself our flesh and blood and to bear the wrath of God on the cross for us. We confess that he came to earth to bring us to heaven, that he was condemned to die that we might be pardoned, that he endured the suffering and death of the cross that we might live through him, and that he was once forsaken by God that we might forever be accepted by him.

The sacrament thus confirms us in God's abiding love and covenant faithfulness, sealing to our hearts the promises of his gracious covenant and assuring us that we belong to his covenant family. Let us then be persuaded as we eat and drink that God will always love us and accept us as his children for the sake of his Son.

Our Lord also promises that as we *eat this bread and drink the cup*, we are fed with his crucified body and shed blood. To do this he gives us his life-giving Spirit, through whom the body and blood of our Lord become the life-giving nourishment of our souls. Thus he unites us with himself and so imparts the precious benefits of his sacrifice to all who partake in faith.

As a means of grace, this meal also unites us with one another in the bond of the Spirit as the apostle says: *we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17). Thus, even as he unites us with himself, he strengthens the bond of communion between us, his children.

Finally, the remembrance of our Lord's death revives in us the hope of his return. Since he commanded us to do this *until he comes*, the Lord assures us that he will come again to take us to himself. As we commune with him now under the veil of these earthly elements, we are assured that we shall behold him face to face and rejoice in the glory of his appearing.

Our Lord Jesus will surely do what he has promised. Let us draw near to his table, then, believing that he will strengthen us in faith, unite us in love, and establish us more firmly in the hope of his coming.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Rev. 1:5–6).

Prayer

Let us pray:

Almighty God, with one accord we give you thanks for all the blessings of your grace; but most of all we thank you for the unspeakable gift of your Son Jesus Christ. We most humbly thank you that your Son came to us in human form, that he lived a perfect life on earth, that he died for us on the cross, and that he arose victoriously from the dead. We bless you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, for the gospel of reconciliation, for the Church universal, for the ministry and the sacraments of the church, and for the blessed hope of everlasting life. We pray, gracious Father, to grant us your Holy Spirit, that through this sacrament our souls may truly be fed with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant us the full assurance of your grace as we draw near to your holy table, filling our hearts with humble gratitude for your mercies. Unite us more fully with our blessed Lord, and so also with one another. Enable us, in newness of life, to pledge ourselves in service to Christ and all your children. And lift our hearts to you, that in all the troubles and sorrows of this life we may persevere in the living hope of the coming of our Savior in glory. Answer us, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

¶ If the table needs to be prepared, an appropriate hymn may be sung.

Creed

As we draw near to the table of our Lord, let us confess our Christian faith:

¶ Congregation:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Words of Promise

¶ Having approached the table, the minister shall say:

Beloved, hear these gracious words of promise spoken by our Lord:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matt. 11:28, 29).

I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst ... whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:35, 37b).

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matt. 5:6).

¶ Then the minister says:

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us lift up our hearts to the Lord; let us lift them up to the God of our salvation.

¶ Or:

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.

Communion

¶ *As he breaks the bread, the minister shall say:*

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:23–24).

¶ *At the eating of the bread, the minister shall say:*

Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was given for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

¶ *As he takes the cup, the minister shall say:*

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:27–28).

¶ *At the drinking of the wine, the minister shall say:*

Take, drink, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Thanksgiving

¶ *The minister and congregation may read the following Psalm responsively:*

Minister: Bless the LORD, O my soul,

Congregation: And all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Minister: Bless the LORD, O my soul,

Congregation: And forget not all his benefits,

Minister: Who forgives all your iniquity,

Congregation: Who heals all your diseases,

Minister: Who redeems your life from the pit,

Congregation: Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

Minister: Who satisfies you with good

Congregation: So that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Minister: Let us pray:

Almighty God, we give you our most humble and hearty thanks that of your great mercy you have given us your Son to be our Savior from sin and to be our constant source of faith, hope, and love. We bless you for permitting us to show forth his death and to receive the communion of his body and blood through the holy sacrament. We praise you for uniting us more fully with the body of Christ, and for assuring us that we are heirs of your heavenly kingdom. Grant that our commemoration of his death may tend to the daily confirming of our faith, the establishment of our hope, and the strengthening of our love. Enable us henceforth to live always for our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us. Amen.

Short Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper: 1

Preparation

To all of you who have confessed your sins and affirmed your faith in Christ, the promise of Jesus is sure: *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink* (John 6:54–55). *For the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me"* (1 Cor. 11:23–25).

While remaining bread and wine, these sacred elements nevertheless become so united to the reality they signify that we do not doubt but joyfully believe that we receive in this meal by the spirit through faith nothing less than the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For all who live in rebellion against God and unbelief, this holy food and drink will bring you only further condemnation. If you do not yet confess Jesus Christ and seek to live under his gracious reign, we admonish you to abstain. But all who repent and believe are invited to this sacred meal not because you are worthy in yourself, but because you are clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness. Do not allow the weakness of your faith or your failures in the Christian life to keep you from this table. For it is given to us because of our weakness and because of our failures, in order to increase our faith by feeding us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. As the Word has promised us God's favor, so also our Heavenly Father has added this confirmation of his unchangeable promise. So come, believing sinners, for the table is ready. *Taste and see that the Lord is good* (Ps. 34:8a).

The Consecration

Let us pray:

Almighty and everlasting God, who by the blood of your only begotten Son has secured for us a new and living way into the Holy of Holies, cleanse our minds and hearts by your Word and Spirit that we, your redeemed people, drawing close to you through this holy sacrament, may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Trinity through the body and blood of Christ our Savior. We know that our ascended Savior does not live in temples made by hands, but is in heaven where he continues to intercede on our behalf. Through this sacrament, by your own Word and Spirit, may these common elements now be set apart from ordinary use and consecrated by you, so that just as truly as we eat and drink these elements by which our bodily life is sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ. We receive these gifts by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls. Amen.

Apostles' Creed (optional)

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.
Amen.

¶ *The minister then says:*

Let us now go to our Heavenly Table and receive the gift of God for our souls. By the promise of God, this bread and wine are for us the body and blood of Christ.

¶ *Minister:* Lift up your hearts!

¶ *Congregation:* We lift them up to the Lord.

Communion

¶ *The elements are distributed, and the minister may use the formula:*

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink all of it, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Thanksgiving Prayer

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the blessing of this holy feast. Although we are unworthy to share this meal with you, it is by your invitation and dressed in Christ's righteousness that we have come boldly into the Holy of Holies. Instead of wrath, we have received your pardon; in the place of fear we have been given hope. Our High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant has reconciled us to you and even now intercedes for us at your right hand. Please strengthen us by these gifts so that, relying only on your promise to save sinners who call on Jesus' name, we may, by your Spirit, honor you with our souls and bodies, to the honor and glory of your holy name. Amen.

Short Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper: 2

Exhortation

Brothers and Sisters, you who desire to come to the Holy Communion of the body and blood of our Savior must consider how Paul exhorts us diligently to *examine* ourselves, before we *eat of the bread and drink of the cup* (1 Cor. 11:28). For as the benefit of this sacred meal is great, if we receive the sacrament with a penitent heart and lively faith, so is the danger great, if we receive it *in an unworthy manner* (1 Cor. 11:27). For then we are *guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord* (1 Cor. 11:27), we eat and drink to our own *judgment* (1 Cor. 11:29), and we kindle God's wrath against us (1 Cor. 11:30). *But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged ... by the Lord* (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). Therefore truly repent of your sins, place a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Savior, and live in love with all people so that you will be worthy partakers of this holy sacrament.

Above all things you must give most humble and sincere thanks to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Savior Christ. Give thanks that he who is God became man. Give thanks that the Son humbled himself to death upon the cross for us, miserable sinners. Give thanks that we, who walk in this dark world and in the shadow of death, have been made the children of God and exalted to everlasting life. Because of this we should always remember the exceedingly great love of our only Savior, Jesus Christ, and the innumerable benefits which he has obtained for us by his precious blood. This is why he instituted and ordained holy sacraments, as pledges of his love and for a continual remembrance of his death, to our great and endless comfort. To him, therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, let us give continual thanks, submitting ourselves completely to his holy will and pleasure, and seeking to serve him in true holiness and righteousness all the days of our life.

To all of you who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who embrace by faith Jesus as your Savior, and who desire more and more to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, draw near and take this holy sacrament to your comfort.

Comforting Words

Hear what comforting words our Savior Christ speaks to all that truly turn to him:
Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).
For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost (1 Tim. 1:15).

If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1–2).

¶ *Then is said:*

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.

Prayer of Humble Approach

We do not presume to come to this table, O merciful God, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under the table of your Son. But you are our merciful and gracious Father. Grant us, therefore, that we may feed on our crucified Lord by faith, and that we may be united to him, and he to us; who with you and the Holy Spirit is worthy of eternal thanks and praise. Amen.

Words of Institution

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:23–25).

Communion

¶ In eating the Bread, the minister says,

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

¶ In drinking the wine, the minister says,

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Almighty and ever-living God, we most heartily thank you. You have fed us, who have rightly received this holy sacrament, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. You assure us by this bread and wine of your favor and goodness toward us, that we are members of the body of your Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people. You have made us heirs of your everlasting kingdom by the merits of the most precious death and passion of your dear Son. And we most humbly pray, O heavenly Father, assist us with your grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as you have prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Form for Excommunication

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ:

As you know we have announced to you the great sin committed and the grievous offense given by our fellow-member, N_____, to the end that, by your Christian admonitions and prayers, *he might come to his senses*, turn to God, and *escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will* (2 Tim. 2:26).

But to our great sorrow no one has yet appeared before us who has caused us to understand that, by the frequent admonitions given *him* (in private, before witnesses, and in the presence of many), *he has* come to any sorrow for *his* sin or has shown the least evidence of true repentance. Since, then, by *his* stubbornness *he* daily aggravates *his* transgression, which in itself is not small, and since we have made known to you the last time that in case *he* did not repent, after such patience shown *him* by the church, we should be constrained further to grieve for *him* and to come to the extreme remedy, we are therefore at the present time compelled to proceed to *his* excommunication. We do this according to the command and charge given us in God's holy Word. Our purpose is that *he* may be ashamed of *his* sins, that by this corrupt and as yet unrepentant member we may not put the whole body of the church in danger, and that God's Name may not be blasphemed but revered.

Pronouncement of Excommunication

Therefore, the consistory, acting in the name and under the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, declares before you all that for the reasons previously announced we hereby excommunicate N__ from the Church of the Lord; that, so long as *he* persists obstinately and impenitently in *his* sins, *he is* excluded from the fellowship of Christ, and of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual blessings and benefits which God promises to and bestows upon his Church; and that he is to be considered by you as an unbeliever who is outside of (cf. Matt. 18:17), according to the command of Christ, who says, *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven* (Matt. 18:18).

Exhortation

Further we exhort you, brothers and sisters, that you no longer have Christian fellowship with this unrepentant sinner (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11), recognizing that this person has been excluded from the communion of the church. Yet, when opportunity allows, to treat this individual as one who needs the gospel (cf. 2 Thess. 3:15).

In the meantime let everyone take warning by this and similar examples to fear the Lord and diligently to take heed: *let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall* (1 Cor. 10:12); but having true fellowship with the Father and his Son Christ, together with all believing Christians, to remain *firm to the end* (Heb. 3:14), *obtaining the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls* (1 Peter 1:9). Guard yourselves, then, against the least beginnings of evil, and according to the admonition of the apostle, *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith* (Heb. 12:1–2). *Be*

sober-minded; be watchful (1 Peter 5:8); pray that you may not enter into temptation (Luke 22:46). Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts (Heb. 4:7), but work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12); and let everyone repent of his sin, lest our God humble us again and we be obliged to mourn for some of you; but may you, with one accord living in godliness, be our crown and joy in the Lord.

But since *it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13)*, let us call upon his holy Name with confession of our sins.

Prayer of Confession

O righteous God, merciful Father, before your high majesty we blame ourselves for our sins and acknowledge that we have justly deserved the sorrow and pain caused us by the excommunication of this fellow-member; indeed, if you should enter into judgment with us, we all deserve to be excluded and banished from your presence on account of our great transgression. But, O Lord, be gracious unto us for Christ's sake; forgive us our trespasses, for we heartily repent of them; and work in our hearts an ever increasing measure of sorrow for them, that we, fearing your judgments which you bring upon the stiff-necked, may endeavor to please you. Grant that we may avoid all pollution of the world and of those who are excluded from the communion of the Church, in order that we may not make ourselves partakers of their sins, and that *he* who *is* excommunicated may become ashamed of *his* sins. And since you desire not the death of the sinner, but that he may repent and live, and since the bosom of your Church is always open for those who return, kindle, therefore, in our hearts a godly zeal, that we, with good Christian admonitions and example, may seek to bring back this excommunicated person, together with all those who through unbelief and recklessness of life go astray. Add your blessing to our admonitions, that we thereby may have reason to rejoice again in *them* for whom we must now mourn, and that thus your holy name be praised, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for Excommunication – Form 2

First Announcement

Brothers and sisters, since we are responsible for one another as fellow members of the body of Jesus Christ, we are deeply concerned when a member of the body wanders from the Christian way and does not repent. Therefore, it is our painful duty as office-bearers of this church to inform you that one of our fellow members has sinned and given offense against God and his church and remains unrepentant to this day despite our prayers and admonitions.

Through his/her unrepentance our brother/sister is breaking the covenant bond with the Lord and his people. Thus, we have suspended his/her participation in the sacraments, the signs and seals of this relationship with our Savior and with one another. We also have suspended the other privileges of communicant membership.

At his/her profession of faith he/she promised to honor and submit to the authority of the church. Let us all pray that our brother/sister may respond positively to the admonitions of the church and return to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in grace and faithfulness desires this brother's/sister's repentance.

Second Announcement: (Note: Before using the second announcement, the advice of classis shall be sought.)

Brothers, and sisters, since we are responsible for one another as fellow members of the body of Jesus Christ, we are deeply concerned when a member of the body wanders from the Christian way and does not repent. Therefore, the office-bearers of the church previously requested your prayers for a fellow member who has remained unrepentant of the sin which gave offense against God and his church.

With a heavy heart we report that the suspension of _____ (name) _____ and all our admonitions and prayers since that time have not produced in our brother/sister any evidence of repentance or a desire to be restored to fellowship with the Lord and his people. We inform you, therefore, with the advice of classis, that if our brother/sister does not repent, it may be necessary to (move toward the extreme step of excommunicating him/her) from membership in the church of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord does not wish that sinners should perish but desires that they turn from their evil ways and live. Therefore, let us all continue to pray for our brother/sister and to plead personally with him/her to mend his/her ways and return to the Lord and his people in repentance and faith.

Third Announcement

Brothers and sisters, since we are responsible for one another as fellow members of the body of Jesus Christ, we are deeply concerned when a member of the body wanders from the Christian way and does not repent. On previous occasions the office-bearers of this church requested you to pray for and plead with a fellow member, _____ (name) _____, who remains unrepentant of the sin which gave offense to God and his church. With sadness of heart we report that our loving admonitions and prayers still have not led him/her to demonstrate any sign of repentance and faith.

Because he/she continues to reject the admonition and discipline of the church and has broken covenant with the Lord and his people, we find it necessary to proceed to ~~exclude~~ (excommunicate) this brother/sister from membership in the church of the Lord. If he/she does not show evidence of repentance by _____ (date) _____, to our deep sorrow we will move to excommunicate him/her from membership. If any member of the church knows of any valid reason why this should not be done, we urge that person to inform the consistory.

Let us all continue to pray for _____ (name) _____ and plead with him/her so that he/she may not harden his/her heart completely but may return to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with confession of sin and assurance of faith.

Form for Excommunication from Membership

Brothers and sisters, our hearts grieve for our fellow member, _____ (name) _____, who has not responded to the loving admonition and prayers of this consistory and congregation and who remains unrepentant to this day of his/her sin and offense against God and his church and does not heed the admonition of the church and its consistory. Accordingly, in obedience to the command of God in his Word and with great sorrow, we ~~exclude~~ must take the extreme step of excommunicating him/her from membership in the church of our Lord.

We do so to uphold the honor of God and to maintain the holiness of God's church with the prayer that this action will also lead the erring one to repentance. We pray that God may cause him/her to seek forgiveness of sin, renewed union with Christ, and restoration into the family of God, the church.

Prayer for Grace

Heavenly Father, we are humbled before you. We stand before you with fear and trembling, conscious of our own imperfection, yet conscious also of the responsibility you have given your church to discipline its members. Grieving deeply, we plead that this action may build up your people and cause none to stumble. This we ask in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Declaration

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we hereby-excommunicate _____ (name) _____ from membership in the church of our Lord, knowing also that God himself excludes him/her from fellowship in Christ and all his blessings as long as he/she persists in his/her unrepentance.

Exhortation

As we are saddened by this event, let us be warned to fear the Lord and live close to him and his Word. Let us not harden our hearts, but let us place ourselves under the discipline of our Master, who with a loving and firm hand renews our lives through the ministry of the Word and Spirit and the loving care of his church.

Call to Prayer

Let us all continue to pray that by the grace of the Holy Spirit _____ (name) _____ may yet come to recognize his/her sin, to show genuine repentance, and to seek restoration to fellowship with the Lord and his people. Let us also pray that the Holy Spirit will use us in our contacts with him/her to that end. Let us now together call on the Lord, confessing our sin and pleading for mercy.

Prayer of Confession

O righteous God and merciful Father, before your great majesty we confess that we are sinners and acknowledge that we have justly deserved the sorrow and pain caused by the excommunication we witnessed today; indeed if you should judge us, we all deserve to be excluded and banished from your presence on account of our great and many transgressions.

O Lord, be gracious to us for Christ's sake; forgive us our trespasses, for we wholeheartedly repent of them; and work in our hearts a continually increasing measure of sorrow for them, that we, fearing your judgments and desiring to serve and love you, may endeavor to please you. Grant that we may avoid all the pollution of the world and of those who are excluded from the communion of the Church, in order that we may not make ourselves partakers of their sins, and that he/she who is excommunicated may become ashamed of his/her sins.

And since you do not desire the death of the sinner but that he/she may repent and live, and since your Church is always open for those who return, kindle, therefore, in our hearts a godly zeal, that we, with good Christian admonitions and example, may seek to bring back this excommunicated person, together with all those who through unbelief and recklessness of life go astray. Add your blessing to our admonitions, that we thereby may have reason to rejoice again in them for who we must now mourn, and that your holy name be praised, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

(Congregation)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for Readmission: 1

Announcement

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord:

It was made known that some time ago our fellow-member _____ was excommunicated from the church of Christ. We can now announce to you that he, by this remedy and also through good admonitions and your Christian prayers, has come to confess his sin and now asks to be readmitted to the fellowship of the church. Since it is our duty, according to the command of God, to receive such persons with joy and thanksgiving, and since all things should be done decently and in good order, we inform you that at the next celebration of the Lord's Supper we shall set this man free from the bond of excommunication and receive him again into the fellowship of Christ's church.

If any of you should have reason against such readmission, it is incumbent upon you to give notice as soon as possible. Meanwhile let us thank the Lord, who has shown favor to this lost sheep, and let us earnestly ask him to perfect his work of conversion in him to eternal salvation. Amen.

¶ Afterwards, if no hindrance occur, the minister shall proceed to the readmission of the excommunicated sinner according to the following form:

Readmission

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We have recently informed you of the repentance and conversion of _____, to the end that, with your consent, he might be received again into the church of Christ. No one has brought forward any objection against this readmission, and therefore we will now receive him again into the communion of the saints.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught his church to put out of the fellowship those who refuse to repent of their sins. In Matthew 18 he says, *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.* But he immediately added, *and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Matt. 18:18). Indeed, he taught us that excommunication does not take away all hope of salvation. For God has sworn by himself, saying, *As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live* (Ezek. 33:11). Therefore the church keeps hoping and praying for the repentance and return of the lost sinner, always eager to receive those turning from and sorrowing for their sins. The apostle Paul commanded the congregation at Corinth to forgive and comfort the brother who had been reprovved and had come to repentance. He exhorted the church to reaffirm their love for him lest he should be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Christ also teaches us that God reckons the sentence of absolution, passed upon a repentant sinner according to the Word of God, as binding. For this reason no one who truly repents needs to doubt in any way that he is certainly received by God in grace, as Christ has declared, *If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven*" and *"whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (John 20:23; Matt. 16:19).

Confession

That we may proceed to your readmission into the fellowship of Christ and his people, I ask you, _____, to stand now, and in the presence of God and his church respond to the following questions:

First: Do you declare with all your heart that you are truly sorry for the sin and stubbornness on account of which you were justly excluded from the church?

Second: Do you also truly believe that the Lord has forgiven all your sins for the sake of Christ's blood and now receives you by his grace and mercy through him?

Third: Do you, therefore, desire to be readmitted to the church of Christ, promising, by the grace of God, to live from now on in all godliness according to the Word of God?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Declaration

We, then, here assembled in the Name and the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and on his behalf, declare to you, _____, that you are set free from the bonds of excommunication. We joyfully receive you again into the church of our Lord, and declare that you share in the fellowship of Christ, of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual gifts and blessings of our Savior which God promises to his church and bestows upon her. May the eternal God preserve you in this to the end, through his only Son Jesus Christ. *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it* (1 Thess. 5:24). Amen.

Charge

Dear brother, be assured in your heart that the Lord himself has received you in grace. Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the weakness of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. The love of Christ has brought you back. Love him, for he has forgiven much. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit anew, who has promised in your baptism to dwell in you and to sanctify you as a member of Christ.

And you, dear fellow Christians, receive this brother with all your love. Rejoice and be thankful, for this brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found. Rejoice with the angels, for Christ said, *I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance* (Luke 15:7). Count him no longer as a stranger, but as a fellow member with the saints of the household of God.

Prayer

Since there is no good in ourselves, let us, with praise and thanksgiving, implore the Lord Almighty for his mercy:

Gracious God and Father, we thank and praise you through Jesus Christ that you have granted this brother godly sorrow and repentance unto life and have brought us to rejoice in this. We ask you to show him your grace, that he may be continually assured of the complete remission of all sins, and may derive from that assurance joy and delight to serve you. Since for a time he has grieved many by his sin, grant that he may now edify many by his new path of faith. Grant also that he may walk steadfastly in your ways till

the end. Teach us, Father, by this example, that with you there is always forgiveness, and may you therefore be praised and adored. Grant that now, we, with our brother, may serve you with childlike fear and obedience all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit is the one and only true God. Amen.

¶ Or:

... through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for Readmission: 2

Announcement

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

As you are aware, some time ago our fellow-member _____ was excommunicated from the church of Christ because of his persistence in a serious and offensive sin without any token of genuine repentance. As a congregation, it has been our prayer that God would use this excommunication as the extreme remedy to bring him to conversion. We thankfully announce that the Lord has answered our prayers, and we rejoice in the blessed results of Christian discipline and with joy we announce that _____ has repented and expressed his desire to be restored to fellowship with Christ and his people. According to God's command, we are to receive back joyfully those who repent of their sins, and so, if there are no lawful objections, this readmission will be celebrated on _____. Meanwhile, let us praise the Lord for the favor shown this poor sinner and ask God to perfect his powerful work of grace in him to his eternal salvation. Amen.

¶ Afterwards, if no hindrance occur, the minister shall proceed to the readmission of the excommunicated sinner according to the following form:

Readmission

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

It is known to you that _____, who was excommunicated, has requested to be readmitted to the communion of Christ and his church. Since no one has presented any valid reason why this restoration should not take place, we now proceed with gladness to receive our brother again into the church of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord teaches us in Matthew 18 that those who have been excommunicated from the life and fellowship of the church are not deprived of all hope of salvation, for in the way of faith and repentance sinners may once more be set free from the bonds of condemnation. God even declares in his Word that he takes *no pleasure in the death of the wicked* but rather that he should *turn from his way and live* (Ezek. 18; Luke 15). Likewise, the church always hopes for the conversion of those who have fallen into gross sin and is ready to receive back the penitent, which is in keeping with what the apostle Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 5. Therefore, all who truly repent should not doubt in any way that the Lord receives them in grace, as Christ assures us: *If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven*" and *"whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (John 20:23; Matt. 16:19).

Confession

_____, please stand now, and in the presence of God and his people respond to the following questions:

First: Do you declare before God and his church that you are truly sorry for your sin, and do you believe that the Lord has forgiven you for the sake of Christ?

Second: Do you reaffirm your union with Christ and desire to be readmitted to the covenant family of God, promising to live from now on in all godliness according to the command of the Lord?

Third: Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honoring and submitting to its authority; and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord to which he calls us?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Declaration

We, then, being here assembled in the Name and the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ declare you, _____, to be set free from the bonds of excommunication. We joyfully receive you again into the church of our Lord, and declare that you share in the fellowship of Christ, of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual gifts and blessings of our Savior, which God promises to his church and bestows upon her. May the eternal God preserve you in this to the end, through his only Son Jesus Christ. *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it* (1 Thess. 5:24). Amen.

Charge

Dear brother/sister, be assured in your heart that the Lord himself has received you in grace. Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the weakness of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. The love of Christ has brought you back; love him, for he has forgiven much. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit anew, who has promised in your baptism to dwell in you and to sanctify you as a member of Christ.

And you, dear fellow Christians, receive this brother/sister with all your love. Rejoice and be thankful, for this brother/sister was dead and is alive; he/she was lost and is found. Rejoice with the angels, for Christ said, *I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance* (Luke 15:7). Count him/her no longer as a stranger, but as a fellow member with the saints of the household of God.

Prayer

Since there is no good in ourselves, let us, with praise and thanksgiving, implore the Lord Almighty for his mercy:

Gracious God and Father, we thank and praise you through Jesus Christ that you have granted this brother/sister godly sorrow and repentance unto life and have brought us to rejoice in this. We ask you to show him/her your grace, that he/she may be continually assured of the complete remission of all sins, and may derive from that assurance joy and delight to serve you. Since for a time he/she has grieved many by his/her sin, grant that he/she may now edify many by his/her new path of faith. Grant also that he/she may walk steadfastly in your ways till the end. Teach us, Father, by this example, that with you there is always forgiveness, and may you therefore be praised and adored. Grant that now, we, with our brother/sister, may serve you with childlike fear and

obedience all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit is the one and only true God. Amen.

¶ Or:

... through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for the Ordination (or: Installation) of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

The Council has made known to you the name of our brother _____, who is now to be ordained to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments (or: installed in the ministry to which he has been called).

The Holy Scriptures teach us that Christ Jesus gathers, protects and preserves for himself a church out of the corrupt race of men to life eternal and gives to his church such teaching and care that it may grow in faith, love, and service. For this work, Christ, by a particular grace, uses men, appointing them to the preaching of the Gospel, and for the building up of his body. The apostle Paul solemnly charged Timothy to *preach the word* (2 Tim. 4:2), and our Lord Jesus charged his disciples to *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Matt. 28:19–20). The apostle Paul declares that the Lord Jesus Christ has given *the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ* (Eph. 4:11–12). For this reason the church has recognized the distinct office of the minister of the Word.

The minister of the Word is called by the command of God to preach the Gospel of his kingdom. This preaching has the twofold object of calling sinners to reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and nurturing believers in the faith and life of the kingdom of God. Ministers are called *ambassadors for Christ*, as though God were pleading by them, *Be reconciled to God* (2 Cor. 5:20). Therefore this preaching must be addressed to all people. The preaching of the Gospel must especially be addressed to the gathered congregation for the nurturing of Christian faith and life and for strengthening them against all error. Paul charged Timothy *in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus... preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 Tim. 4:1–2), and he charged Titus that a minister *must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it* (Titus 1:9). The minister of the Word is called to administer the sacraments which the Lord has instituted as signs and seals of his grace. Christ gave this charge to his apostles, and through them to all ministers of the Word, when he commanded them to *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt. 28:19); and when he said of the Lord's Supper: *Do this... in remembrance of me* (1 Cor. 11:24–25). The minister of the Word is called to the service of prayer. In speaking of their calling, the apostles say: *We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word* (Acts 6:4). So, too, it is the calling of all God's ministers to lead the people of God in *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings ... for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions* (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

The minister of the Word is called, together with the elders, to shepherd the people of God in their Christian life, giving guidance and counsel in all that they need, exhorting them to *contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 3), and keeping the church of God in good order and discipline. They are pastors, appointed to shepherd the church

of Christ which he purchased with his own blood, in keeping with the Lord's command: *Feed my lambs! Feed my sheep (John 21:15, 17)!* They, together with the elders, watch over the house of God for the right and fruitful ordering of the faith and life and worship of the people of God. In their exercise of the keys of the kingdom, what they *bind on earth shall be bound in heaven*, and what they *loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Matt. 18:18).

¶ *The officiating minister shall now read paragraph (1), (2), (3), or (4), depending on whether this is the ordination, or installation, of the pastor of an established congregation, a foreign missionary, or a home missionary, or the ordination of a teacher of theology.*

(1) For the Pastor in an Established Congregation

We now proceed to ordain (install) brother _____ as minister of the Word and Sacraments in this congregation. We rejoice that in his faithful love the Lord Jesus has provided a minister to serve as pastor and teacher to this people, and also as their leader in the missionary calling of this church. We receive this servant of our Lord from the hand and heart of the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. We are grateful that our Savior has committed preaching, teaching, and pastoral care to the office of the minister of the Word, and that he will continue to use sinful men for such high and holy purposes until the day of his return.

No one is able to fulfil this holy ministry in his own strength, therefore, we set our hope on Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has said: *Behold I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, _____, are willing to accept this office, you are requested to stand, and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

First: Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Second: Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Third: Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ *Answer:* I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ *The officiating minister shall then say (in the case of ordination with the ceremony of the laying on of hands, other ministers present participating):*

God, our Heavenly Father, who has called you to this holy office, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your ministry that you may be engaged in it faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his Name and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

¶ The officiating minister shall address the congregation:

Dear people of God and members of this church, since this solemn act involves obligations also on your part, I ask you before God:

First: Do you in the name of the Lord welcome this brother as your pastor?

Second: Do you promise to receive the Word of God proclaimed by him and to encourage him in the discharge of his duty?

Third: Will you pray that he may, in the power of the Spirit, equip you in the work of advancing God's Kingdom for the honor of Christ our Lord, the building up of his church, and the salvation of men?

To these questions, what is your answer?

¶ Answer: We do, God helping us.

¶ The officiating minister (and/or others designated) shall then exhort the ordained minister and the congregation in the following manner:

Beloved brother and fellow-servant in Christ, take heed to yourself and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you a guardian, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood. Love Christ and feed his sheep, exercising the oversight, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, and not as domineering over those in your charge but humbly serving all. Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, and to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have. Take heed to your teaching. Be patient in all trials. Be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. And when the chief Shepherd appears you will obtain the unfading crown of glory.

And you, beloved Christians, receive your minister in the Lord with all joy, and hold him in honor. Remember that through him God himself speaks to you. Receive the Word which he, according to the Scripture, shall preach to you, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God. Let the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, and bring the Good News, be beautiful and pleasant to you. *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you (Heb. 13:17).* If you do these things, the God of peace shall enter your homes. You who receive this man in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward, and through faith in Jesus Christ, the inheritance of eternal life.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we are thankful that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant, sent to this people as a messenger of your peace. Send now the Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the ability to make known the mystery of the Gospel with boldness. Grant him the wisdom to care for and guide the people over whom he is placed. Through his ministry build up your holy church, and grant her increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty

and to be steadfast to the end. We pray that this people may receive him as having been sent by you. May they receive his teaching and exhortation with all reverence, and believing in Christ through his Word become partakers of eternal life. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

(2) FOR A FOREIGN MISSIONARY

We now proceed to ordain (install) brother _____ as a foreign missionary, for service in _____. It is the task of these ministers to bring the Gospel to foreign lands, so that all peoples may come to the knowledge of salvation and to the service of the Lord, and the church of Jesus Christ be established in all the earth. Jesus Christ has said: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come* (Matthew 24: 14). In the person of her missionaries the church reaches into the lives of those who are yet without God and without hope. She brings to all lands the witness that Jesus is the Son of God, that the glory of the nations belongs to him, and that his grace, love, and redemption are offered to them in the way of repentance and faith. In this work of missions the church may lift up her eyes to the Lord's coming, and look with longing to the day when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

No one is able to fulfil this holy ministry in his own strength, therefore, we set our hope on Jesus Christ our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, _____ are willing to accept this office, you are requested to stand, and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

First: Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Second: Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Third: Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ *Answer:* I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ *The officiating minister shall then say (in the case of ordination with the ceremony of the laying on of hands, other ministers present participating):*

Go, then, brother, and bring the Gospel to those to whom you are sent. Make disciples of them, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. God, our Heavenly Father, who has called you to this holy ministry, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your ministry that you may be engaged in it faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his name, and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ.

And you, congregation, continue in fellowship with this missionary whom you send forth in the name of Christ. Sustain him with your fervent prayers. Support him with your gifts. Strengthen his hand and heart in every need. As Christ received you, be ready to receive those who are brought into the body of Christ through his ministry, that there may be one flock, one shepherd.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we give thanks that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant, now being sent by this people in your name to be a messenger to others of the Good News of your peace. Send now the Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the ability to make known the mystery of the Gospel with boldness. Grant him the wisdom to care for and guide the people over whom he is placed. Through his ministry build up your holy church, and grant her increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. Let those to whom he comes see in him the ambassador of Christ, calling them to be reconciled to God. May they receive his teaching and exhortation with all reverence, and believing in Christ through his Word become partakers of eternal life. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

(3) For a Home Missionary

We now proceed to ordain (install) brother _____ as a home missionary for service in _____. The calling of these ministers is in particular the preaching of the Gospel, the spiritual care, and the instruction of those in our land, who, though exposed to the witness of the church and the Gospel have been alienated or are yet estranged from the Lord and his church. In the parable of the Great Banquet the Lord Jesus Christ has spoken about the lord who sent his servants out into the streets and lanes of the city, into the highways and hedges, to invite all men to his feast. Even so our Lord calls us to bring men into the house of the King through the ministry of his love, in order that his house may be filled. The Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached for a testimony to our own nation as well as to all nations of the world. Thus men are called to walk in the way of God's commands and promises. And in this ministry we look to the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

No one is able to fulfil this holy ministry in his own strength, therefore, we set our hope on Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now in order that it may appear that you, _____, are willing to accept this office, you are requested to stand, and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

First: Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Second: Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Third: Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ *Answer:* I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ *The officiating minister shall then say (in the case of ordination with the ceremony of the laying on of hands, other ministers present participating):*

Go then, brother, and bring the Gospel to those to whom you are sent. Call the unbelieving to faith, the faithless to obedience, and invite men in the name of the Lord into the house of your King. May God, our Heavenly Father, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your ministry that you may fulfill it faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his Name, and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ.

And you, congregation, continue in fellowship with this missionary whom you send forth in the name of Christ. Sustain him with your fervent prayers. Support him with your gifts. Strengthen his hand and heart in every need. As Christ received you, be ready to receive those who are brought into the body of Christ through his ministry, that there may be one flock, one shepherd.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we thank you that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant,

now being sent by this people in your name to be a messenger to others of the Good News of your peace. Send now your Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the ability to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel. Grant him the wisdom to care for and guide the people over whom he is placed. Through his ministry build up your holy church, and grant her increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. Let those to whom he comes see in him the ambassador of Christ, calling them to be reconciled to God. May they receive his teaching and exhortation with all reverence, and believing in Christ through his Word become partakers of eternal life. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

FORMS FOR THE COMMISSIONING OF MINISTERS TO EXTRAORDINARY TASKS

(4) For a Teacher of Theology

Congregation of Jesus Christ: _____ has been appointed by this congregation for the particular task of teaching at [institution/ministry]. We are mindful of the need for the training of men who as ministers of the Word shall preach the Gospel of salvation to the people of God in the church of Christ and to men outside of the church of Christ.

The first messengers of peace in the days of the New Testament were taught directly by our Lord Jesus Christ, and were trained and sent by him personally. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he gave various extraordinary gifts and knowledge of the mysteries, for the salvation of sinners and the edifying of the saints. But since those extraordinary methods lasted only as long as the Lord judged them to be necessary for the founding of his church among the nations, the necessity was soon recognized of training men for the holy ministry under the ordinary dispensation of the Spirit by the regular methods of education. Thus Paul wrote to his fellow-minister, Timothy: *...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (2 Tim. 2:2).

For the most effective discharge of this task in our day, the church supports theological education and appoints ministers of the Word who will serve the cause of the Gospel by teaching and training those who are to become ministers of the Word in Christ's church. Our brother _____ has been called to serve in this important task.

No one is able to fulfil this holy ministry in his own strength, therefore, we set our hope on Jesus Christ our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, _____, are minded to accept this office and fulfill this task, you are requested to stand and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

First: Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Second: Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Third: Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ *Answer:* I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ *The officiating minister shall then say*

God, our Heavenly Father, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your calling that you may discharge its duties faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his name, and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we are thankful that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant, sent to train men to be messengers of your peace. Send now your Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the power to teach others to speak to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel. Endow him with wisdom to instruct and care for those men who are preparing for the Gospel ministry that through his ministry your church will be preserved in peace that she may increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ *Congregation:*

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

(5) For Other Extraordinary Tasks

Congregation of Jesus Christ: _____ has been called by this church for the particular task of _____ which is recognized as a labor which is spiritual in character, directly related to the ministry of the Word, and one which is to be performed as a service for the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is required that one so appointed be mindful of his ordination to the ministry of the church in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the service of prayers, and the ministry of the care and discipline of the church of God. It is further required that one so appointed serve in his particular task as a minister of the Word of God, and in loyalty and service to the church by which he is called.

No one is equal to this holy ministry in his own strength, therefore, we set our hope on Jesus Christ our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, _____, are minded to accept this calling, you are requested to stand and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

First: Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Second: Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every teaching in conflict with them?

Third: Do you promise to perform your task faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ *Answer:* I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ The officiating minister shall then say:

God, our Heavenly Father, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your calling that you may discharge its duties faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his name, and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we are thankful that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the extraordinary gift of this your servant, to participate in that calling. Send now your Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the power to teach the mystery of the Gospel. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

The Council has made known to you the names of our brothers here present who were chosen to the offices of elders and deacons in this church. They have indicated their belief in our confessions by their agreement with the Form of Subscription. Since there were no lawful objections, we shall proceed to their ordination, in the Name of the Lord.

Instruction

Let us listen to what the Word of God teaches regarding these offices.

The office of elder is based on the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when he ascended, left his Church in the world and provided it with officers who should rule in his Name. The apostle Paul, in Acts, insists upon the ordination of elders in every church, and, in his letter to Timothy, commands those who *rule well to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching* (1 Tim. 5:17). In this and other passages Paul distinguishes between the elders who labor particularly in the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, and those who are responsible for the supervision of the church together with the ministers of the Word. Therefore the Church, from the beginning, has had elders in addition to ministers.

The work of the elders is that of ruling in the Name of the ascended King, and as servants of the great Shepherd, caring for his flock. It is also the duty of the elders to maintain the purity of the Word and sacraments, to uphold the good order of the church, carefully guarding the sacredness of the offices and faithfully exercising discipline. They should with love and humility promote the faithful discharge of the office by their fellow-officers, having particular regard to the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word, that the church may be edified and may show itself to be the pillar and ground of the truth.

To fill such a sacred office honorably, the elders should set an example of godliness in their personal life, in their home life, and in their relations with their fellow-men. Walking thus in all godliness, and faithfully discharging their office, *when the chief Shepherd appears, they will receive the unfading crown of glory* (1 Peter 5:4).

The office of deacon is based upon the love and concern of Christ for his own. This concern is so great that he considers what is done to one of the least of his brothers as done to him. In this way our Lord identifies the needy as his representatives in our expression of sympathy and benevolent service on earth. *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me* (Matt. 25:35–36).

According to Acts 6, the apostles themselves in the beginning ministered unto the needy; but afterward, being overburdened with this service to the extent that some were neglected, certain men were chosen to whom they committed the special responsibility of exercising this ministry, leaving the apostles greater opportunity to continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the Word. Since that time the Church has recognized this service as a distinct office.

The work of the deacons consists in the faithful and diligent gathering of the offerings which God's people in gratitude make to their Lord, in the prevention of poverty, in the humble and cheerful distribution of gifts according to the need, and in the relief of the distressed both with kind deeds and words of comfort and encouragement from Scripture.

To fill such a sacred office worthily, the deacons, as well as the elders, should set an example of godliness in their personal life, in their home life, and in their relations with their fellow-men. Thus conducting themselves as worthy representatives of Christ's loving care, and faithfully ministering in his Name to those who are the beloved of God, they gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 3:13).

Vows

Brothers, in order that the church may hear that you are willing to take your respective offices upon you, please answer the following questions:

First: Do you elders and deacons feel in your hearts that you are lawfully called by God's church, and therefore by God himself, to your respective holy offices?

Second: Do you believe the Old and New Testament to be the only Word of God, and the doctrinal standards of this church to be in harmony therewith?

Third: Having heard the description of the purpose and requirements of these offices, do you promise to fulfill them faithfully by the grace of God: you elders, in the government of the church, together with the ministers of the Word; and you deacons, in the ministration to the poor?

Fourth: Do you promise to walk in all godliness and submit to the government of the church in all things pertaining to your office?

¶ *Each answers individually:* I do.

May the Almighty God and Father fill you all with his grace, that you may faithfully and fruitfully discharge your respective offices. Amen.

Exhortation

I charge you, elders, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be diligent in the government of the church which is committed to you jointly with the minister of the Word. Be faithful watchmen over the house of God, taking heed that purity of doctrine and godliness of life be maintained.

I charge you, deacons, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be diligent in receiving the gifts of God's people, wise and cheerful in the distribution of the same, sympathetic and self-denying in the ministry of Christian mercy.

I charge you, beloved Christians, to receive these brothers as the servants of God, sustaining them with your daily prayers. Render to the elders all honor, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord. Provide the deacons generously with the necessary gifts for the needy, remembering that in so much as you do it to the least of these his children, you do it to him. May God give us to see in the ministry of the elders the supremacy of Christ, and in the ministry of the deacons the care and love of the Savior.

Being thus engaged in your respective callings, each one of you shall receive of the Lord the reward of righteousness.

Prayer

O Lord God and heavenly Father, we give thanks that you have been pleased, for the better edification of your Church, to ordain in it rulers and assistants besides the ministers of the Word, by whom your Church may be preserved in peace and prosperity, and the needy assisted. We thank you for giving us in this place men who are of good testimony and by your promise endowed with your Spirit. We ask you to provide them more and more with such gifts as are necessary for them in their service: with the gifts of wisdom, courage, discretion, benevolence, sympathy, and self-denial, to the end that every one may acquit himself as is becoming in his respective office. May the elders take great care of doctrine and life in keeping out the wolves from the sheepfold of your beloved Son, and in admonishing and reproofing disorderly persons. Likewise, the deacons in carefully receiving gifts and generously and wisely distributing them to the poor, and in comforting them with your holy Word. Give grace both to elders and deacons, that they may persevere in their faithful labor, and never become weary by reason of any trouble, pain, or persecution of the world. Grant especially your divine grace to this people, over whom they are placed, that they may willingly submit themselves to the good exhortations of the elders, counting them worthy of honor for their work's sake. Give unto the rich generous hearts toward the needy, and to the needy grateful hearts toward those who help and serve them; to the end that, every one acquitting himself of his duty, your holy Name may thereby be magnified, and the kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ enlarged, in whose Name we conclude our prayers. Amen.

Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1

¶ *The following announcement may be made on the previous Sunday:*

The consistory announces that _____ and _____ have indicated their intention to enter into the holy bond of marriage, according to the ordinance of God. They desire to begin this holy state in the Name of the Lord and to complete it to his glory. If no lawful objection is brought forward, the ceremony will take place, the Lord willing, on _____.

We are assembled here in the presence of God for the purpose of joining in marriage _____ and _____. Since the consistory has received no lawful objections, we may now proceed to the solemnization of their marriage in the Name of the Lord. Therefore, let us reverently call to mind what the word of God teaches us about marriage.

Instruction

The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God at the very beginning of history. He created man in his own image, supplied him with many blessings, gave him dominion over all things and said: *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him ... So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, this at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh* (Gen. 2:18, 21–24). We therefore believe that in marriage God gives a man and woman to each other as husband and wife and as an institution of God must be held in honor among all. Since they are united by his hand, nothing shall separate them in this life.

Our Lord Jesus honored marriage by his presence at the wedding in Cana, and confirmed it as an institution of God, as an honorable state, and as a lasting bond when he declared: *What therefore God has joined together let not man separate* (Matt. 19:6). God has made marriage a strong bond, *he hates divorce* (Mal. 2:16), and our Lord Jesus Christ explains in these words: *whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery* (Matt. 19:9). Since the Lord forbids immorality, *each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband* (1 Cor. 7:2), so that our bodies may be preserved as *a temple of the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 6:19) and we may *glorify God in our body* (1 Cor. 6:20). The apostle Paul shows the exalted nature of marriage when he calls it a symbol of the mystical union of the Savior and the Church, his redeemed bride, commending it as a state honorable among all.

The word of God also teaches us the purpose of marriage. First, husband and wife shall live together in sincere love and holiness, helping each other faithfully in all things. Secondly, by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased. Thirdly, by marriage the advancement of the kingdom of God is to be promoted. This purpose calls

for loving devotion to each other, and a common responsibility for the nurturing of children in the true knowledge and fear of the Lord, which the Lord may give them as his heritage and as parties to his covenant.

For the home which marriage establishes the Lord ordained that the man should be the head of the wife even as Christ is the Head of the Church, and that he should protect her and provide for her in love, a love which, if exercised in the spirit and after the example of Christ, will be conducive to mutual happiness. God also ordained that the wife should be subject to the husband in all things according to his Word, showing him respect even as the Church does to Christ. Thus the liberty of both husband and wife is glorified by mutual loyalty to God's law. A home so begun in the name of the Lord and regulated by his commandments becomes the very foundation of a Christian society and affords a foretaste of the eternal home.

Marriage, then, is a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness, an institution of the highest significance to the human race, and a symbol of the union of Christ and his Church. We may, therefore, as Christians look with confidence for grace in the discharge of our mutual responsibilities and for guidance and help in our common difficulties and trials.

Statement of Intent

And now, _____ and _____, having heard from the Word of God the teaching concerning marriage, do you agree, and do you desire to enter into this holy state of marriage as ordained by God?

¶ *Groom:* I do.

¶ *Bride:* I do.

May the Lord confirm the desire and purpose of your hearts, and your beginning be in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Vows

¶ *To the groom (repeating after the minister):*

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife. I promise before God, and all who are present here, to be your loving and faithful husband. I will love you and give myself up for you, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in riches and in poverty, in sickness and in health. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to develop the gifts that God has given you, and never forsake you, as long as we both shall live.

¶ *To the bride (repeating after the minister):*

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband. I promise before God, and all who are present here, to be your loving and faithful wife. I will love you and submit to you, as the church loves and submits to Christ. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in riches and in poverty, in sickness and in health. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to develop the gifts that God has given you, and never forsake you, as long as we both shall live.

Ring Ceremony

¶ *To the Groom:*

Do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love?

¶ *Groom:* I do.

¶ *Optional:* I give you this ring as a symbol of my constant faithfulness and abiding love.

¶ *To the Bride:*

Do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love?

¶ *Bride:* I do.

¶ *Optional:* I give you this ring as a symbol of my constant faithfulness and abiding love.

Pronouncement

I now pronounce you, _____ and _____, husband and wife, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What therefore God has joined together let no one separate. From this day forward you travel life's pathway together, and may the Father of all mercies, who of his grace has called you to this holy state of marriage, bind you together in true love and faithfulness and grant you his blessing.

_____ and _____, since we cannot expect anything from ourselves, you shall kneel before the Lord and we shall pray with you and for you that he may enable you to fulfill your vows and grant you his blessing.

Prayer

Most merciful and gracious God, of whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named, we ask you to set your seal of approval upon the marriage which our brother and sister have begun this day. Give them your fatherly benediction; grant them grace and your Holy Spirit to fulfill with pure and constant affection the vow and covenant made between them. Guide them in the way of righteousness and peace, that, loving and serving you with one mind and heart all the days of their life, they may be abundantly enriched with the tokens of your everlasting favor in Christ Jesus our Lord. In all life's experiences lift up your countenance upon them, that they may be thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity. May their marriage be fruitful. Grant them wisdom and strength to build a home which shall be to the glory of your Name and the coming of your kingdom. May they live together many years, and in the hour of death may they part in the blessed hope of celebrating forever with all the saints of God the marriage of Christ and the Church he loved. Hear our prayer in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Solemnization of Marriage – Form 2

[After Processional the officiant shall say:]

Dear family members and friends,

We have come into God's presence to join in marriage groom's full name and bride's full name. In doing so, we seek to honor the will of God for marriage, the concern of the Christian church for its well-being, and the interest of the state in the orderly development of society. That we may do so, let us seek God's favor and blessing upon this blessed ceremony.

Prayer of Invocation

God, our Father, we praise you for making and redeeming us to live together in love. We thank you for the love and trust which bring groom's name and bride's name to this their wedding day. Favor them with the honor of your presence, and unite them by your Spirit so that together they may reflect the love of Christ for his church and the church's devotion to her Savior. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Parting from Parents (giving of bride optional)

Today groom's name and bride's name leave their parents to establish a new home.

Do you, Mr. and Mrs. parents of the groom, give your blessing to them and promise to uphold them in their pledge of love and fidelity to each other?

They answer: We do (God helping us).

Do you, Mr. and Mrs. parents of the bride, give your blessing to them and promise to uphold them in their pledge of love and fidelity to each other?

They answer: We do (God helping us).

Optional: Who gives this woman to this man?

Father/Guardian answers: I do. (or: Her mother and I. or: We do.).

Institution and Meaning of Marriage

Dear Christian friends, since we have received no lawful objections to this proposed union, it's fitting that we call to mind the institution, purpose, and obligations of marriage as taught in God's Word.

The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself at the beginning—God made man after his own image, and gave to him the blessing and task to exercise dominion over all things. In so doing, God said: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18). And so God created woman of man's own substance and brought her to the man. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24).

Our Lord Jesus Christ confirmed the blessedness of marriage, declaring it to be a lasting union when he declared, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt. 19:6). The apostle Paul shows the exalted significance of marriage when he calls the union of husband and wife a symbol of the mystic union between Christ and his church (Eph. 5:31-32). Thus, we learn that marriage is well-pleasing to God, and most honorable to all who maintain it with mutual love and fidelity.

In marriage, as instituted by God, a man and a woman covenant to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity (Gen. 2:18; Matt. 19:5-6). If marriage is to be pleasing in the sight of God, those who enter into this covenant of life must share a common commitment to the Lord of life.

In putting his blessing on marriage God's purpose was to provide a context within which husband and wife can help and comfort each other and find mutual companionship before the Lord; a setting within which they may give loving and tender expression to the desires he gave them; a secure environment within which children may be born and taught to know and serve the Lord; a structure that enriches society and contributes to its orderly function; and, finally, a relationship that serves to further his kingdom and bring him glory.

Indeed, when these purposes are prayerfully pursued in union with Christ, the kingdom of God is advanced and the blessedness of husband and wife assured.

The institution and purpose of marriage also brings with it obligations for each partner. In Ephesians 5 the apostle Paul admonishes all Christians to develop a mutual respect and love when he says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” When he applies this to the marriage relationship, he instructs the wife to be subject to her husband as the church is subject to Christ, its head. He also instructs the husband to pattern his love for his wife after the example of Christ's love for his body, the church. Paul says, “Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord,” and “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” In marriage this requires that the husband and wife serve each other by providing the love, respect, and faith which will enrich their lives together and build a Christ-centered home.

Our sinful and selfish tendency to break down what God has built threatens marriage with tensions, anguish, and even broken bonds. People who marry in the Lord, however, may trust that he will lead them and graciously provide for their needs when they follow the biblical pattern for love. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:4-8a).

To desire marriage, then, as instituted by God and ordered according to his Word, means that we may not enter into it carelessly or from selfish motives, but responsibly and prayerfully. It also means that must seek God's grace in order that we might faithfully fulfill the obligations and privileges of marriage, both in life's joys and trials.

Declaration of Intent

And now, Groom's name and Bride's name , understanding that God has instituted, ordered, and blessed the holy union of marriage, do you affirm this biblical teaching, and do you commit yourselves to each other in accordance with it?

Each answers: I do.

[Then the officiant says:]

May the Lord confirm the desire and purpose of your hearts, and your beginning be in the name of the Lord, our Creator and Redeemer.

Exchange of Vows

In the presence of God and before these people I now invite you Groom's name and Bride's name to exchange your vows to each other. *[The officiant may have the vows printed for the couple to read.]*

Vows Option A

Groom: I, _____ , take you, _____, to be my lawfully wedded wife; and I promise, before God and all who are present here, to be your loving and faithful husband, as long as we both shall live. I promise to love you and give myself up for you, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to serve God with the gifts he has given you.

Bride: I, _____, take you _____, to be my lawfully wedded husband; and I promise, before God and all who are present here, to be your loving and faithful wife, as long as we both shall live. I promise to love you and submit to you, as the church loves and submits to Christ. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to serve God with the gifts he has given you.

Vows Option B

Groom: I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife; and I promise, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband; in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health; as long as we both shall live.

Bride: I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband; and I promise, before God and these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful wife; in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health; as long as we both shall live.

Exchange of Rings [optional]

Groom: name, do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love? *Answer:* I do.

Bride: name, do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love? *Answer:* I do.

Declaration of Marriage [Thereupon the officiant says:]

According to the laws of the state and the ordinances of the church of Christ, I now pronounce you, Groom's name and Bride's name, husband and wife, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What therefore God has joined together let no one put asunder. From now on, as you go down life's pathway together, may the Father of all mercies, who of his grace has called you to this holy state of marriage, bind you together in true love and faithfulness and grant you his blessing.

Pastor's Message

Prayer Following the Ceremony of Marriage

Prayer Option A

Our Father in heaven, grant your blessing on name and name in their union as husband and wife. We give you thanks for the vows they have spoken to one another and the pledge of love and fidelity in which they are now united. May they find your love and fidelity to them the source and blessing for the promises they have expressed. We pray that Jesus Christ

will ever reign as the acknowledged head of their home and the master of their lives. Gracious Father, equip them with the Holy Spirit so that they may walk with one another in patience, and serve you and each other sacrificially. Work your grace in their marriage so that, as husband and wife, they express abiding kindness to one another. And grant to them a lasting trust in Jesus Christ our Lord, so that you are praised, whether in life's abundance and joys or in life's burdens and trials. May their home, then, be a place of joy and security, and in times of difficulty a haven of healing and forgiveness. May they, and the children you may be pleased to give them, give constant thanks to you. Be pleased to bestow these blessings on them, our heavenly Father, who with the Son and the Holy Spirit, our eternal God, are blessed and exalted forever. Amen.

Prayer Option B

Our most merciful and gracious God, the creator of all life and all persons, we ask that you might be pleased to set your seal of approval on the marriage our brother and sister have entered into today. Give them your fatherly blessing; grant them grace and your Holy Spirit to fulfill with pure and abiding affection their vows to one another. Guide them in the way of the gospel, of forgiveness, grace, peace, and charity, so that they may love and serve you with one mind and heart all the days of their life together. And may they be abundantly enriched with the tokens of your everlasting favor in Christ Jesus our Lord. In all life's experiences lift up your fatherly favor on them so that they may be thankful when life goes well and patient in adversity and trial. May their marriage be fruitful for this life and the life to come. Grant them, we ask, wisdom and strength to build a home that glorifies your name and serves the coming of your kingdom. May they live together many years, and in the hour of death may they part in the blessed hope of the everlasting celebration of the marriage of Christ and the church he loves. Hear our prayer, our gracious Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the Spirit's blessing. Amen.

Optional: Invitation for Groom to kiss his Bride

Presentation of the Couple [whereupon the officiant says:]

Dear family members and friends, it is my honor to present to you for the first time Mr. and Mrs.

_____.

[Recessional follows]

CECCA Report to Synod Wyoming, Michigan, June 13-17, 2016

Esteemed brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ,

It is once again our privilege, as Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA), to report to you on the activities of your committee since our report to Synod Visalia, 2014. The following terminology document serves as the mandate of our committee:

- I. The first step, Ecumenical Contact, will follow a period of initial exploration. Ecumenical Contact will focus on studying matters of general concern between the URCNA and the “foreign” federation. This step will be implemented, where possible and desirable, by:
 1. Exchange of official observers at major assemblies such that one visit be made to one assembly/church per year to churches with whom we have ecumenical relations.
 2. Consultation on issues of joint concern, including:
 - a. authority and sufficiency of Scripture;
 - b. creeds and confessions;
 - c. formula of subscription to the confessions;
 - c. significant factors in the two federations’ history, theology, ecclesiology and stands on ethical issues.
 - d. church order and polity;
 - e. liturgy and liturgical forms;
 - f. preaching, sacraments and discipline;
 - g. theological education for ministers.
 - h. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies.
 - i. Exchange of denominational Church Directories (Yearbooks).
 - j. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the Confessional Standards.
 - k. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order.
 - l. Exchange of the most recently denominationally published editions of Psalters/Hymnals.
 - m. Exchange of information regarding current ecumenical relations.
- II. The second step, Ecumenical Fellowship, will focus on the oneness of the URCNA with the “foreign” federation, even though we are separated by geographical boundaries. This step will be implemented according to church order article 36, (in addition to the points listed under step one above) by:

- a. Occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option).
- b. Intercommunion, including ready reception of each other's members at the Lord's Supper– but not excluding suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership – as regulated by each consistory (session).
- c. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity.
- d. Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another.
- e. Joint action in areas of common responsibility.
- f. Agreement that, as changes in polity, doctrine or practice are instituted, the churches will inform each other – understanding that the adoption of substantial changes may jeopardize the established ecumenical relationship.

Since our report to Synod Visalia, CECCA has met six times: four times by way of conference call meetings and two face-to-face meetings. This report will first focus on churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Fellowship (phase 2). Second, it will focus on churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Contact (phase one). Third, it will focus on churches with whom we are corresponding with a view to entering into Ecumenical Contact (phase one). Fourth, it will report on the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Fifth, it will conclude with a number of recommendations that require action by Synod.

I. Churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Fellowship

The Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)

The RCNZ is a federation of churches established in 1953 by young Dutch immigrants of reformed persuasion who were unable to find a spiritual home within the more established (mainstream) churches in this country. From the beginning the denomination wanted to be a New Zealand rather than an immigrant church. English became the accepted and spoken language of the church within a few years of its establishment. As a confessional church the three forms of unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism and Canons of Dordt) as well the Westminster Confession of Faith were accepted as its standards. Some initial tension was experienced in this area but, by asking office bearers to subscribe to the 'whole system of doctrine', a successful confessional basis has been achieved and maintained. There is therefore a merger of confessional traditions (Reformed and Presbyterian) evidenced in their congregations.

The RCNZ remains a small denomination consisting of 3 presbyteries: Auckland – 6 congregations; Wellington – 8 congregations; South island – 6 congregations (total of 20 churches). They currently have 15 ministers and three vicars. They also have four retired ministers who still serve as they are able. They have 3,283 members, as of February 2015. Their congregations are clustered mainly around the major population centers: Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Hamilton, Hastings, Palmerston North, Nelson and Dunedin. For more details, see www.rcnz.org.nz.

Shortly after Synod Visalia, CECCA delegated brother Doug Field to represent the URCNA at the twenty-eighth synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand that met at the Bishopdale Reformed Church in Christchurch, New Zealand from September 13-19, 2014. A copy of the address given at this synod can be found in **Appendix 1**. A detailed report of the visit made can be found in **Appendix 2**.

The United Reformed Churches in Congo (URCC)

The URCC is a federation of churches comprised of 181 churches, organized in ten regional synods, which are subdivided into 42 classes. In addition there are 46 preaching stations with a view to church planting. The URC has 27 ordained pastors, 395 elders and 262 deacons. The total membership of the churches is 13,408. This can be broken down into: 2465 men, 3077 women, and 4964 children. The churches operate one theological seminary and nine biblical training centers.

CECCA delegated Rev. Jason Tuinstra to represent the URCNA at the General Synod of the URCC in Kinshasa. A copy of the address given at this synod can be found in **Appendix 3**. A report of the visit made can be found in **Appendix 4**.

II. Churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Contact

A. The Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA)

The GKSA or the Die Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika/Reformed Churches in South Africa is a federation of churches comprised of 393 churches divided into 27 classes. The churches have 270 pastors. The federation operates its own seminary in Potchefstroom. This seminary has 17 theological professors.

In our report to Synod Visalia, we wrote that the GKSA planned to deal with the issue of Women in Office at its January 2015 synod. This did not happen. Instead, this synod decided to deal with this issue at a special synod that was to be convened in July, 2015. Because of church political concerns, this also did not occur. The planned meeting finally took place in January of this year. CECCA delegated Rev. Ray Sikkema to attend this synod. We are thankful and happy to report that this synod, after many years of struggling with the issue of women in the teaching offices of the church, overwhelmingly took a decision to not allow women as pastors and elders. For a report of this visit, see **Appendix 5**

In the light of this historic decision, **CECCA proposes that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) with the GKSA at this time.** We offer the following grounds for our decision:

- 1) With this decision the main obstacle for having full ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA has been removed. Scripture prohibits ordaining women into the office of pastor and elder and, thus, being part of the governing body of the church.

- 2) With this decision the GKSA clearly distances itself from the CRCNA with which it is still in fellowship. Moreover, with this decision, the GKSA is able to be a clear witness to the CRCNA regarding the prohibition of ordaining women into the teaching and ruling offices of the church.¹
- 3) With this decision the GKSA clearly demonstrates that having women deacons, who are not part of the ruling body of the church, is not a slippery slope that inevitably leads to the ordaining of women into the teaching and ruling offices of the church.²
- 4) Having women deacons who are not part of the ruling body of the church does not disqualify churches from becoming members of the ICRC.³ In fact, the ICRC considers that churches who have women deacons also “faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the [its] Basis” (Article IV.1).

B. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv)

The GKv (De Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt in the Netherlands/the Liberated Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) is a federation of churches comprised of 270 churches organized in nine regional synods, subdivided into 31 classes. The GKv has a membership of 121,578 members served by 276 ministers.

In our report to Synod Visalia, CECCA reported that the Deputies for Men/Women in the Church presented Synod Ede, 2014 with a report that recommends opening all the offices in the church to women. Synod Ede took the following decision: *(1) Not to agree with the basis of the conclusion of the Deputies M/F in the Church that it fits within the range of what can be labeled as Scriptural and Reformed when in addition to men women too may serve in the church offices. (2) The vision that in addition to men, women too may serve in church offices should be discussable as long as this is argued from Scripture. Ground: Scripture shows two lines. One line is that of equality between men and women – the other, the difference in responsibility that God has given to man and woman; both of these lines should be taken into account.*

Synod also appointed new deputies to map out the following: *(1) Since the structure of the offices in use since the time of the Reformation is not directly drawn from Scripture and may therefore be modified or augmented depending on the circumstances, and since not all work of the current office bearers directly has to do with having responsibility for the spiritual direction to the congregation, to investigate how the structure of the church offices can be filled in so that women can work for God's Kingdom within this structure.*

¹ The GKSA having fraternal relations with the CRCNA was an impediment at Synod London for moving from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II).

² The GKSA having women deacons was an impediment at Synod London in moving from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II).

³ See, e.g., the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koshin) and the GKSA.

(2) What the consequences of such a structure are in relation to the Forms and the Church Order in use within the churches. (3) How sister churches think about filling in the offices of pastor, elder and deacon; this is to be done with a view to maintaining the catholicity of the Church. (4) To inform the domestic and foreign sister churches of this decision and to ask them for advice regarding this.

Since CECCA received a letter from the GKv terminating its sister church relationship with us (NB: we were only in Ecclesiastical Contact with them, but they were in Ecclesiastical Fellowship with us), the GKv will not communicate with us on any forthcoming proposals.

The developments in the GKv continue to be a cause of concern for CECCA. At the same time, we do not want to judge the GKv prematurely. Therefore, we wish the GKv the wisdom of the Lord in bringing the matter of Women in Office to a biblical resolution at its (next) major assembly. At the same time, we want to be able to address their situation with brotherly credibility before their next major assembly.

CECCA proposes that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the GKv at this time.

C. The Calvinist Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT)

The GGRC-NTT is a federation of churches comprised of eight congregations spread out in different islands of Indonesia, including Timor, Sabu, Rote and Java. The federation is organized in two classes. It has a total membership of 1,608 members. Most of the pastors studied at the Reformed Theological Seminary on Sumba (about 45 minutes flying from West Timor). One pastor received his training at the Theological Seminary of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario. Elders and deacons and other church leaders are trained by local leaders via seminars.

In April 2014, CECCA adopted a protocol for establishing ecclesiastical contact and advancement to ecclesiastical fellowship (see **Appendix 6**) This protocol contains the following considerations: (1) The period of Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) is intended for CECCA to become well acquainted with another church, denomination or federation. (2) However, experience teaches that occasionally little of substance may occur between URCNA Synods that will enable CECCA to become measurably better acquainted with such churches, denominations and/or federations. (3) In the eventuality that little or nothing occurs between Synods that enables CECCA to become measurably better acquainted with such churches, denominations and/or federations, then it would appear that there is no substantial impediment to advancing from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II). (4) Prolongation of advancement from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) poses a significant danger of the creation of an unwelcoming impression on the part of the URCNA and potentially causes unnecessary hurt to those churches, denominations or federations that aspire to advance to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) status with the URCNA.

With regard to the advancement to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II), our protocol states: (1) Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) relationship with a church, denomination or federation will be proposed by CECCA to Synod when there are no outstanding issues with such a church, denomination or federation with which the URCNA is in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) and CECCA has made a formal visit to such church, denomination or federation. (2) CECCA will ordinarily not wait longer than two synods (i.e. four years from the year that Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) is established) to propose to Synod that the URCNA advance to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) with such church, denomination or federation. (3) CECCA will ordinarily not use the desirability of ecumenical relationships that a church, denomination or federation in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the URCNA should have with other churches, denominations or federations in their area or the pace of the development of these ecumenical relationships as an argument against moving from an Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) relationship to an Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) relationship.

In the light of this protocol:

CECCA proposes that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) with the GGRC-NTT

Since we have no new report on a visit to the GGRC-NTT, we include the report that was included in our report to Synod Visalia (see **Appendix 7**)

E. The Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC)

The FCC is a federation of churches made up of six presbyteries, representing thirty-eight congregations. The FCC was formed in 2000 but sees itself as a continuation of the Free Church of Scotland. Given this, they trace their history back to the “Disruption of 1843” when, under the leadership of Thomas Chalmers, 450 ministers left the Church of Scotland. Through the Church of Scotland, the FCC dates back to 1560 and the Reformation under John Knox. While the URCNA has a different confessional background than the FCC, it is clear that we share the same, like precious faith. Our practices may differ at points (no instruments, exclusive metrical Psalm singing), but our similarities are clear.

Just prior to Synod Visalia, Rev. Jason Tuinstra visited the General Assembly of the FCC in May 2014 (see **Appendices 8 and 9**). He plans to do the same just prior to Synod Wyoming. Since there are no substantial impediments to advancing from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) and we do not want to create an unwelcoming impression on the part of the URCNA:

CECCA proposes that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) with the FCC.

F. The Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT)

The ERCLAT consists of two congregations. The first congregation, the Riga Reformed Bible Church, was planted in 1990 by Pastor Alvis Sauka. Ten years later, a second congregation was planted in Riga. Church leaders and members embraced Reformed theology through the teaching received at Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga. Professors such as Mark Vanderhart, Cornelis Venema, Gerard Van Groningen, Hans Buyer, Simon Kistemaker, Larry Sibley and more have been instrumental in mentoring these two congregations.

The ERCLAT, which was unable to send an observer to Synod Visalia, has informed us that it will likely not be able to send a fraternal delegate to Synod Wyoming. While members of other churches in the URCNA have made visits to the ERCLAT, no member of CECCA has as yet made a visit to the ERCLAT.

CECCA proposes that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the ERCLAT.

G. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales (EPCEW)

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW) is a federation of 18 churches, which includes a mission church at Ribchester, Lancashire. There is a Bible study in Manchester, preliminary to a church plant, God Willing. In Hexham, a Mission to the World missionary has been appointed, and in Barry (South Wales) a World Witness (ARP) missionary has been appointed to work alongside the minister in the church. A missionary from the PCA is expected to join the church in Tranås, Sweden soon. The group in Berlin, Germany has been established as a church plant, and the first minister was ordained in December 2015. The total (communicant and baptized) membership of the EPCEW is about 690 (2014 figure), a growth of about 8% from the previous year, and the denomination, though still very small, has been growing at about 10% a year over its history. There are 12 churches in England, three in Wales, and one in Sweden, at Tranås, and now one in Berlin, Germany. The church in Sweden has been fully part of the denomination for several years.

CECCA delegated Rev. Dick Moes to attend the General Assembly of the EPCEW held on March 5, 2016. Due to pastoral reasons, the trip needed to be cancelled at the last minute. The address he had written was still sent. See **Appendix 10**.

Since we have only been in fraternal relations for two years:

CECCA proposes that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the EPCEW.

III. Churches with whom we are corresponding with a view to Ecumenical Contact

A. The Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI-NTT)

The GGRI-NTT is a federation of churches comprised of 20 established congregations and 75 places of worship on the island of Sumba. It is organized in five classes and has a membership of 7000 members, served by 20 active ministers and 7 retired ministers. The federation maintains a Theological College in Waingapu, the capital of East Sumba. There are 20 students on Campus at the moment. Three of them are married. There are five students doing their practicum in the churches at the moment. There are four full-time and seven part-time lecturers. Since the College does not have its own campus yet, they are presently renting a building. The GGRI-NTT holds to the Three Forms of Unity (see **Appendix 11**)

CECCA proposes that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the GGRI-NTT.

B. The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)

The PCEA is a federation of 12 congregations organized in three presbyteries. The congregations are spread from Brisbane in the north down to Geelong in Victoria. There is one congregation in Ulverstone, Tasmania. The PCEA does not have a seminary, but uses the colleges of the Presbyterian Church in Australia, which is complemented by reading, and essays set by their own Training of Ministry Committee to cover their own distinctive doctrines, history and practice. The PCEA has a membership of about 1000 members. It holds to the Westminster Standards and the Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government. For more information on this federation, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Presbyterian_Church_of_Eastern_Australia.

In an email (see **Appendix 12**), CECCA received the following communication from the PCEA: “Synod welcomes the invitation from the United Reformed Churches in North America to enter into ‘Ecclesiastical Contact’ and resolves to extend Fraternal Relations to the URCNA in terms of our Act of Synod 1993.” See **Appendix 13** for a copy of the Fraternal Relations Act.

CECCA proposes that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the PCEA.

IV. The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

The ICRC is a Conference of Reformed Churches which meets once every four years in locations throughout the world. The first preliminary meeting was held in 1982 in the Netherlands with the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) taking leading roles. Subsequent meetings have been held in

Scotland (1985), Canada (1989), The Netherlands (1993), Korea (1997), the USA (2001), South Africa (2005), New Zealand (2009) and Wales, United Kingdom (2013).

The purpose of the conference is:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world

The next conference will, the Lord willing, be held in 2017 in Jordan, Ontario with the URCNA being the hosting federation and the Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church of Jordan being the hosting church. The theme of the conference will be *Reformation 500*. See **Appendix 14** for more information on the ICRC.

The ICRC in Cardiff, Wales adopted changes to the constitution. Member churches need to approve the changes so that the ICRC in Jordan can adopt the revised constitution. We have included the present constitution and the revised constitution in **Appendix 15**. For the revisions made, see **Appendix 14**.

VI. Recommendations

CECCA recommends to Synod Wyoming that:

1. the URCNA enter in Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase II) with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA);
2. the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (Phase I) with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv);
3. the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) with the Calvinistic Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRT-NTT);
4. the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase II) with the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC);
5. the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (Phase I) with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT);
6. the URCNA remain into Ecumenical Contact (Phase I) with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW);
7. the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI-NTT);
8. the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA);
9. the URCNA approve the proposed changes to the constitution of the ICRC;
10. Synod reappoint Rev. Dick Moes as member-at-large of CECCA;

11. Synod welcome the fraternal delegates present at Synod, extending to them the opportunity to address Synod on behalf of the sending church;
12. Synod welcome the fraternal observers who may be present, extending to them the opportunity to greet Synod on behalf of the sending church;
13. Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following members of CECCA to answer Synod's questions regarding this report: Rev. Christo Heiberg, chairman and Rev Dick Moes, secretary.

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Ancel Merwin, member
Rev. Ray Sikkema, member
Rev. Rick Miller, member
Rev. Jason Tuinstra, member
Br. Martin Nuiver, member
Br. Huibert Den Boer, member
Br. Doug L. Field, member
Rev. Christo Heiberg, chairman
Rev. Dick Moes, secretary.

Appendix 1

FRATERNAL ADDRESS TO THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NEW ZEALAND

Moderator and brethren,

It is my great privilege to stand before you and greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and address you on behalf of the United Reformed Churches of North America. As we contend, both here and in North America, with a culture that is increasingly unified and intentional in its hostility to the gospel of our Savior, how true ring the words of the Psalmist: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” In your offices as pastors, elders and shepherds may you always be a sweet aroma as you represent the voice of our great Prophet, the compassion of our great Priest, and the authority of our great King!

On June 3, 2014, just a few weeks past, the ninth Synod of the URCNA was convened in Visalia, California. Two delegates each represented our 115 churches as we worked diligently through a 372-page agenda. That agenda contained matters that were for the most part routine and comparatively little that was in any manner contentious. We are thankful for the peace that the Lord has given to our federation and its churches. Significant time and effort were devoted to the furtherance of ecumenical relationships with churches outside of our federation.

While we understand that it was not possible at Synod Visalia 2014, it would have been our privilege to have hosted a delegate from among you. It had been our privilege two years ago at Synod Nyack 2012 to have the attendance of Rev Leo de Vos and his detailed report is attached to Report 19 of the Interchurch Relations Committee. As Rev. de Vos notes, the URCNA has two committees dealing with ecumenical relationships. They include CERCU (Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity) and CECCA (Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad.) CERCU’s purview is churches in North America and CECCA’s is churches in all other parts of the world. I serve on both committees.

At Visalia, Synod accepted the recommendations of CECCA that our federation enter in to Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase II) with the United Reformed Churches of Congo (URCC) and that it enter into Ecumenical Contact (Phase I) with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW).

Relationships with numerous other denominations and federations, including our excellent and productive relationship with Reformed Churches of New Zealand continue uninterrupted and we are humbly grateful for them.

You here in Christchurch have been most generous in your hospitality to us and we are eager to reciprocate whenever you can send representatives to any of our broader

assemblies. While we can learn much from reports, we can learn much more by spending time with each other and interacting face to face. Each of our federations experiences limitations and we should never minimize the challenges that they can present. Hence, we understand why you were not able to send a delegate. While the Lord in His providence did not open a way for you to be among us in 2014, we pray that a day may come when we can host you and bless you as you have blessed us.

It can be inferred from reading its report that the Interchurch Relations Committee is operated within a structure that standardizes its work. We would encourage you in this. Our own CECCA has objective standards that it follows in seeking out and establishing ecumenical relations with other denominations and federations. As I alluded to a moment ago we have two phases in our ecumenical relations that are meant to reflect an ongoing maturation of each relationship. I encourage you to continue to wrestle with this matter. We, like you, do not believe in unity at all cost. We believe in a unity and ecumenicity that is rooted in our common confession as Reformed churches. It is our confessional commitment and subscription that brings us close to each other. We hope that this will always be the case. When it is, much good results as iron cannot sharpen iron if it never touches. We are glad that in Christ we can be iron to you and you to us.

Finally, thank you again for having me here as your guest and as I conclude will you indulge me in an anecdotal observation? A tour book that I consulted before coming to New Zealand contains this statement: “Kiwis don’t tend to be religious with two-thirds *lightly* following one of the four main Christian religions (Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian and Anglican.)” Obviously, the writer of that comment failed to visit any of the Reformed churches in this beautiful county. Had he done so he would have readily observed that there is nothing *light* in your dedication to our Lord and His Gospel. May you, His heralds, continue to be faithful in your task as you urgently proclaim the good news of Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life! And may He, the Captain of our Salvation, be honored in all that you and we do and say, to the praise of His name.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elder Douglas L. Field
Fraternal Delegate (URCNA)

Appendix 2

REPORT OF VISIT TO THE TWENTY-EIGHTH SYNOD OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NEW ZEALAND

The Twenty-eighth Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand was convened at 3:00 pm Saturday; September 13, 2014 at Bishopdale Reformed Church, Christchurch, New Zealand. Rev. Robert van Wichen of the Bishopdale Reformed Church offered opening and welcome. Rev. Van Wichen made meaningful comment on John 17 emphasizing Jesus' high priestly prayer for those of us who would become his followers in the centuries after his death. Jesus' concern for the unity of the saints was ably brought to the attention of the assembly.

Credentials to Synod were examined and approved. One pastor and one elder delegate each represented all 20 RCNZ congregations. In addition to the pastor and elder delegates from the various congregations of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, present were fraternal delegates from the URCNA, Canadian and American Reformed Churches, Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, Free Reformed Churches of Australia, GKSA, OPC, Presbyterian Church of East Australia and Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia.

(The RCNZ has sister-church relationships with:

- URCNA
- Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
- Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA
- Canadian and American Reformed Churches
- Reformed Churches of South Africa,
- Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (terminated this Synod),
- Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated).

They are in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia.

In addition, they have contact with:

- Free Reformed Churches of Australia
- Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia
- Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.)

All delegates declared their agreement with the confessional standards. Moderamen were chosen as follows: Rev. Peter Kloosterman Moderator, Rev. Robert van Wichen Vice Moderator, Elder John van Dyk First Clerk, and Rev. Michael Willense Second Clerk.

Synod was then declared officially open. It then held a prayer service on Saturday evening. Rev. Bruce Hoyt led the service and Rev. Andrew de Vries preached a sermon on the theme of dwelling together in unity drawn from Psalm 133.

Although Synod did not meet, on Sunday September 14, we were privileged to attend services, both morning and evening at Bishopdale Reformed Church. In the morning Rev. John Rogers preached on Zechariah 5 noting the need for repentance and for living for the Lord in a world wherein evil is prevalent but will not last forever. In the evening Rev. Leo de Vos preached on the subject of covenant baptism and the distinctions between the reformed and Baptist practices in this regard.

The regular business of Synod initiated Monday morning September 15. Reports of the Educational Resource, Ministers' and Wives' Conference, National Publishing, Synodical Archivist, Forms and Confessions Committees and the Stated Clerk were considered and their recommendations for the most part approved.

The Report of the Inter Church Relations (IRC) committee was next considered. The Synod had received communication from the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Christian Reformed Churches of the Netherlands)(CGKN) suggesting that since the CGKN is shifting its focus more and more to Europe and that since it has been difficult to attend each other's synods that the relationship of full correspondence be discontinued and that the relationship between the denominations be continued through the ICRC. Synod voted to express its thanks to the CGKN for the sister-church relationship that has heretofore been enjoyed, to discontinue the sister-church relationship with the CGKN and to direct the IRC to explore ways of maintaining contact through the ICRC.

The Gereformeerde Kerken vrijgemaakt (Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated))(GKv) also sent a formal communication to the Synod. Rev. Dirk van Gaarderen attended the GKv synod in June and reported (as CECCA has been aware) that it had rejected the proposal that women be eligible for any office in the church. Nevertheless, Rev. Van Gaarderen infers that the issue will continue to be a matter of consideration and possible future adoption in that denomination.

After the GKv Synod, the RCNZ received a letter from the BBK, which is the GKv's rough equivalent of our CECCA indicating in essence according to Rev. van Gaarderen, "it has been nice to know you." This communication was received without solicitation and was not in conjunction with any other context. It came as something of a surprise. (Please recall that CECCA received a somewhat similar communication from the BBK.) The RCNZ Synod is encouraged that the GKv has not opened offices to women, but it continues to be concerned that the proposal has not been definitively rejected. The IRC will seek clarification from the BBK and will indicate that barring a clear withdrawal from the current hermeneutical direction the sister-church relation between the GKv and the RCNZ would be imperiled. At this time, however sister-church relations are to be continued.

It was recommended by the IRC that the RCNZ work towards recommending establishment of a sister-church relationship with the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Australia (PRCA) and that the RCNZ send a delegate to at least one Presbytery of the PRCA annually during the RCNZ inter-synodical period of the next three years.

I was offered the opportunity to address the Synod on behalf of the URCNA at the start of the Monday evening session. I made the address previously forwarded to and approved by the CECCA brothers and it was graciously received.

Rev. Leo de Vos offered response. He recalled fondly the time he had spent at Synod Nyack 2012 and appreciated, “how you do Synod.” Rev. de Vos fondly speaks of some 50 pastors and elders that he knows in the URCNA. He thanked our federation for its support of the RCNZ and commented that he prays for our strength in the unity of the truth. He closed his responding remarks referring to Psalm 72 in which allusion is made to God having “dominion from sea to sea” and he wished us well in the ultimate establishment of the Kingdom in the United States and Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

Synod then discussed the recommendation of the IRC that sister-church relations with the URCNA be continued and a motion to that effect was passed without dissent.

On Tuesday, September 16, the session took up a very sensitive matter involving a couple in one of the congregations who had been disciplined by their session and which couple appealed successfully, at least in part, to the governing presbytery. The session then appealed to Synod in 2011 and were upheld, but Synod’s decisions in 2011 were considered ambiguous and the matter was not resolved. It was thus brought back before Synod 2014. Synod 2014 labored at length to resolve the several competing issues and attain reconciliation among all parties. Unhappily, a final resolution that reconciled all parties to one another was not achieved, but great respect and Christian love for all involved was both expressed and clearly observable.

Thereafter Synod took up a proposed child abuse policy that had been developed in committee. After extensive discussion the guidelines were adopted.

Then it was a real pleasure to celebrate with the delegates the inauguration of the new hymnal that this comparatively small federation has produced and published on its own. The new songbook is entitled *Sing to the Lord* and consists of approximately one half psalms and one half hymns. The new volume was used to frequent and good effect throughout Synod.

On Wednesday, September 17 Synod (having started this discussion one Tuesday) returned to debate concerning a proposed child abuse policy that had been developed in committee. The policy not only covered means and methods for protecting children from this scourge, but also with issues of investigation and (if necessary) punishment of cases and issues involving pastoral care. As such this policy was altogether comprehensive (and, if I may editorialize, beautifully crafted.) After lengthy discussion it was in most particulars adopted.

The representatives from the OPC and Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand (5 small congregations in New Zealand) gave their fraternal addresses and they were both

were well received. Synod voted to continue in sister-church relationship with the OPC and to open formal contact with the Grace Presbyterian Church of New Zealand. The RCNZ's former status designation of "Ecclesiastical Fellowship" was changed to "Ecumenical Fellowship."

Most of the churches in the RCNZ federation use the 1984 New International Version for pulpit purposes. There was a proposal to look into assessing the viability of adopting the NIV 2011. However, Synod 2011 had disallowed the use of this translation for pulpit purposes. There was great ambivalence of feeling. There was even talk of trying to purchase the copyright to the 1984 NIV from Zondervan. In the end Synod decided not to look further into the NIV 2011. After that authorization for the use of the ESV and NKJV for pulpit use was proposed and in both cases approved.

On Thursday, September 18, Synod engaged in a very lengthy discussion of reorganization of the federational missions commission and of its funding.

Thereafter, several proposed changes to the forms generally and specifically to the Form of Profession of Faith, Form for the Baptism of the Children of Believers and the Form for Baptism Upon Profession of Faith and the Form for Excommunication were brought forward. The changes were predominantly stylistic and while important did not intrude upon any area of fundamental doctrine.

The Fraternal Delegates of the Canadian and American Reformed Church and the Free Reformed Church of Australia gave their addresses. The CanRef address was very capably given and well received. It evidenced a close and vibrant sister-church between CanRef and the RCNZ. Synod reaffirmed the already existing sister-church relationship with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Comment was made that since it has been some while since RCNZ has attended a CanRef synod, doing so should now receive high priority.

The situation with the FRCA is more complicated. RCNZ had extended to the FRCA an offer of sister-church relations for several years now that have not yet been accepted. This is due to concerns on the part of the FRCA over the relationship that the RCNZ maintains with the Christian Reformed Church. In essence, the fraternal delegate acknowledged the awkwardness of the situation but nevertheless asked the RCNZ Synod to continue to have patience with the FRCA as it works through this issue. The RCNZ response encouraged the FRCA to move forward and implied that patience may, in the foreseeable future, wear thin. Synod did decide to continue to offer sister-church status to the FRCA for the present.

The fraternal delegate of the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika (Reformed Churches of South Africa) (GKSA) offered his fraternal address and acknowledged candidly that the RCNZ has raised its concerns with the GKSA relative to the latter's allowing of women to be ordained as deacons. GKSA has asked the RCNZ to offer detailed explanation of its objection to the action taken by the GKSA. Some of the delegates to

Synod questioned this request and indicated feelings that it should be the GKSA that is making explanation and justification of its position in the matter.

In addition the IRC felt that the GKSA had inappropriately handled appeals at its Synod on the subject. Synod opted to continue to express its deepest concern concerning its decision to allow women to be ordained as deaconesses. Synod thus voted to express concern to the GKSA concerning the handling of appeals and to inform the GKSA that if it continues to ordain women as deacons its sister-church relationship with the RCNZ will be put under strain. (It became evident from the historical record offered during debate that in recent years the GKSA had been ambivalent on this subject and has variously allowed the ordination of women, rescinded that decision and then reinstated it. The current status is that ordination of women as deaconesses in the GKSA is allowed.)

During the evening session the fraternal delegates of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia offered their addresses. The relationship between the PCEA and RCNZ appears to be quite close. Synod voted to continue in sister-church relations with the PCEA. Relations with the CRCA have been mildly less felicitous and what was formerly a sister-church relationship has been reduced to one of ecumenical fellowship. This appears, among other issues, to have arisen from questions of the ordination of women deacons that is apparently proposed but not yet enacted. Synod voted to continue in ecumenical fellowship with the CRCA.

On Friday, September 19, Synod dealt with a number of remaining Church Order change and clarification proposals. These are intricate and convoluted and were largely recommitted to the Church Order committee for further work and presentation to Synod 2017. While little was definitively determined by this Synod as to Church Order issues, the committee will have the benefit of Synod's thinking and input for its further deliberations.

Authorization was given to the appropriate committee to look into the publication of a smaller and lighter version of the new *Sing to the Lord* songbook.

A letter of loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was prepared and approved. The irony was noted, with significant light-hearted banter, that this letter will be signed by Moderator Rev, Peter Kloosterman who is an American citizen.

Synod 2014 agreed that Synod 2017 will begin with a service of thanksgiving upon the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation.

A proposal to allow for the lifetime appointment of elders was brought and defeated. The concept presented was that procedurally elders when initially chosen actually are in effect chosen for life and thereafter serve active terms for various periods of time with various periods of time off active service. The proposal was complicated by the fact the proposal would permit election of elders to both indefinite and definite terms according to local discretion. A motion to appoint a study committee was also defeated.

The IRC recommended continuing membership in the ICRC. (Parenthetically there is great interest among the RCNZ in the ICRC and representatives will likely be present at 2017 Conference in Ontario, Canada.) Continued membership is authorized.

Synod approved the IRC's recommendation for sending delegates to Synods and broader assemblies of churches with which the RCNZ has relationships as follows:

1. Send a delegate to both the CanRef Synod in May 2016 and the OPC General Assembly in conjunction with one another. The last time RCNZ attended a can Ref Synod was 2007.
2. Send a fraternal delegate to the next GKSA Synod.
3. Send a delegate to the PCEA Synod in either 2015, 2017 or 2017. PCEA has yearly synods
4. Maintain contact with the CGKN through ICRC, but send no delegate.
5. Send a delegate to the RCN General Synod in 2017.
6. Send two delegates to the next synod of the CRCA.
7. Send three delegates to the ICRC on 2017 in Ontario, Canada including Dirk van Gaardenen and Bruce Hoyt plus one additional individual.
8. Send a delegate to the GPC Assembly
9. Send a delegate to the next synod of the FRCA.
10. Send a delegate to at least one Presbytery of the PRCA during the intersynodical period.

You will note that there is no specific plan to send a delegate to the URCNA Synod Wyoming 2016. I was taken aside and personally told that this is because a delegate was fairly recently sent to Synod Nyack 2012. It was noted "various visits may be able to be made in combination with visits for personal reasons to locations in question." This means that, as I was also advised, that effort would be made to attend our next synod should opportunity arise. Since Synod Wyoming is planned for Summer 2016, as are the CanRef and OPC meetings, I anticipate that the possibility does exist that we will have the pleasure of hosting someone from the RCNZ, the failure of formal authorization for it by this Synod notwithstanding.

Stated in other words, there was evident sensitivity to our potential feeling that the URCNA having made the investment in sending a delegate to this Synod its effort was not being commensurately reciprocated.

Respectfully submitted,

Doug L. Field

Appendix 3

Fraternal Address to the General Synod of the United Reformed Church of the Congo

Brothers, fathers and co-laborers in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Greetings in the name of Him who was, and is and ever shall be Lord over all! My name is Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra and I serve the Bethel United Reformed Church of Jenison, Michigan. It is my distinct honor and privilege to address you as the fraternal delegate from the United Reformed Churches of North America. I am here, per your invitation, as a member of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad, otherwise known as CECCA. I know Rev. Christo Heiberg was hoping to attend this meeting. Unfortunately, he was not able to come but brings his warm greetings to you all.

I am pleased to let you know that at our last synod, Synod Visalia 2014, we unanimously voted to enter into phase two ecumenical relations with the URCC. This is the closest bond that we can have with a foreign federation and was a cause for celebration among us at our synod. Though there may be much that separates us in terms of distance, culture and background, we rejoice that we share like precious faith with you in our Savior, Jesus Christ. We rejoice that the same confessional standards that form your unity as churches are the same three forms that provide the basis of our unity as federations. We rejoice that we can say, with a unified voice, that our only comfort, in life and in death, is that we belong to our faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

Since arriving here last Thursday, I was able to attend a meeting of the Committee Executive National (CEN) and worship among you twice. Though limited in my ability to communicate with you in any of your many languages, your love for the Lord and desire to serve Him needs no translation. On Sunday morning I saw that your hospitality does not simply extend to a strange man with white skin from a far away place, but more importantly, it is shown to a single woman who visits your church for the first time. I have seen how you seek to both edify the saints and reach out to the lost. This has been a great encouragement to me as a fellow laborer in the gospel with you.

Unlike the GKv and the RCUS, our relationship with you is relatively young. Over time the GKv and RCUS have developed ways of being able to support you and encourage you in specific and meaningful ways. As the Lord blesses our blossoming relationship, we trust that we will be able to provide the kind of encouragement that is rooted in a history of interaction and trust. Being able to attend this meeting of synod is particularly helpful as it is only through this type of personal, face-to-face interaction that we can show mutual encouragement, learn from each other and identify areas where we can better support one another.

As a first time observer of your synod, I am encouraged by your commitment to the work that is before you. I am also reminded that though we may be thousands of miles apart, many of our debates and discussions take on the same nature. Our look and style may be different, but human nature is the same. Deliberations often fall into questions about fine

points of procedure. The result is that the pace of progress grinds to a halt. The unfortunate effect is that the precious little time that we have for assembly meetings is eaten up. What is more, the incredible sacrifice that you make to be here is spent on items that might not be worth that investment. It seems that you would be benefited by a clear and specific set of rules and procedures for your meetings. Everyone must be committed to them, know them ahead of time and maintain them throughout the assembly. Your time is incredibly valuable. Having rules and procedures allows you to navigate through the finer points and frees you to deliberate on the weightier matters that your churches entrust you to deliberate. I would encourage adopting these kinds of procedures for all your broader and narrower assemblies so that when you come to your general synod, you are all well practiced in these procedures.

The encouragement that I take away from your meeting is the way that you informed one another in your regional synod reports. It was good to hear you share both your joys and sorrows. It is right to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. I can see how this not only keeps your churches better informed about one other, I see how this strengthens your unity among one another. We do not have anything like this in our federation and I can see the benefit of taking this time to deepen your fellowship with one another and aid you in your prayers for one another.

Allow me the personal privilege of publicly thanking Rev.'s Kabongo and Abel for their patient and loving care of me since I've been here and dealing with all my questions and arrangements even before I arrived. They have been very hospitable and have provided help for me without which I would have been lost. As a federation, you are well represented and served by such men. Also, I would like to express a special thanks to brother Albert for translating for me during your deliberations and for providing a private French Class in the back of your assembly. If the URCNA is going to be of better assistance to you and your assembly, it is clear that someone from our committee should learn French. Thank you to all those who have sought to fill that gap by helping me with my French vocabulary and pronunciation. Merci beaucoup!

Brothers, the Lord has entrusted you with a high honor. You are building and planting His church in the midst of syncretism, superstition, nominalism and indifference. The need is great. The days are dark. But light always shines most brilliantly when contrasted with the dark. The moon shines brightest on the darkest night. So shine with the light of the gospel. Be of good cheer. Christ has overcome the world. He rose victoriously from the dead. The tomb is empty and the throne is occupied. The Bridegroom loves His bride. He has laid down His life for her. So go forward in the hope of the risen, reigning Christ. Teach and train for His glory. Labor for His praise. Proclaim His truth. And live from His comfort.

May the Great Shepherd of the sheep sustain you in your task. To Him be the glory!

Humbly Submitted,

Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra
Foreign Delegate (URCNA)

Appendix 4

Report on the United Reformed Church of the Congo

On July 22, 2015, I began my journey from the relative quiet of Grand Rapids, Michigan to the bustling city of Kinshasa, Congo. As a representative of CECCA, I was invited to travel to Western Africa to attend the second ever synod of the United Reformed Church of the Congo (URCC). Because we are in Phase II Ecumenical Relations with the URCC this is an important expression of our fraternal relationship. After significant hours in a plane, I arrived late on the evening of July 23 in Kinshasa, a city of thirteen million people.

Having arrived a few days before the synod began, I was blessed to be able to get to know some of the families from one of the local congregations. During this time, the executive committee of the URCC had some pre-synod work to do. I was able to attend some of these meetings and offer some input.

One of the challenges our committee has faced in forming a meaningful relationship with our brothers and sisters in the URCC is the language barrier. The Congolese speak French as their official language and various tribal languages depending on the region of the country you find yourself in. Nevertheless, during my stay some of the Congolese brothers were able to speak English, most notably, the chairman of the URCC, Rev. Kabongo. He helped me tremendously during my stay, but was not always able to fill in the gaps as he was chairing the synod. Through his assistance, not only was I benefited during the synodical meetings, I was also able to preach at the Zion URCC of Kinshasa the Sunday before the opening session of synod.

As a member of an ecumenical committee, we are accustomed to dealing with documents and positions in determining our affinity and fraternity with a fellow denomination. That is necessary and essential. And yet, it was in worshipping with these brothers and sisters that our common beliefs were fully experienced in congregational worship. Beyond the synod and the camaraderie that develops during these all-day sessions, Sunday worship cemented a closeness that could not otherwise have happened. Here too, I bumped up against the language barrier. My sermon was first spoken in English, then translated into French by Rev. Kabongo, and then translated into Lingala (the local tribal language) by the serving elder. Despite the division of tongues, there was a unity in faith as we celebrated the gospel of grace alone in Christ alone through a study in Luke 15.

If language was one of the issues that I kept bumping up against, poverty is the issue that this young federation continually bumps up against. The people are poor. And yet, Kinshasa is the 13th most expensive city in the world to live in. For context, it is more expensive to live in Kinshasa than anywhere in the United States or Canada. The average Congolese citizen makes roughly \$1.50 USD a day. Sometimes we soften the blow of a low number by factoring in a cheaper standard of living. But as I report above, this is not the case in Kinshasa. Hence, the poverty the church bumps up against is real, devastating, debilitating and always present.

My time among the brothers in the URCC was blessed and wonderfully challenging. Most of our work in CECCA is done through spoken words and prepared addresses. But what happens when federations need this and more? How is the URCNA prepared to use our resources in a unified way for those with whom we have a unified commitment? These are some of the questions we will have to struggle with as your committee.

God has given us a tremendous opportunity to serve Him among the URCC. He has given us wonderful partners in this work with the RCUS and the GKv, both of whom were represented at this synod. May God continue to bless the bonds between us. I'm glad to report that through this long journey a strong bond was further strengthened. Praise God!

Humbly Submitted, Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra

Appendix 5

Report to CECCA re Visit to GKSA, January 12-16, 2016

Brothers, herewith the report of my visit to the Extraordinary General Synod of the GKSA which met from January 12 to 16, 2016 at Potchefstroom.

As you may recall, there was some uncertainty relating to the Agenda of this meeting. Would this Synod actually deal with the Women in Office (WiO) issue, yes or no? I contacted a number of people, including my friend Rev. Ben Fourie in SA. He assured me that (in all likelihood) the WiO issue would indeed be handled by this Synod. Therefore, in consultation with our chairman, the decision was made that I should make arrangements to attend this meeting of what they called the Extraordinary General Synod.

The meetings were begun on Tuesday with the election of officers. The Rev. HJP de Beer was chosen as the Chairman of Synod, a great choice! Rev. de Beer is a man blessed with wonderful gifts for the task that awaited him as Chairman – wisdom, forbearance, patience, self-denial, to mention a few! Soon there was an emotion-driven issue: the language to be used in this meeting. Should it be the (per usual) Afrikaans – which was translated into English, or should it be English. The threat was that, in the event Afrikaans was maintained, then the members of various native tribes would speak in the language of their tribe – and translators, it was said, should then be brought in to translate into English or Afrikaans. The matter was finally (after many hours of intense debate) resolved: The meetings would be conducted in English – as much as each delegate felt free to express himself in English. Those who chose to speak Afrikaans (for many English is virtually a foreign language) would so announce and their comments would then simultaneously be translated into English. The Chairman would state all matters both in English and in Afrikaans. Also, a committee will look at the language issue prior to the next regular-scheduled meeting of the General Synod, to be convened in January 2018. So ended the first day on a rather peaceful note; no one left the meeting.

In addition to handling Protests relating to the calling of what was referred to as “a Special Synod” (this Synod, which was to be made up of a far smaller number of delegates, was slated to answer the Gravamina relating to WiO that had not been handled by the January 2015 meeting of the Synod – but did not meet) the Extraordinary General Synod of 2016 dealt with many Gravamina (Appeals) against the decision of Synod 2009 (2003 & 2006). Eight committees were appointed – each to deal with “one line of argumentation” as it was found in any of the Appeals. For example, if any of the Appeals made reference to I Tim 2 that part of that Appeal was handled by the committee assigned to deal with I Timothy 2. This proved to be an excellent *modus operandi*.

The first Gravamen dealt with by the Synod was an Appeal against the decision of Synod 2003, which permitted churches to elect women to serve as Deacons. Each of its three grounds was dealt with separately and occasioned a lengthy debate each time; the voting on each part was close (the raised hands had to be counted), but the advice of the committee of pre-advice was adopted in each case: ***“the gravamen does not succeed on ground of protest 1 (of protest 2, of protest 3)”***. In other words, the decision that women

may serve as Deacons in the GKSA stands! I thought that the appellants had made some excellent points, but they did not prevail.

Significantly, all of the other Gravamina also failed; none *succeeded!* Some of the argumentation presented was clever, subtle – appealing, for example, to the contention **that** the church may not bind the conscience of its members; **that** the decision (that women may not serve in ecclesiastical office) leads to discrepancies in the exegesis and hermeneutics of the Scriptures; **that** such a decision negatively impacts the church’s confession re the unchangeable faithfulness of God; **that** such a decision negatively affects the free sovereign authority of God who can call and use (it was alleged) any person in His church without limitation; **that** such a decision narrows the gift of prophecy; **that** such a position leads to contradictions in ecclesiastical practice; etc.

Without a doubt, the arguments presented re the exegesis of I Tim. 2 were the subtlest. The first ground in one of the Gravamina stated that the exegesis of verse 12 (and the resulting inferences) are in conflict with *“what is allowed”* according to Greek grammar. But it was (correctly) pointed out that Greek scholars do not all come to the conclusion the appellants advocated. Additionally, the question re the focus of the words: *“in every place”* was at issue. Does that refer specifically to all occasions when the congregation gathers to pray and to worship, that is, to the worship service? The appellants maintained that it does not; that, therefore, the Synod (2009) was in error; its exegesis is, therefore, *“inadmissible”*, they said.

I met with this committee every time it met, including on Friday morning at 6:00 AM. A Majority report (finding that *“the Gravamen does not succeed on the Grounds...”*) and a Minority report (finding that *“the grounds of the protest succeed”*) were presented to Synod. A lively debate ensued; however, the Majority report won “hands down”. **So it was that the GKSA Synod rejected every attempt to move toward accepting Women in the Office of Elder and Minister of the Word!**

Clearly, a large percentage of the delegates (there were +/- 280 delegates from seven Regional Synods) were very thankful for the outcome of the debates on what had, for many years, been a contentious, potentially divisive issue in the GKSA. The Synod ended early Saturday afternoon with prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord who had so wondrously led His church in the decisions made.

Brothers, in view of the above, I recommend that we (CECCA) propose to Synod Wyoming that the URCNA enter into a Phase II “Ecumenical Fellowship” relationship with the GKSA. I believe that will clearly and unambiguously communicate to the GKSA our thankful appreciation of the position they took re the WiO issue – which in the past prevented us from entering that phase of Ecumenical relations with the GKSA.

Thankfully presented,
Rev. Raymond J. Sikkema

Appendix 6

Protocol for Establishing Ecclesiastical Contact and Advancement to Ecclesiastical Fellowship

Background:

1. CECCA currently has no protocol governing the circumstances under which Ecclesiastical Contact is established with other churches, denominations and/or federations.
2. CECCA currently has no protocol governing the advancement from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) status to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) status with such churches, denominations and/or federations.
3. CECCA currently has no protocol governing either the reduction from Ecclesiastical Fellowship to Ecclesiastical Contact or the severance of ecumenical relations with such churches, denominations and/or federations.
4. In order to promote consistency in the establishment, advancement, reduction and severance of ecumenical relations with other churches, denominations and/or federations, it will be beneficial to have a specific protocol governing such matters for use by CECCA.

Considerations:

1. Ecclesiastical Contact with another church, denomination or federations should be proposed only upon the development and verification by CECCA of specific information.
2. The period of Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) is intended for CECCA to become well acquainted with another church, denomination or federation.
3. However, experience teaches that occasionally little of substance may occur between URCNA Synods that will enable CECCA to become measurably better acquainted with such churches, denominations and/or federations.
4. In the eventuality that little or nothing occurs between Synods that enables CECCA to become measurably better acquainted with such churches, denominations and/or federations, then it would appear that there is no substantial impediment to advancing from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II).
5. Prolongation of advancement from Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) poses a significant danger of the creation of an unwelcoming impression on the part of the URCNA and potentially causes unnecessary hurt to those churches, denominations or federations that aspire to advance to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) status with the URCNA.

Protocol:

1. Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) relationship with a church, denomination or federation will be proposed to Synod after such a church, denomination or federation has provided to CECCA satisfactory information relative to the following topics:
 1. The authority and sufficiency of Scripture
 2. Creeds and confessions
 3. Formula of subscription to the confessions
 4. Significant factors of history, theology, ecclesiology and positions on ethical issues
 5. Church order and polity
 6. Liturgy and liturgical forms
 7. Preaching, sacraments and discipline
 8. Theological education for ministers, and
 9. Information regarding other current ecumenical relations.
2. Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) relationship with a church, denomination or federation will be proposed by CECCA to Synod when there are no outstanding issues with such a church, denomination or federation with which the URCNA is in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) and CECCA has made a formal visit to such church, denomination or federation.
3. CECCA will ordinarily not wait longer than two synods (i.e. four years from the year that Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) is established) to propose to Synod that the URCNA advance to Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) with such church, denomination or federation.
4. In the event that either an Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) or an Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) relationship becomes no longer biblically or confessionally viable or practically feasible, CECCA will consider and recommend to Synod the reduction and/or severance of such relationship as appropriate.
5. Reduction and/or severance of status should be undertaken reluctantly and only after careful and deliberate investigation in gentleness and love and with the purpose of seeking repentance, attempted restoration and reconciliation of any issues which may have arisen.

Dated: April 15, 2014

Appendix 7

Report of Visit to Indonesia

July 31 – August 14, 2013

Brothers, herewith a brief report of my visit to Indonesia.

As per our decision (made at our face-to-face meeting in Chicago, January 24, 2013) namely that I should seek opportunity to travel to Indonesia with a member of the Can RC, I traveled with the Rev. Dr. Andrew Pol to Indonesia leaving on July 31 and returning on the 14th of August. We flew to Denpasar, Bali where we “rested” for a day and a half, whereupon we flew to Waingapu, Sumba, the Island where the Synod of the GGRI would hold its meetings.

For the next three nights, we lodged with the Rev. Doko, a “retired” teacher of the theological school of the GGRI. He had suffered a stroke four years ago and now lives in squalor, not having received any income for several months. (I had agreed with Rev. Pol that, rather than lodging in a Hotel, we should stay at the home of church members.) On Sunday, August 4, I preached at Petawang, Rev. Pol translating.

On Monday we met with the members of the Soli Deo Gloria Foundation (YaSDeG) which operates a Reformed Senior High School, grades 10-12, near Waingapu. Since this is the only such school in Sumba (operated by members of the GGRI) most of the students live on “campus”. We discussed the ministry needs of the school for the future. There may be opportunity for the school to purchase some additional land which will permit the school both to expand its “program”, e.g. teaching the students how to care for land and animals, and enlarge its facilities. Whether the Theological School should also be located on this property is a matter under discussion.

On Tuesday we drove to Kataka, a small, poverty-stricken village in the hills where the Regional Synod of the GGRI was scheduled to meet for two weeks. (No Western style conveniences available there.) In addition to Rev. Pol of the CanRC, a “foreign” delegate was present also from Australia (from the FRCA which has ecumenical relations with and is supportive of some of the ministry programs of the GGRI). Also present were Rev. Yonson Dethan (along with two delegates) from the GGRC and Rev. Edwer Dethan, the missionary of the Smithville CanRC working in Timor – operating a broadcasting ministry and a Bible College. Since Rev. Pol had served as a missionary on Sumba for five years, he is fluent in the language spoken – a great blessing for me. Rev. Pol would type up the gist of the discussion – so as to keep me abreast of the Agenda matters discussed. As did the other “foreign” delegates, I spoke some words of greeting. – underscoring, i.a., the importance of the GGRI and the GGRC coming to ecumenical unity. (Though I was not a delegate, I was well received.)

On Thursday (for most of the afternoon and early evening) the visitors/delegates from “abroad” met with the “CECCA” members of the GGRI. We discussed at length the “issue” of the relationship between the GGRI (with whom both the CanRC and the FRCA have Ecumenical relations) and the GGRC (with whom the URCNA has an Ecumenical Contact relationship). The GGRI has most of its congregations in Sumba (with one in

Timor) and the GGRC has its congregations in Timor. Historically, the two federations had worked together quite amiably. Depending on who you ask, the reason for the misunderstandings that have plagued the two federations of late are variously attributed to (1) pressures from the FRCA (re ministry programs), (2) conflicts between the brothers Dethan, (3) a conflict between Yonson Dethan and an earlier leader of the GGRC (who has now passed away – whose funeral Yonson was asked to conduct!), and (4) the question of the relationship between the ministry of the Smithville CanRC (Rev. Edwer Dethan) and both the GGRI and GGRC.

As I listened to (and indeed participated in the “discussions”), it struck me that the GGRI is very sensitive to (what it considers to be) interference from especially the FRCA. There was a genuine desire (expressed by the GGRI members) for ecumenical relations with the GGRC. The GGRC, though surely not averse to ecumenical relations with the GGRI, expressed a lot of hurt because of unresolved past issues – not the least of which is the “judgement” (expressed by the delegate of the FRCA) against the person of Rev. Yonson Dethan. At our meeting, all participants pledged to work toward “ecumenical union” between the two federations.

The Rev. Madah Biha, a member of the “CECCA” committee of the GGRI (the only pastor of the GGRI working in Timor) expressed genuine interest in having an ecumenical relationship with the URCNA. He indicated that he would be in contact with me/us.

(It should be noted that the GGRI is a new federation presently made up of three Regional Synods. The three Regional Synods – the GGRI-NTT in Sumba, the Reformed Churches in KalBar [Borneo] and the Reformed Churches in Papua – formed the GGRI in the Spring of 2012 with a view “to work together more closely and to help each other – in their respective three provinces”. Should the GGRC decide to join this new federation, it would continue to hold its own Regional Synod meetings – as do the other three members – and gather with the (General) Synod of the GGRI when it meets. The mission churches established by the mission work of Smithville CanRC through the ministry of Rev. Edwer Dethan also plan to join this new federation “once the GGRI-NTT and the GGRC decide to unite”.

It should also be noted that both federations operate a “Theological School” and that the school in Sumba has not been “accredited” while the school in Kupang is “accredited”. The idea is, therefore, that the theological students from Sumba go to Timor for their last year so as to be eligible for a diploma “that is officially recognized in Indonesia”. It is my understanding that these “theological schools” are post High School, not post College institutions. It is for that reason that some of the graduates are sent to Canada or Holland for additional training.)

On Thursday evening we (Rev. Yonson Dethan and I) left Kataka. We spent another night at the home of Rev. Doko. Friday was a travel day. Yonson and I traveled to the Airport that morning and waited many hours before we could fly from Waingapu, Sumba to Kupang, Timor.

On Saturday I met for nearly 5 hours with the CECCA committee of the GGRC. Some of the questions (which we had raised and discussed at the Synod) I also discussed with these brothers – including (1) What is your view of/response to the question: “How can the GGRC and the GGRI come together?” (2) Do you agree that the GGRC should be admitted to/accepted as a Regional Synod of the GGRI – of which the GGRI-NTT is also a member? (3) Do you agree that the mission work of Rev. Edwer Dethan (eventually) be recognized as the work of the GGRC?

Additionally, I asked the brothers “What do you see should be the fruit of our (that is of the URCNA and the GGRC) ecumenical relations?” In response, the brothers told me not only such things as: we have one Savior; we are brothers, we hold to the same doctrines; we have an obligation to know each other and support each other. They also said that they have a good strategy for reaching out to the un-churched and could share that with us. They indeed agreed that communicating via the Internet is good; however, a “personal relationship” is better – so as to gain a good (a better) understanding of each other. They look forward not only to hear our preaching, they very much anticipate that some of us will come to conduct seminars on agreed upon topics/issues. We spent some very meaningful time together which was enjoyed and appreciated by all the participants.

Later on that Saturday, I met with Rev. Ed Dethan at “his” school and broadcasting facility. Though we were somewhat pressed for time (Ed had to take his wife to the hospital because of an injury to her foot), I got a very good impression of the theological school (whose Library holds 1254 of my books). Whereas the Soli Deo Gloria Reformed School in Sumba is a High School, this school offers a post High School curriculum. The school is presently involved in a building program; quite impressive! The radio programs can be heard throughout Timor.

On Sunday I preached twice – again with interpreters. This went well. I spent considerable time talking with Yonson – both on Sunday and on Monday morning. He is rather disturbed (and indeed “down”) about (what he experiences as) attacks against him. I believe Yonson appreciated the talks, I will touch base with him again in Cardiff (the venue of the ICRC meeting) later this month.

On Monday I travelled back to Denpasar, Bali; spent another night at the Hotel; was dropped off at the Airport at 2:30 PM on Tuesday; waited 11 hours (till 1:30 AM on Wednesday) and flew home via Seoul and Chicago to Toronto where I arrived at 5:00 PM – a long 36 hour day later.

I thank the Lord for His guiding mercies. He made all things wondrously well for me. I thank you for permitting me to make this trip. May it serve to enhance our relationship with the churches in Indonesia – the GGRC and the GGRI.

In Christ,
Rev. Ray Sikkema

Appendix 8

Fraternal Address to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)

Moderator, fathers and brethren,

It is my privilege to stand before you once again and greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ as I address you on behalf of the United Reformed Churches of North America. As we battle a culture that is increasingly unified in its hostility to the gospel of our Savior, how true are the words of the Psalmist: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” In your office as shepherds, may you ever be found faithful as you represent the voice of the great Prophet, the compassion of the great Priest, and the authority of the great King!

On June 3, 2014, just a few days from now, the ninth Synod of the URCNA will be convened in Visalia, California. Each one of our 115 churches will be represented by two delegates as we act on a 372 page Agenda. Our Agenda is straight-forward and nothing is particularly contentious.

We are thankful for the peace that the Lord has given to our churches. Nevertheless, allow me to highlight a couple matters that will be deliberated. Our Synod will address two Overtures relating to church membership. The first relates to the resignation of one’s membership. The second addresses the desertion of one’s membership. The Overtures call for the formation of Study Committees with the mandate to suggest a unified approach in answering these pastoral challenges.

In light of this, I was glad to read in your reports that church membership was the theme of your Spring Conference this year. Our culture is more and more buying into the notion that relationships can exist without any commitment or accountability. We all are unhappy witnesses to the devastating effects of this lie. Thankfully, the goal of the Overtures before us is not to debate the importance of church membership. Rather, the burden is to bring a consistent response to those who do not see their church membership as important.

Another item that will be addressed by those delegated to Synod 2014 relates to the use of Liturgical Forms. As a new Psalter Hymnal has been worked on, the question of the number of Liturgical Forms has arisen. Our current practice allows us to choose from three different Forms for Baptism and three Forms for the Lord’s Supper. It also allows us to choose from two different Forms for Public Profession of Faith and the Baptism of Adults. This Overture asks Synod to instruct our Liturgical Forms Committee to limit the production of Liturgical Forms to one Form per liturgical event. This is meant to aid in consistency of instruction and practice.

As we deal with these issues and others, it would have been our privilege to host a delegate from among you at our Synod. The Committee for Ecumenical Contact with

Churches Abroad (CECCA), the committee on which I serve, was delighted to invite you. You have been generous in your hospitality to us and we were and are eager to reciprocate. While we can learn much from reports, we can learn much more by spending time with each other and interacting face to face. We fully understand the limitations that you experience and do not minimize the challenges that they can present. Hence, we understand why you were not able to send a delegate to our Synod. While the Lord in His providence did not open a way for you to be among us this year, we pray that a day may come when we can host you and bless you as you have blessed us.

It was good to read in your reports that your Committee on Ecumenical Relations is laboring to objectify the nature of its work. We would encourage you in this. Our own committee has objective standards that we look at in seeking out and establishing ecumenical relations. We have two phases in our ecumenical relations – (Ecumenical Contact and Ecumenical Fellowship) – which are meant to reflect a maturing of the relationship. Continue to wrestle with this matter. We, like you, do not believe in unity at any cost. We believe in a unity and ecumenicity that is rooted in our common confession as Reformed churches.

We wholeheartedly agree with your committee's report when it states that you "adhere to the Westminster Confession of faith as (y)our great ecumenical confession originally devised to unite churches." Exactly! It is our confessional commitment and subscription that brings us close to each other. May that ever be your and our endeavor! For iron can only sharpen iron when there is real contact; so too, the warnings and admonitions of a friend can only be offered when there is proximity and intimacy in their relationship. We are glad that in Christ we can be iron to you and you to us.

Finally, thank you for having me here again. I know I'm pushing the bounds of my allotted time, but allow me to make an observation. A person walks into the open doors of this kirk by passing through a maze of closed graves. Perhaps it's simply because I'm an American, but this is striking to me. Every time you walk into this assembly you are reminded by closed graves why it is we must open our mouths, for "it is appointed for men to die once, but after that comes judgment." Be challenged in your work by these closed graves and the message that they speak. But more importantly, be pressed on by the open, empty grave of the Savior, which is the message that we speak. To us is entrusted the message of the empty grave! May you, His heralds, be faithful in this task. Surrounded by death, may you urgently proclaim Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life"! And may the Captain of our Salvation, be honored in all that you do and say, to the praise of His name.

Humbly Submitted,

Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra
Foreign Delegate (URCNA)

Appendix 9

Report on the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) General Assembly

The General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) opened their proceedings by singing “Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, and His praise in the assembly of saints” (Psalm 149). As the 52 commissioners and many guests were led in worship by Rev. Warren Gardner, General Assembly 2014 was under way.

The assembly, moderated by Rev. Allen Murray, began on Monday, May 19th, and concluded on Thursday, May 22nd. The FSC(C) is made up of thirty-eight churches and one foreign mission in Canada. The FSC(C) also has a US Presbytery consisting of five congregations. At this year’s annual meeting there was nothing particularly controversial before the body and had a fairly straightforward agenda. Nevertheless, there were two matters that brought more than the usual amount of discussion.

Scottish Independence: A report was published by the Public Questions Committee that suggested that independence would diminish the place of Christianity in Scotland, would endanger civil liberties and is not morally justified. While the report passed, some commissioners dissented thinking it unwise to commit the FSC(C) to such a definite position on this highly charged political matter.

KJV: The FSC(C) does not have an officially approved Bible version. Nevertheless, the King James Version is uniformly used. During a report on this subject, an addendum was made commending the continued use of the KJV. This was met with resistance by some commissioners who wondered why a motion was needed to continue a current practice. Further, it was feared that this addendum would have the unintended consequence of binding the churches liberty. The addendum was sustained after a lengthy discussion. A number of dissenting commissioners had their names recorded.

On Wednesday, the 21st of May, I had the privilege of extending ecumenical greetings on behalf of the URCNA. I sought to encourage the body in the work before them and their witness in an increasingly secular society. Further, I sought to inform them about important developments in our federation that would be addressed at Synod Visalia 2014. A copy of this address has been submitted for the official record.

After the General Assembly adjourned, I had the privilege to go to the town of Ayr and preach at the Bethel FCS(C), pastored by Rev. Gavin Beers. I could not have felt more at home among God’s people at Bethel as we rejoiced together in the gospel of Jesus Christ! It was a joy to express our fraternity and unity in this way. With that in mind, I came home celebrating the bond we have with such a faithful federation of faithful believers.

Humbly Submitted,

Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra

Appendix 10

Address to the General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, March 5, 2016

Brothers (and sisters),

It would have been a joy to be present in your midst, the Lord began to call an elderly sister home to himself just before I was about to leave for Birmingham. I experience the privilege of representing the United Reformed Churches in North America as a little foretaste of what the apostle John writes in Revelation seven about the church being gathered from every tribe, nation, people and language. Here I would have been, once again, in another country, together with brothers and sisters of another nation, sharing the same faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the same hope of the coming kingdom of heaven and the same life of love instilled in us through the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I had already met some of you in September 2013 when your federation had the honor of hosting the International Conference of Reformed Churches in Wales. I have fond memories of that time. The teaching at that conference was sound and the fellowship rich. Friendships were forged and lasting memories made. I also had the privilege of fellowshiping with the late Brian Norton, one of your pastors whom the Lord called home to glory. We're all on a journey to the new heaven and new earth and Brian has reached his eternal destination before us. May the Lord grant us the perseverance of faith to follow in the footsteps of our Savior and by the grace of God on day join brother Brian in the life hereafter. And may the Lord graciously sustain Brenda with his amazing grace.

Undoubtedly, I would have been well taken care of during the past number days by Stephen Dancer and his wife Susan. We would have had ample opportunity to get to know each other during this past week. And in getting to know them better, I have also gotten to know you better.

It's rather coincidental that, as a fraternal delegate of the United Reformed Churches in North America, I would have been meeting with you in a church building that belongs to the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom. As you know, what looks alike is not always the same. Whereas the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom blesses same sex unions, we do far from that. In fact, the origin of the United Reformed Churches in North America lies precisely in the fact that we did not want to go down the road of a new hermeneutic that reinterprets the Scriptures for the sake of cultural relevance in a way so that what the Scriptures literally say is no longer valid for today. Consequently, we felt morally obligated to leave the Christian Reformed Church in North America over the issue of women's ordination in the early 1990's. Since then, we have grown as a federation. As of November 1, 2015, we have about 23,500 members in 120 congregations (including 18 mission works not yet organized), in eight classes spread across North America. Our next biannual synod plans to meet in June of this year. At this synod, the hymn section of the new Psalter Hymnal (a joint effort with the OPC) is

scheduled to be approved. If all goes as planned, the new Psalter Hymnal will be printed in the fall of 2017. Needless to say, this will be a liturgical milestone in our young church federation. We hope you will be able to send a fraternal delegate to this synod so that he can have a similar experience as I would have had with you. Please pray for the brothers and sisters in Wyoming, Michigan as they make the final preparation to host this synod.

The EPCEW is a small church federation that undoubtedly has many of the joys and sorrows of a federation that is larger than yours. I was looking forward to hearing a little more about this during my time with the Dancers. We will lift you up in our prayers and remember you before the throne of Gods grace that you will receive the grace you need to continue to be a faithful federation of churches in England and Wales.

Tomorrow, being the fourth Sunday in Lent, reminds us that being church is ultimately not about numbers, buildings and programs. It is essentially about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ who continues with his ministry of rescue from sin and transformation into his image through the Holy Spirit. This entails the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that takes place deep within our souls and manifests itself in our personal and corporate lives. This dying and rising with Christ is not always an easy process nor is it a painless one. And yet, it is one that needs to take place and one that the ministry of the Word and sacraments encourages. Lent is a good time to be intentionally attentive to this process. It is also a good time to remember that cultivating this process is what the Lord Jesus Christ is ultimately busy with in his church through the ministry of the Word and sacraments.

Thus, the United Reformed Churches in North America are a federation of believers and their children who are under construction just like the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales is. We travel the journey to the new heaven and new earth on a level playing field where we need to come alongside each other and encourage each other to live in Christ through faith, remain in Christ through faith, especially when the going gets tough, and mature in Christ through faith. Our late brother Brian, who has finished the race before us, would most certainly agree. I wish you the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit as you continue to be church in England and Wales.

Thank you.

Dick Moes
Fraternal delegate

Appendix 11

DEPUTIES ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN INDONESIA PROVINCE EAST NUSA TENGGARA (GGRI-NTT)

Jln. H.R.Horo no.21, Matawai-Waingapu, NTT-Indonesia, 87111

Email: pilanjuka_wgp@yahoo.com Hp: 085 253 345 688

Waingapu, June 9, 2014

To Committe for Ecumenical Contast with Churches Abroad (CECCA) Of URCNA

First of all, we apologize for being so late in replying your letter.

We are thankful for your letter and willingnes to have an ecclesiastical contact with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia. Hereby we would like to answer your questions:

Our federation accept the Bible as the true and living Word of our Lord and God. We believe that it is infallible and inerrant. It is inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is the rule of our faith and conduct.

We have 6 creeds: ecumenical creeds and the three forms of unity namely:

1. The Apostle's Creed;
2. The Nicene Creed;
3. The Anthasian Creed
4. The Belgic Confession
5. The Heidelberg Catechism;
6. The Canons of Dort.

All of these creeds are taught at our Theological College. The Heidelberg Catechism is taught at catechism class and also preached in the churches (but not all of the churches have two worship services on Sunday).

When a candidate minister passes his clasis examination, or when he is ordained he has to subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity.

The Reformed Churches in Indonesia East Nusa Tenggara Province is one of the two denominations in Sumba that has not joined PGI= Persekutuan Gereja-Gereja di Indonesia (Communion of Churches in Indonesia). Furthermore, our federation is also one of the federation which does not have women in office.

Our Church Order is a copy or a translation of the Church Order of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). Until now we have not changed that Church Order yet. Because our federation was planted by the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands, there are many things similar with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, including our liturgy. We stick to what is described in the Church Book from the Netherlands.

A preacher is a person allowed only to preach by the consistory. We have no open-pulpit policy. All preachers come from our federation and ministers from our sister churches. Our sister churches are Reformed Churches in Papua and West Kalimantan, Calvinistic Reformed Churches, Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Reformed Churches in the

Netherlands (Liberated) and Canadian Reformed Churches. There are 2 sacraments: The Holy Baptism and The Holy Supper. Those who could participate in the Lord's Supper are only communicant members who are ready to sit at the Lord's table after examining themselves. There is a home visitation before celebrating the Lord's Supper. According to God's Word and our Church Order, those who live in sin will be put under discipline. We do not have open-table policy.

Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia= Reformed Churches in Indonesia consists of Reformed Churches in East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, West Papua, West Kalimantan and East Java. This means that our federation exist in 5 provinces in Indonesia. These churches have decided at their Nasional Synod in 2012 in Papua to have one Theological College which located in Waingapu, the capital city of East Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara Province. Before that time, Papua, West Kalimantan and East Nusa Tenggara had their own Theological College, but now there is only one Theological College. The churches in Papua have sent students and the Lord willing the churches in West Kalimantan will send students this year. The Lord willing, this year we hope to build our new campus in Waingapu. At the moment there are 17 students and we hope to have more in the coming academic year. There are 3 full-time lecturers and 7 part-time lecturers. There is one traveling lecturer from the Netherlands that is Dr. J.A. Boersema and one from Australia namely Rev. Arthur Van Delden. Principal of the College is Rev. Pila Njuka, who studied at Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton. We need more lecturers at the College. The Lord willing, in the future Dr.A.J.Pol from Carman West will also come as guest lecturer at our Theological College.

We hope we have answered your questions. If still have more questions we are happy to answer them. May the Lord continue to bless us His church.

Yours in Christ

Rev Umbu Hapu Pariamalinya
(chairman)

Rev. Pila Njuka
(secretary)

Appendix 12

From: gdball@manningpcea.org.au
Sent: Monday, May 25, 2015 11:08 AM
To: dickmoes@shaw.ca
Subject: PCEA

Greetings Dick,

I am pleased to report that at the recent PCEA Synod meeting your invitation from URCNA to enter into Ecclesiastical Contact was considered. It was unanimously resolved in the following:

‘Synod welcomes the invitation from the United Reformed Churches in North America to enter into ‘Ecclesiastical Contact’ and resolves to extend Fraternal Relations to the URCNA in terms of our Act of Synod 1993’.

I attach a copy of the Act of 1993 for your information.

I will also forward to you an electronic copy of the minutes of our Synod meeting.

This is a good outcome. The PCEA in the past has had a predominantly Scottish culture. But times are a changing. We now have men in the ministry from Chile, Zimbabwe, NZ, Hong Kong, Sudan, Ireland (myself), we even have one from Canada, from the URCNA – Jim Klazinga; who was our Moderator at Synod this year; and did a very good job indeed. There is also possibility of a young man from the OPC arriving soon. So we are emerging into a multicultural church – which is good.

For your information we have had a number of meetings with the CRCA since Cardiff – and have established a much sounder relationship and understanding. We anticipate their application to the ICRC in 2017 – and at this stage we don’t envisage any obstacles.

With Warmest Christian Greetings,

George Ball,

(Secretary of the PCEA Inter Church Relations Committee).

Appendix 13

Fraternal Relations Acts (PCEA)

It was resolved that Synod (1993) approve and adopt the following statement regarding Inter-Church Relations:

Fraternal Relations should exist between Churches that openly and practically profess the true faith of Christ as summarised in one or more of the classical Reformed symbols – ie the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort.

Certain duties and courtesies devolve upon churches sustaining fraternal relations.

1. There should be a spirit of cordial love and trust as becomes brothers in the faith.
2. There should be an attitude of mutual helpfulness. Each should be willing to share problems and difficulties with the others. By the same token each should be allowed to exhort to more exact obedience any who appeared to relax faithfulness to their avowed confession. This should not invite to an inquisitorial interference but to strengthening one another in love for Christ.
3. There should be a willingness to accept certificates of communicant membership, normally without personal examination
4. There should be in the highest courts of the Churches a cordial welcome to visiting delegates from other Churches recognised as in fraternal relationship. This need not amount to according membership in the court to the visiting delegate.
5. There should be a willingness to allow ministers of one Church access to the pulpits of fraternal Churches as a matter of courtesy.
6. Churches should exchange copies of the Acts and Proceedings of their highest courts or at least inform one another of major decisions.

Appendix 14



THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES (ICRC)

A Brief History

Together with churches in Australia, Ireland, the Netherlands and Scotland, the Canadian Reformed Churches, are among the founding members of International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). The organizing meeting for the ICRC was held in 1982 in Groningen, The Netherlands. The first meeting of the Conference took place in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1985. Subsequent meetings have been held in Canada 1989 (Langley, BC), The Netherlands 1993 (Zwolle), Korea 1997 (Seoul), the United States 2001 (Philadelphia), South Africa 2005 (Pretoria), New Zealand 2009 (Christchurch), United Kingdom 2013 (Cardiff). The ninth general meeting of the ICRC is slated for 2017 in Canada (Jordan, Ontario).

Character

From its inception the ICRC has never sought to be more than a “conference” or “gathering” of Reformed churches. It is a vehicle that binds churches together in a semi-official way. As such it is not to be viewed as some sort of super international synod. It is not the kind of body that can order its member churches around seeing that all of its decision are advisory in nature. At best it is there for the purposes of sharing, supporting, consulting, educating and encouraging. It is a great forum in which to network together. It is an organization that gives small, young, isolated churches an opportunity to rub shoulders with their larger, older and more established cousins.

Growth

From its rather small beginnings in 1982 of eight churches, the ICRC today has a membership of thirty-two churches. It is expected that the 2017 meeting will see the addition of more members. At present the member churches of the ICRC come from all the major regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America. Currently most of the member churches are quite equally divided between these regions, with the exception of South or Latin America. It is anticipated that in the future most of the increase in members will come from Africa, Asia and South America. These are also the parts of the world that are seeing the most growth when it comes to planting of new Christian churches.

Reorganization

The 2009 meeting of the ICRC in Christchurch saw the approach of almost twenty-five years of existence and this led to the establishment of a committee to review all aspects of

the working of the Conference. This committee's report was received and adopted at the 2013 general meeting in Cardiff, Wales.

The result was that a revamped constitution was proposed and new bylaws were adopted. New structures were put in place. It was decided to refresh and expand the ICRC website. The matter of regional conferences came under review and a decision was taken to hold more of them. The various standing committees received new and expanded mandates. The finances of the ICRC were also reviewed and reorganized. Manpower changes took place as well.

Since then

Since 2013 the new coordinating committee and executive have been hard at work implementing the changes decided upon. An expanded website is now up and running. You can access it at www.icronline.com. More material is being added to this website on a regular basis.

With respect to regional conferences, one was held in Cardiff, Wales in 2014 to which many of the European members sent delegates. Representatives were also present from churches considering membership. In October of 2015 a regional conference is slated to be held in Seoul, Korea. Both Africa and North America plan to host regional conferences in 2016. Discussions are also underway to hold a regional conference in South America.

The purpose of these regional conferences is to give member churches in a certain region an opportunity to gather together and discuss both regional and international ecclesiastical challenges and issues. The regional nature cuts down on travel time and reduces expenses. It will also give member churches a means to get together more often without having to wait four years when there is a meeting of all the members of the Conference.

Constitutional Changes

At the 2017 meeting of the ICRC in Jordan, Ontario, Canada, the revised Constitution will need to be adopted. Quite a few member churches have already approved the proposed changes. Some, like the Canadian Reformed Churches, still need to do so.

What are these changes? You can see for yourself if you go to the website and read through the documents. The Name and Basis remain unchanged. Under Purpose, there are some minor changes under items 3 and 4.

When you come to Membership you can see some rewording, as well as a new and expanded section dealing with suspension or termination of membership. Also, there is added that if a member church fails to send a delegate to three consecutive meetings, its membership shall ordinarily be terminated. It may also be noted that whereas the present Constitution gives a list of the documents that a church applying for membership needs to submit, such stipulations are now to be found in the Regulations where they properly belong.

Next, the section dealing with Authority has also been expanded. It is now called Nature and Extent of Authority and reads, “it is understood that the Conference is not a synodical, classical or presbyterial assembly, and therefore all actions and decisions of the Conference, other than those with respect to a church’s membership in the Conference (*Constitution, IV*), are advisory in character and may in no way curtail, restrict, or intrude into the exercise of the jurisdiction or authority given to the governing assemblies of the member Churches by Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church.”

Finally, under the heading of Amendments to the Constitution one will also find some changes. Again, these represent not so much a change in substance as in wording and terminology.

It may be added that thus far these proposed constitutional changes have attracted no dissent or disagreement from any of the member churches. Hopefully such will also be the case when Synod Dunnville meets in 2016.

The Next Conference

The next general meeting of the Conference will take place, the Lord willing, from July 13 – 19, 2017 with meetings being held in the Immanuel Reformed Church and the Heritage Christian School, Jordan, Ontario. The United Reformed Churches of North America will be the host church. A Prayer Service will be held on the evening of July 12, 2017.

It is hoped that the church members of the member churches in the Niagara area: the Canadian Reformed, Free Reformed, Heritage Reformed, Orthodox Presbyterian and United Reformed Churches will open up their homes and host the more than one hundred delegates and observers that will be coming from the four corners of the globe. It promises to be a truly cross-cultural experience for all and a testimony to the growing catholic character of the Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

James Visscher, Corresponding Secretary

Appendix 15

PRESENT CONSTITUTION OF THE ICRC

Article I - Name

The name shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches.

Article II - Basis

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

Article III - Purpose

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

Article IV - Membership

1. Those churches shall be admitted as members which:
 - a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
 - b. have been sponsored by at least two member Churches;
 - c. furnish
 - i. their confessional standards,
 - ii. their declaratory acts (if applicable),
 - iii. their form of subscription,
 - iv. their form of government;

- d. are not members of the World Council of Churches or any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis;
 - e. are accepted by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, every member Church having one vote.
2. Termination of membership shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches whenever the Conference is of the opinion that the member Church in its doctrine and/or practice is no longer in agreement with the Basis.

Article V - Authority

The conclusions of the Conference shall be advisory in character. Member Churches are to be informed of these conclusions and are recommended to work towards their implementation.

Article VI - Amendments to the Constitution

The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the member churches.

The proposed amendment(s) shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary two years before the meeting of the Conference. He shall send it to the member churches immediately.

PROPOSED CONSTITUTION

I. NAME

The name of the Conference shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches (“ICRC”).

II. BASIS

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

III. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Member Churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches;

3. to facilitate and promote cooperation among the Member Churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the Member Churches;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

IV. MEMBERSHIP

1. The Conference was duly constituted on October 26, 1982, by delegates from the eight founding churches, having been previously authorized to do so by their major assemblies. A list of past and present members of the Conference shall be maintained among the Conference's documents.
2. Churches eligible for membership are those which:
 - a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
 - b. have complied with the applicable Regulations regarding applications for membership;
 - c. are not members of any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis.
3. Admission to membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote.
4. Suspension or termination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes that the Member Church, in its doctrine and/or practice (which includes the ordination of persons to the offices of minister or ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture, cf., Belgic Confession, Article 30), is no longer in agreement with the Basis; removal of suspension shall also be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote. A proposal to suspend, terminate, or remove the suspension of the membership of a Member Church may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church. A suspended Member Church may send Delegates to meetings of the Conference but shall not vote.
5. When a Member Church fails to send at least one Delegate to three consecutive meetings of the Conference, its membership shall be automatically terminated as of close of the third such meeting, unless during that meeting the Conference determines by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, that there are good and sufficient grounds for such failure.

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

It is understood that the Conference is not a synodical, classical, or presbyterial assembly, and therefore all actions and decisions of the Conference, other than those with respect to a church's membership in the Conference (Constitution, IV), are advisory in character and may in no way curtail, restrict, or intrude into the exercise of the jurisdiction or authority given to the governing assemblies of the Member Churches by Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church.

VI. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

This Constitution may be amended by two-thirds majority vote of the major assemblies of the Member Churches eligible to vote, such amendment having been proposed to the Member Churches by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches present and eligible to vote, each Member Church having one vote. An amendment, as proposed to the Member Churches, is not amendable. A proposal to amend the Constitution may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church eligible to vote, or by a Committee of the Conference, and shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary not later than two years before the meeting of the Conference.

URCNA Web Oversight Committee Report to Synod Wyoming 2016

March 24, 2016

Brothers in Christ,

The Web Oversight Committee is a standing committee of Synod, comprised of representatives from each Classis and a synodically appointed Webmaster. The current members of the Committee are as follows:

Classis Central US	Mr. Jay de Young (Secretary)
Classis Eastern US	Mr. Stephen Adamus
Classis Michigan	Mr. Gary Fisher (Webmaster appointed by Synod)
Classis Ontario East	Mr. Bruce Vrieling (Chairman)
Classis Pacific Northwest	Rev. Adrian Dieleman
Classis Southwest Ontario	Mr. Tim Feijer
Classis Southwest US	Rev. R. Andrew Compton
Classis Western Canada	Mr. Kevin Pasveer

This Committee is one of the synodical committees of the URC that operates without a foreseeable dissolution date because its primary role, that of assisting the Webmaster in his service to the federation, is the sort of assistance which is often beyond the giftings of any single overseeing Church/Consistory, and this is not expected to change.

One of the differentiating characteristics of this Committee, as compared to the other synodical committees, is the small volume of work the Classis-appointed representatives actually do on a regular basis. The vast bulk of the work of this Committee is performed by the Webmaster, Gary Fisher, who consults with the Committee as needed. Since the launch of the revised URCNA.org website two years ago, the major work accomplished by this Committee has been the production of the Directory, which is primarily the responsibility of the Webmaster, with voluntary assistance from the Stated Clerk and a member of the Waupun congregation, Mr. Larry Van Den Berg. This Committee continues to serve at the pleasure of Synod and remains eager to hear your input through your Classical representatives.

The web site continues to be a valuable resource to the federation. The number of countries served continues to grow, with visitors seeking out the URCNA website in one typical 30-day period having arrived from the U.S., Canada, New Zealand, Italy, the Netherlands, the U.K., the Philippines, South Korea, and forty other countries on every inhabited continent. The average number of visits per day since the beginning of 2016, as of this writing, is 1,090, with a high of 2,522 on Sunday, February 7th.

The Committee respectfully reminds the churches that their online Directory details must be submitted in a timely manner to ensure that both outside visitors and member churches are accurately informed. Because so many churches failed to update their online information in 2015, it was necessary to distribute and collect a survey (via postal mail) to gather this information. Due to the delay associated with this additional work the 2015 Archive Directory has still not been completed.

In order to finance the ongoing maintenance of the website, each Classis currently contributes \$100/year via Classical askings. The balances of these funds were \$3019.55 (CAD) and \$7014.77 (USD) as of 31/12/2015. The fixed annual expenses for maintaining the website amount to approximately \$875 (USD) per year; there are no large additional projects currently being considered.

Recommendations:

The Committee presents the following recommendations to Synod Wyoming 2016:

Recommendation 1: That Synod thank Mr. Gary Fisher for his work as Webmaster, and re-appoint him for another term.

Recommendation 2: Synod Nyack 2012 directed the Web Oversight Committee to recommend an appropriate honorarium for the Webmaster. Our recommendation is that the annual remuneration amount remains at \$4500/year, with an additional one-time \$1000 increase due to the extra work associated with putting the Directory together this year. (This means \$5500 in 2016, and \$4500/year in the years following).

Recommendation 3: That Synod thank the Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church of Waupun for their oversight of the Committee, and request that its oversight continues until at least the next Synod.

Recommendation 4: That Synod decreases the Classical askings for the Web Oversight Committee from \$100 to \$75 per year.

Grounds: a) There are sufficient funds to cover current costs, even if there are small annual deficits.

Respectfully Submitted,
Website Oversight Committee

Bruce Vrieling, Chairman

Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee

March 24, 2016

Esteemed brothers,

The Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church (Waupun, Wisconsin) presents this report to synod for our duties as the Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee (WOC). Synod Visalia 2014 (article 70 of the Acts) re-appointed Grace URC (Waupun, WI) as the Oversight Consistory for the WOC.

Our mandate is (Acts of Synod London 2010, article 57, recommendation #14):

- Acting as a legal entity when such is requested by the Website Oversight Committee for the proper fulfillment of the Website Oversight Committee's mandate; the specific actions taken shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.
- Acting as the responsible ecclesiastical assembly, in the time between synods, when such is requested by the Website Oversight Committee for the proper clarification and fulfillment of the Website Oversight Committee's mandate; the specific actions taken shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

The only action taken since the last synod was to pay an item related to the operation of the website (i.e. web forwarding). Several renewals are scheduled to occur within the next two years.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve the Lord of the churches in this capacity. In keeping with synodical rules 3.2, we humbly present the following **recommendations** for synod:

1. That synod appoint a Consistory to serve as the Oversight Consistory for the WOC until the next synod.
Ground: Synod Visalia's request of Grace URC was "until at least the next synod."
2. That synod revise the Regulations for Synodical Procedure 4.7.4.q. to replace "Oversight Consistory" with "Website Oversight Committee."
Grounds:
 - a. The Oversight Consistory is mandated to work with the Website Oversight Committee, not the Webmaster. The Oversight Consistory has very little (if any) interaction with the Webmaster.
 - b. Since the Webmaster serves as an "advisory member of the Website Oversight Committee" (4.7.4.n.) as well as "advise[s] the Chairman of the Website Oversight Committee in the preparation of the Committee's Synodical Report" (4.7.4.m) it is more natural for his report to be included as part of the Website Oversight Committee's report.

Sincerely, in Christ,

Rev. Talman Wagenmaker
Clerk
Grace United Reformed Church (Waupun)

URCNA Missions Committee Report to Synod Wyoming (2016)

I. Introduction

Since Synod Visalia (2014), the Missions Committee has been very blessed to see added to our number Pastor Richard Bout, our newly elected Missions Coordinator. Rich took up his duties as Missions Coordinator on January 1, 2015 and has laboured faithfully in the task he's been given since then.

The addition of the Missions Coordinator to our committee has made some significant differences in the work of the committee, and this will be reflected in this report. In regard to format, you will notice in this Missions Committee report the added element of a report from Pastor Rich on the work that he has done since he took on the job almost a year and a half ago.

At Synod Visalia (2014) the report of the Missions Committee reflected that much of its time since Synod Nyack (2012) was spent on developing guidelines to help the churches in domestic missions and church planting. This was reflected in Synod Visalia's approval of *How to Plant a Reformed Church* as helpful guidelines for the churches.

Since Synod Visalia, however, the focus of the committee has moved more to the area of foreign missions and developing guidelines to help the churches in extending Christ's kingdom beyond our immediate social contexts. To that end this report gives both suggested changes to how we work together in the area of foreign missions (see section IV, "Growing in Foreign Missions") and also presents to the churches for their feedback and approval the Foreign Missions Manual, a manual that will be developed and refined over time but is ready now to be utilized within the federation as guidelines to assist consistories, missionaries, and church planters in the day-to-day activity of foreign missions. *Consistories should be sure to review the recommendations in section IV and V of this report.*

One final comment we must add before ending our introduction is that our chairman, Pastor Michael Brown, stepped down as chair of the Missions Committee due to numerous commitments on his time. Pastor Greg Bylsma was elected as chairman in his stead, and Pastor Brown took on the role of vice-chair. As a committee we want to acknowledge and recognize the tremendous amount of work that Pastor Brown has done on behalf of the federation in the area of this Missions Committee. He has served as chair of the committee since the committee was first formed as a study committee in 2010, and we are grateful for the work, time and energy that he has contributed to all aspects of the work of the committee over the last five years as chairman. This leads us to our first recommendation.

Recommendation 1: That Synod thank Pastor Michael Brown for his work as chairman of the Missions Committee.

We are grateful for the opportunity we have had to serve Christ's kingdom through our work on the URCNA Missions Committee. We pray that God will continue to bless and grow the work of the URCNA as she continues to faithfully make disciples of all nations.

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Functions and Tasks of the Synodical Missions Committee, and of the Missions Coordinator (from Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee...pt. A.1)

1. The committee would function as an information hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication among URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils, joint venture committees, classis mission committees, and congregations by doing the following:
 - (a) The committee shall obtain updates from the missionaries and church planters, from their respective councils, and from any joint venture committees or classis Missions Committees with which they are connected, for publication in the missions newsletter and missions page of the URCNA.org website.
 - (b) The committee shall ascertain and remain abreast of the disparate financial needs of missionaries, and disseminate pertinent information to URCNA councils (e.g., location, family, nature & needs of a particular ministry).
 - (c) The committee shall generally promote the cause of missions in the URCNA in a way that consistently represents our commitment to function as a covenanted body.
 - (d) The committee shall gather information about the work of missions and church planting which could be contributed to a manual of helpful guidelines to assist Consistories, joint venture committees, classis Missions Committees, missionaries and church planters in the day-to-day activity of missions (this is addressed more specifically below).
 - (e) The committee shall produce a report on the work of URCNA missions to each synod.
 - (f) The committee shall have copies of the *Biblical and Confessional Basis for Missions*, along with the missions Policies and Guidelines, printed in booklet form and made available to all the churches.

Missions Committee Membership

Pastor Greg Bylsma (Cl. SWON, chair)
Pastor Michael Brown (Cl. SWUS, vice)
Pastor Jared Beaird (Cl. PNW, clerk)
Pastor Richard Bout (Cl. SWON, M.C.)
Pastor Richard Anjema (Cl. WCAN)

Pastor Harry Bout (Cl. EON)
Pastor Cornelius Hegeman (Cl. EUS)
Pastor Jody Lucero (Cl. CUS)
Elder Paul Wagenmaker (Cl. MI)

II. Updates on URCNA Mission Works

A. Classis Southwest U.S.

Classis Southwest U.S. presently has two domestic missions (Colorado Springs, CO and Ontario, CA), one foreign mission (Milan, Italy), one foreign mission developing (Bucharest, Romania), and one missionary serving in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Alan Vander Pol). We regret to inform you that the church plants in Kauai, HI and Rifle, CO both closed after experiencing difficulties in finances and stability.

1) Colorado Springs, CO

Covenant United Reformed Church in Colorado Springs is a church plant of Coram Deo Reformation Church in Littleton, CO. The work is nearing its fifth year anniversary, which will be in July 2016. It began in 2011 with four families from the area who were driving over one hour to attend services in Littleton. The Consistory of Coram Deo sent two elders and one deacon who lived in Colorado Springs to begin the work. Rev. Alex Garleb was called to be the first church planter of the work. He was replaced by Rev. Tony Phelps, who was installed in January 2016. Approximately 35 gather for worship at Covenant URC every Lord's Day. The church plant is still dependent upon outside support, but has made much progress in their sustainability and spiritual maturity. They will soon begin officer training, and are hopeful to organize within the next 18 months.

2) Ontario, CA

Inglesia Reformada Unida de Ontario (IRUDO) is overseen by the Ontario URC in Ontario, CA, and pastored by Rev. Taylor Kern, who has ministered to the flock since 2013 and was ordained and installed in February 2016. This is a ministry to Spanish speakers in Ontario (of which more than half of the population speaks Spanish as their primary language) and the greater Los Angeles area. IRUDO has a worship service every Lord's Day and weekly Bible studies. They continue to grow as a congregation with more than ten families in membership. While the general funds and offerings within IRUDO has been on the increase, the reality is that the work is still dependent on outside financial support. They are in need of \$2500/month in outside support. IRUDO has the goal of becoming a self-sufficient ministry and an engine for planting Spanish-speaking Reformed churches in the Los Angeles area.

3) Milan, Italy

Chiesa Riformata Evangelica 'Filadelfia' (CERF) in Milan, Italy is pastored by Rev. Andrea Ferrari, who is called and overseen by Christ URC in Santee, CA. CERF presently has more than 50 souls in membership. They are overseen by two elders and served by one deacon. The church has two worship services as well as catechism classes every Lord's Day, and a mid-week prayer meeting. They are blessed with frequent visitors to the church every week and have much opportunity for outreach and evangelism. Within the past two years, under the care and oversight of CERF and Rev. Ferrari, a new core group and church plant opportunity has been birthed in

Perugia, a city in central Italy. In April 2016, the people of the core group became members of CERF, and worship with the congregation via Skype every Lord's Day. They are praying for an Italian-speaking pastor to serve and lead them so that they can have worship services of their own. While CERF have made much progress in their financial stability, they are still largely dependent on outside support.

4) Bucharest, Romania

A future church plant in Bucharest is currently developing. For the past four years, a small core group of Reformed believers, all of whom are Romanian nationals, meet every Lord's Day for Bible study and prayer. They are members of and overseen by the Consistory of CERF in Milan, Italy. Rev. Ferrari stays in regular contact with them, visiting at least twice a year. The original leader of this work, Mihai Corcea, attended Westminster Seminary California from 2013-2016, graduating with a Master of Divinity and completing a lengthy internship at Christ URC in Santee, CA. Christ URC is prepared to call Mr. Corcea as a missionary and church planter to Bucharest, contingent upon his classical examination in July 2016. The total annual budget for this work, which includes the entire support of Mr. Corcea and his wife Lidia as well as rent for a worship space and all administrative expenses, is approximately \$45,000. Christ URC in Santee asks all churches in the URCNA to consider supporting this mission work and share in the blessing of bringing the gospel to Romania.

5) Rev. Alan Vander Pol

Rev. Vander Pol is called and overseen by the Consistory of First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA, and serves with Miami International Seminary (MINTS). MINTS is a mission organization that uses higher education as its primary tool toward fulfilling the vision of the Great Commission. The goal of MINTS is to provide high quality Bible training in indigenous languages for pastors in areas where the Christian faith is expanding rapidly.

B. Classis Pacific Northwest

Classis Pacific Northwest presently has one domestic mission (Big Springs, CA).

1) Big Springs, CA

Big Springs is pastored by Rev. Nollie Malabuyo, who is called and overseen by Trinity URC in Visalia, California. This work is not organized, but a plant with average Sunday attendance of 25-35 people. They began worship services early 2000 with members who faithfully come for Sunday school and worship. In addition, they have a second service every fourth Sunday of the month. Rev. Malabuyo is currently conducting office bearer training with 8-10 men. Lord willing, this training will conclude by the summer and a few men would be qualified and willing to serve. Pray for this work, its growth, leadership, and starting a ministry in the local colleges.

C. Classis Western Canada

Classis Western Canada presently has one domestic mission (Regina, SK).

1) Regina, Saskatchewan

Presently we have one church plant in Classis Western Canada which is Redeemer Reformation Church in Regina, Saskatchewan. Rev. Brian Cochran has been pastoring there for over five years. Providence Reformed Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba is the overseeing church. Providence assigned two office-bearers to Redeemer, namely Elder Henry Nagtegaal and Deacon Dan Wittebolle. The Lord has really blessed Redeemer. In 2015, they have added twenty-five souls to their membership. They had five baptisms (three covenant children and two adults) and fourteen professions of faith. Many of those new members have come from the community and are on fire for the Reformed faith. Two families joined via membership transfer from sister churches. Rev. Cochran continues to mentor new potential members and has also been involved in leadership training for the men of the congregation. Redeemer also ordained two deacons this past winter. Moreover, Redeemer has been introducing a second service on Sunday and hopes to establish this pattern of two worship services on a more regular basis. With God's continued blessing, it looks more and more like Redeemer will be ready to become an established church within the near future.

2) Classical Home Missions Committee

Classis Western Canada has a classical committee that serves in an advisory capacity for those curious about starting a church in their geographic area. At the time of the Synod deadline this committee was without a chairman.

D. Classis Central U.S.

Classis Central U.S. presently has two domestic missions (Colorado Springs, CO and Ontario, CA), one foreign mission (Quito, Ecuador), and four missionaries serving in an extraordinary capacity (see below). Classis Central US also has a church plant advisory committee, which is included in the report below.

1) Quito, Ecuador

Iglesia Reformada Luz de Vida (Light of Life Reformed Church) is being pastored by Rev. Pablo Landázuri who has served under the oversight of Covenant Reformed Church in Pella, Iowa, since 2014. The church council is composed of Rev. Landázuri, an elder, a deacon, and another minister (Rev. Donoso). Luz de Vida meets twice every Lord's Day. About forty to fifty people attend the morning services; about half that number attend the afternoon service. Catechetical preaching takes place every week in one of the services. Several Bible study groups meet throughout the week in different locations of the city with evangelistic purpose. Currently, there is also a weekly membership course, and Bible-based counseling services are offered to the community. Luz de Vida confesses the Three Forms of Unity, has adopted a version of the URCNA Church Order, and seeks to worship the Lord in a Word-centered, reverent and joyful

way. Last year the congregation purchased its own church building in partnership with the sending church.

2) Rev. Andrew Spriensma – Army Chaplain

Rev. Spriensma continues to serve as a U.S. Army Chaplain under the oversight of Faith URC in Beecher, IL. He is currently stationed at Fort Campbell in Kentucky where he has served for the past two years as a chaplain to an infantry battalion in the 101st Airborne Division. During this assignment, he deployed to serve as the chaplain to a small base in Eastern Afghanistan. In January 2016, the Army reassigned Chaplain Spriensma to 5th Special Forces Group. His primary work involves giving pastoral care and counsel to the soldiers within his battalion and to their families. Rev. Spriensma is scheduled to deploy again in November 2016.

3) Rev. Nathan Brummel, Rev. Paul Ipema, & Rev. Ken Anema –
Professors with Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary

Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary is an independent Reformed institution that is dedicated to the theological education of those in prison. It provides a four-year program of biblical and theological studies at campuses within the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, Indiana, and the Danville Correctional Center in Danville, Illinois. It also has study centers in the Westville Correctional Farm in Westville, Indiana, and the Rockville Women's Correctional Center in Rockville, Indiana. The seminary has fourteen members on its board of directors. Professor Nathan Brummel teaches Systematic Theology and New Testament. Professor Ken Anema teaches Hebrew and Old Testament. They are both associate pastors at Immanuel URC in DeMotte, IN. Professor Paul Ipema (former pastor of Community URC in Schererville, IN) teaches Ministerial Studies. Through evangelistic preaching and theological education, the faculty are carrying out the mission of the church behind bars.

4) Sioux Falls, SD

It is a great joy to recognize that, by God's enduring grace, Christ Reformed Church of Sioux Falls (formerly Sioux Falls URC) anticipates its organization as a United Reformed congregation in 2016 – possibly before the convening of synod. Christ Reformed rejoices in the Lord's gracious provision throughout the last decade of church planting, as they continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and numerically. Rev. Spencer Aalsburg preaches to some 60–70 souls in attendance each Lord's Day, and the church remains active with several regular studies and events. As a young congregation with more baptized than professing members, the church is still dependent (though with a steadily decreasing need) on the support of sister churches.

5) Chicago Heights, IL

El Pacto de Gracia (Covenant of Grace Reformed Church) is a Spanish-speaking church plant in Chicago Heights, IL. The work was originally pioneered by Rev. Valentin Alpuche who now labors as a church planter with the RCUS in California. Early in 2016, the overseeing Council at Faith URC in Beecher, IL issued a call to Rev. Ruben Sernas who accepted; he plans to take up

the work in June 2016. In the meantime, a Spanish service and class continue to be held on Sundays in the building of the First Presbyterian Church in Chicago Heights. Though one family that had come into membership returned to Mexico in 2014, another family (2 professing and 5 baptized) was received into membership in 2015. The Lord continues to sustain this mission work.

6) Church Plant Advisory Committee (CPAC)

This standing committee of Classis Central U.S., comprised of three ministers and two elders, now has classical guidelines in place to carry out its mandate, which can be summarized in three points. First, CPAC is mandated by classis to facilitate more regular communication between the churches of classis and the church plants in our classis by compiling a regular newsletter. Second, while local church Consistories still oversee church plants, the classis has covenanted to be more united in its church planting efforts by receiving regular communication, encouragement, and concurring advice throughout the course of its mission work. (CPAC operates under the oversight of the Consistory at Immanuel URC of DeMotte, IN, but functions as the instrument by which the whole classis seeks greater unity in its church planting efforts.) Third, in order to be engaged proactively in church planting, CPAC is also commissioned to provide recommendations on potential church plant locations within our classis.

E. Classis Michigan

Classis Michigan presently has numerous foreign mission works in Costa Rica, and one missionary serving in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Steven Poelman).

1) Dehradun, India

Rev. Steven Poelman and his wife Nalini reside in Dehradun, a city in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains in northwest India. He teaches various courses including Ethics and Apologetics at Presbyterian Theological Seminary to students from across India. Presbyterian Theological Seminary (PTS) was established in 1969 to train men and women from a Bible believing, Reformed perspective for service in God's Kingdom. Despite much opposition to the gospel from radical Hindus, faithful preachers continue to spread the good news of salvation and the Christian church continues to grow.

2) Costa Rica

Rev. Bill & Aletha Green have labored in church planting in Costa Rica, and are currently involved in their third church plant on the northeast side of San Jose, Costa Rica. They also helped establish the Tepeyac Christian grade school and high school which Aletha served as principal for over 15 years. Bill is Executive Secretary for the "Latin American Fellowship of Reformed Churches" (CLIR), which has as its goal bringing Reformed churches and groups together throughout Latin America to strengthen church leaders, provide support for those who need it, and serve the propagation and defense of the Reformed faith. Toward that end, CLIR has established a publishing ministry, and is providing Latin America with solid, Reformed

resources. Rev. Nick Lamme also labours in Costa Rica, helping out in various ways with the overall work of Gospel ministry.

3) Classical Missions Committee

Classis Michigan has a classical missions committee that serves in an advisory capacity for those curious about starting a church in their geographic area.

F. Classis Southwestern Ontario

Classis Southwestern Ontario presently has three domestic missions (Etobicoke ON, Scarborough ON, and Waterdown ON).

1) Etobicoke, ON

The Hope Congregation is a pioneer church plant that is blossoming through missionary labors among the growing population of South Asians in Toronto. It is overseen by the Covenant Christian Church (URC) of Wyoming, and pastored by Rev. Tony Zekveld. The Gospel is ministered in numerous ways including monthly articles in a South Asian periodical, occasional children's Bible classes in the community, and hospitality but fear and community pressure are big stumbling blocks that keep many from committing fully to Christ. They utilize the Reformed confessions as translated into the Punjabi language by one of their able elders. Hope Congregation meets for two services each Lord's Day, is blessed to have three local elders, and perhaps has the unique experience in the URCNA to worship in both English and Punjabi. One of the fruits of their missionary work is a Christian mission school, called Hope Academy [JK – 6]. Under the initiative of the Providence URC, Strathroy, Ontario, this school is overseen by a board consisting of members from sister Reformed churches. The congregation and school are small, but we are blessed with a multitude of contacts in the broader community. Praise God for His continued blessing on the ministry of the gospel.

2) Scarborough, Ontario

New Horizon URC of Scarborough (East Toronto) is a daughter of Cornerstone URC of London, ON and is pastored by Rev. Mitch Persaud. They are supported by local offerings and donations of churches throughout the federation. This work is in a largely secular city with very few Reformed churches. While the growth at New Horizon is slower than they might desire, they are grateful for the growth God has given, particularly in seeing more coming than moving away in a very transient society. The local leadership is strong and united and busy with outreach, including at a local university. The people are growing in their faith, there have been men and women (and children) converted, and they have been blessed to see young people professing their faith. They recently found a new location to worship, surrounded by many unbelievers, and they regularly have visitors. They look forward to engaging the community in the spring and summer of this year with the Gospel. Pray that this will be their last report sent in and that by the next Synod they will be able to speak for ourselves as an organized body.

3) Waterdown, ON

The Living Hope URC is a church plant under the oversight of the Living Water Reformed Church in Brantford, ON. Started in the September of 2014, the church has roughly 15 families (13 of which are in membership) in attendance each Lord's Day. This local body has been a dedicated and hard working group, reaching out in the community on a regular basis through both ministry opportunities and the life and witness of its members. Of great encouragement to this local body was seeing brother Daniel Ventura accept the call to become an associate pastor at Living Water with a particular focus upon serving the Waterdown congregation. DV, by Synod 2016 Daniel will be ordained and joining us as a delegate of Living Water.

G. Classis Eastern U.S.

Classis Eastern U.S. presently has two domestic mission works (Jersey City, NJ and Cincinnati, OH), one missionary serving in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Cornelius Hegeman), and a church with oversight of our federations "Reformed Missions Services." In church planting efforts since last Synod they have rejoiced to see the establishment of Christ Reformed Church in Washington, DC and grieved to see the church plant in Princess Ann, MD close.

1) Washington, DC

Christ Reformed Church, in Washington, D.C. (www.christreformeddc.org) is pastored by Rev. Brian Lee. On January 21, 2016, they celebrated becoming an organized congregation. The work was formerly overseen by the Zeltenreich Reformed Church, New Holland, PA. We give thanks to God for His blessing on this venture, and pray that they will continue to grow as a local congregation as they faithfully walk in service to Christ.

2) Jersey City, NJ

Grace Reformed Church in Jersey City, New Jersey (started 2013) is pastored by Rev. Samuel Perez, and overseen by Messiah Reformed Fellowship (Manhattan, NY). The congregation is active in door to door evangelism, youth work, Sunday school and membership, community projects and worship services.

3) Cincinnati, OH

Westside Reformed Church is pastored by Rev. Zac Wyse. In July 2013, Zeltenreich Reformed Church (New Holland, PA) began planting the first United Reformed congregation in Ohio in Cincinnati's Westside. They have now been worshipping and maturing together for nearly three years.

4) Rev. Cornelius (Neal) Hegeman, Rev. Allen Vander Pol

Rev. Cornelius (Neal) Hegeman, teaches with MINTS Theological Seminary, serves in eight Spanish speaking countries (Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Hispanic USA, Venezuela), in Brazil, in Haiti, as well as in the prisons in Florida. He is overseen

by Trinity Reformed Church, Cape Coral, FL. He is joined by Rev. Allen Vander Pol, overseen by First Chino, CA, missionary to the Far East (India, Myanmar, Phillipines), but who lives in Cape Coral. Both missionaries also teach at the Charlotte Correctional Institution in Punta Gorda, FL.

5) Reformed Mission Services

Reformed Mission Services (rms.org) work in disaster relief and church development. They are supported by churches of Classis Eastern US. Members of New Haven URC, Vermont, participated in December 2015 in building a church in Lares, Peru.

6) Classis Eastern U.S. Church Planting Committee

Classis Eastern U.S. has a classical committee to encourage and assist church planting efforts in their geographic area. The committee is chaired by Rev. Brian Lee.

H. Classis Ontario East

Classis Ontario East presently has two domestic mission works (Niagara Falls, ON and Scarborough, ON), two foreign missions works (Comayagua, Honduras and Tepic, Mexico) and one missionary serving in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Eric Pennings).

1) Comayagua, Honduras

Rev. Ernest Langendoen has been serving in Comayagua Honduras since November of 1994. Currently the church enjoys a weekly attendance of about 35-40 persons for worship each Sunday morning at 9am, followed by a church Catechism class. On Wednesday nights there is a Prayer Service which is led by Pastor Orlando Sierra, while on Friday nights there is a Bible Study led by Rev. Langendoen. The church of Comayagua has two church plants. One was started in 2009 in Tegucigalpa, and another was started in Marcala in January of the year 2016. Pastor Orlando conducts most of the services in Tegucigalpa, while Rev. Langendoen conducts the services in Marcala. The church in Comayagua also oversees a small Reformed church in southern Honduras that was started over 35 years ago. This group is pastored by Antolin Mendoza. Over the years Rev. Langendoen has taught study groups in Comayagua, southern Honduras, Tegucigalpa and Marcala. Please pray for Rev. Langendoen, the church in Comayagua and the Honduran mission.

2) Niagara Falls, Ontario

Rev. Richard Bultje serves in the River of Life Church plant in Niagara Falls, Ontario. The last couple of years have seen both blessings and hardships. Some of the blessings are that a variety of people from the community have joined worship to be instructed by God's Word. A few of these have made public profession of their faith in Christ. One man has grown in such a way that he deeply desires to serve as a deacon in the church plant. Recently four small Bible studies were started, and they are looking for a larger facility where they can worship. Some of the hardships include that with the growing number of people some come with serious problems,

which some of the initial core group members have found difficult to deal with. Please pray for wisdom for the core group families who disciple new believers and minister to many broken people who are coming to hear the Word.

3) Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico

Rev. Matt Van Dyken was called in 2012 to replace Rev. Richard Bout as pastor of the congregation in Tepic, Mexico. Pastor Van Dyken has been blessed to see the work generally going well. They have a regular attendance of approximately 70 people a Sunday with a mix of members and visitors. Lately the church has struggled as numerous men have been out of work, and one family has moved to another state for work, but another man out of work has used the opportunity to seriously study the Word. The Lord is at work! They are in the process of starting a MINTS study center here with a good number of men from the church. There is plenty to be thankful for, and plenty to keep in prayer as they see people both love the Word and the preaching of the Word. Life in this culture is very up and down and insecure, but the hope of God in Christ continues to shine. Please keep this work in your prayers.

4) Scarborough, Ontario

Rev. Brian Zegers serves to reach out to the Muslims in the greater Toronto area where there are over 120 mosques and Islamic centers. The imams, sheikhs and leadership in the local Islamic communities have an agenda to expand their presence and power in their communities, however the Lord has given various opportunities to reach out to them with the Gospel: through public events such as semi-annual Christian-Muslim forums and monthly discussions, posting topical articles in Islamic newspapers and websites, as well as conversing with Muslim leadership and laity in their mosques and Islamic centers. In addition, Pastor Brian is hosting Muslim families and acquaintances in his home, and visits in their homes. He is thankful to the Lord for all these various means that have opened up to reach out to them. Please continue to pray for him and his family and that many Muslims may come to faith in Jesus Christ.

5) Rev. Eric Pennings

Rev. Pennings is a missionary professor with the URCNA under the supervision of Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto (CRT). They have formed the Hispanic Christian Ministry (HCM) which supervises him as a missionary professor with Miami International Seminary (MINTS) with whom he has received his D Min degree and is currently a PhD candidate. For ten years he served as Regional Coordinator for MINTS in Canada and in Central America. Following the discipleship model of leadership training, this ministry was phased over to one of his students, José Ramírez, who is a member of Covenant and is also supervised by HCM. In 2015, Rev. Pennings was appointed as the MINTS International Academic Dean. While he continues to teach and travel throughout Latin America, he oversees the academic standards and administration of 8,000 MINTS students in 70 countries. In the English language he is helping Word & Spirit Institute (with Grace Canadian Reformed Church of Brampton) to develop a Bible Institute in Toronto.

III. Report of the Missions Coordinator

Overview

At the close of this first year of service as Missions Coordinator, I present this report to you, brothers, grateful for the calling God has placed on me to assist in His kingdom work in this capacity. It is exciting to see the work going on in His name, and humbling to view the immensity of the task before us. Over the last year I have had opportunity to visit both our foreign and domestic mission works and have begun to see first hand what we are doing as a federation. It has been great to meet our men either through visits to the field, or through communication via email or phone. So far I have visited fourteen of our men domestically. I have made trips to four of the foreign fields: the Philippines, Honduras, Mexico and Costa Rica. I will be going to Ecuador next month, and plans are being made to visit Italy and India in the first half of 2016. I have also had opportunity to interact with the calling churches of many of our men.

Analysis

Generally we can be very thankful for the work that God is accomplishing through our men. Considering the size of our federation, we are reaching many parts of the world with the gospel. Our churches are enthusiastically supporting both our domestic and foreign works financially. I believe there is real desire to support grassroots URCNA mission works and there would be strong support if we were to expand to more fields in the future. I have had many young people ask me about how they can serve either short-term or long-term on the mission field.

To be clear, there are many positive and encouraging things happening, but there are concerns that I am hearing and seeing as I have travelled to our mission works. I have been asked to give advice and input by both missionaries and churches regarding these concerns. I have done my best to commit problems to prayer, speak into situations, and give the best advice than I can.

As I have travelled throughout our mission works, here are some of the key observations that need consideration:

- A. In our present model of individual churches sending and overseeing sending men to the field, there is no “big-picture” analysis done.
 - Because our mission works are started and supported by individual churches little partnering or working together is taking place.
 - “Solo” works leave both missionaries and the plants themselves feeling disconnected from the larger body.
- B. On the foreign field we have 7 missionaries in 7 countries, so we are spread thin in our works. Practically, this causes difficulties:
 - Our works remain limited in scope because of lack of manpower.

- When men retire from the field, or need to come off the field, there is no one to take their place. When men need temporary relief, there is no one to stand in for them.
 - There is no plan in place to either replace men who will be retiring from the field, or to leave a work in the hands of an existing national denomination.
- C. Because our calling churches are geographically (and culturally) usually far from the field, it is sometimes difficult to give meaningful input into the work. This can have the following effects:
1. Mission works can stagnate and continue without clear direction. Because there are no colleagues with particular knowledge of the field to give advice or direction to the work, short-term and long-term planning is made difficult.
 2. Friction can develop between missionaries on the field, and/or with the calling churches and JVCs.
 3. The missionary can be burdened with directives from outside the field by well-meaning sending churches that have difficulty understanding the complexity and challenges on the field.

Our federation has committed itself to *“make every effort to unify all of our resources (gifts, talents, and finances) as an united federation in order to bring the gospel from our homes and churches to the nations of the world.”*(Acts of Synod Nyack 2012, p. 527.) The questions that lie before us are: How are we going to concretely fulfill this commitment? What are the changes that need to be made in order to address the concerns that we see in our mission works? How can we move forward as a federation and more effectively work together? This is something that we are presently working on as a Missions Committee and something that we hope to address with concrete proposals to Synod.

Specific Activities of Missions Coordinator in 2015/2016

- January 6 – Delivered two lectures to students and the Canadian Reformed Seminary in Hamilton, ON.
- January 10 – Preached in URCNA Church plant in Waterdown, ON.
- January 13 – Met with committee of Immanuel URCNA of Jordan, ON to discuss upcoming trip to Honduras.
- **January 17-22 - Trip to California.**
 - Preached and taught in Chino URC.
 - Preached in Spanish URCNA church plant Ontario, CA.
 - Spoke in Missions Emphasis Dinner, Chino, CA.
 - Presented/spoke in Westminster Theological Seminary, CA.
- **January 29 – February 9 - Trip to the Philippines**
 - Prayer/encouragement/planning with the Malabuyos
 - Preached and taught in Pasig City church.
 - Travelled to Cagayan de Oro to meet with churches there.
 - Met with Rev. S. D’Hart, Rev. Sikkema and members of TAP of the CanRC.
 - Marriage seminar in Pasig city (Feb. 7)
 - Preached in Imus church.

- February 12 – Met with URCNA Pastor Steve Williamson about student and mission work for London, ON.
- February 15 – Visited URCNA church plant in Niagara Falls, ON.
- **February 21 – March 2 – Trip to Honduras & Rev. Ernie Langendoen** (with Rev. J. Bouwers and K. Stel)
 - Prayer/encouragement/planning with Rev. Langendoen.
 - Preached in Comayagua
 - Preached in Tegucigalpa.
 - Gave presentation in church / translated sermon.
- March 5 – Meeting (tel.) with JVC of Rev. Neal Hegeman & Rev. Eric Pennings.
- **March 7-21 – Trip to Tepic, Nayarit, Mexico**
 - Prayer/encouragement/planning with the Van Dykens
 - Helped lead evangelistic team of YP.
 - Preached in service in “Vida Eterna” - church plant in Tepic.
 - Spoke in two-day family conference.
- March 22 – Preached in URNCA Hispanic church plant El Pacto de Gracia in Chicago Heights, IL.
- March 25 – Attended/reported in Classis South-western ON in Listowel, ON.
- March 26 – Attended/ reported in Classis Eastern Ontario in Dunnville, ON.
- April 1st – Sent out 1st Trumpet – Missions Newsletter of the URCNA.
- April 2nd – Met with Rev. Thabet Megaly, Rev. Al Bezuyen and Rev. Ernie Langendoen.
- April 12 – Preached in Hispanic Migrant Ministry – Jordan, ON.
- April 22 – Visit with Rev. Van Eeden Petersman.
- April 26 – Visited New Horizons URCNA church plant in Scarborough.
- April 27 – Met with missionaries Rev. Brian Z. and Tony Z.
- May 1 - Trumpet
- May 11 - Meeting with Eric Hoeksma – Evangelism coordinator – Hamilton URCNA.
 - Meeting with Jose Ramirez – Pastor of Ministerios de Vida.
- May 17 - Preached in River of Life - URCNA mission in Niagara Falls, ON.
- May 19 – Finished URCNA Mission Map
- **May 30–June 5 – Trip to California.**
 - Preached in Hispanic Ministry, Ontario, CA
 - Translated for installation of office bearers in Ontario URC
 - Attended Pastor’s conference (June 1&2)
 - URCNA Missions Committee Meeting – (June 3&4)
- June 1 - Trumpet
- June 7 – Preached in Living Water URC.
- June 10 – Missions Presentation in Hope Reformed School
 - Meeting with young man interested in missions
- June 14 – Visited Hispanics with Rev. Jose Ramirez, lead Spanish service.
- June 21 – Preached in Living Water URC
- **June 25-29 – Trip to Washington DC – Rev. Brian Lee.**
 - Meeting with Brian Lee and OPC coordinator of eastern US.
 - Preach and teach in Christ URC Washington, DC
- July 1 - Trumpet

- **July 3-6 Trip to Jersey City – Rev. Sam Perez**
 - Meeting with Rev. Paul Murphy and Rev. Perez.
 - Preached/presented in Grace Reformed church.
 - Visited Preakness Valley URC
- **July 11** - Visit with Rev. Ernie Langendoen
 - Spanish soccer outreach – Niagara Hispanic Ministry
- **July 12** – Preach in Ministerios de Vida – Spanish Migrant Ministry, Brantford
- **July 13–14** Assisted in local team/presentation/door to door in URC church plant Niagara Falls – Rev. Rich Bultje.
- **July 17-21 Trip to Cincinnati – Rev. Zac Wyse**
 - Preach/present in Westside Reformed
 - Meet with leaders/attend church picnic
- **July 22** – Meeting with graphic designer to learn how to use in-design program (Trumpet).
- **July 26** - Preach in Niagara Migrant Ministry – Immanuel URC, Jordan, ON.
- **July 27** – Sent prayer maps to churches.
- **July 27-August 3rd** – VACATION
- **August 1**- Trumpet
- **August 4** – Meeting with Rev. Jose Ramirez and Wilfred Bout about Hispanic ministry.
 - Meeting/dinner with Bill and Aletha Green
- **August 7-10 - Visit to Sioux Falls, SD – Rev. Spencer Aalsburg**
 - Preach/present in Sioux Falls URC
 - Participate in local outreach.
- **August 14** – Phone call with Rev. De Vries - Reformed Seminary in South Africa
- **August 16** – Preach in Covenant URC, Wyoming, Ontario.
- **August 20** – Meeting in Niagara for URCNA Missions Website.
- **August 22** – September 4 – VACATION.
- **September 1** – Trumpet.
- **September 5th** – Phone call with potential church plant in Oregon.
- **September 9** - Meeting with Missions Committee chair Rev. Greg Bylsma
- **September 12 – 17 - Trip to Chicago & Philadelphia.**
 - Preach in Chicago Heights URCNA Church plant
 - Meet with members of JVC of Chicago Heights.
 - Attended Central US Classis (14 & 15th).
 - International Conference of Reformed Churches in Philadelphia – ICRC (16th & 17th).
- **September 21** – Phone call about potential Hispanic mission in London, ON.
- **September 24** – Classis SW Ontario – Gave report.
- **September 25-28th Trip to Regina, SK – Rev. Brian Cochran**
 - Preached/presented in Redeemer Reformation Church.
 - Attended leadership meeting.
- **September 30** – Conference call meeting with URCNA Mission Committee
- **October 1** – Trumpet, Visit Rev. Thabet Megaly.
- **October 5 – 8 - Trip to Chicago, IL – Divine Hope Seminary**
 - Visit Indiana State Penitentiary with Rev. Anema.

- Visit/preach (in Spanish)/ teach in Danville Penitentiary with Rev Nathan Brummel.
- Visit with Rev. Tom Wetselaar
- Speak in missions evening – Oak Lawn URC
- **Oct 12 & 13 – Trip to Classis Michigan**
- October 18 – Preached in Living Water URC
- October 21 – Meeting with committee of Immanuel URC about mission in Honduras.
- October 25 - Preach - Niagara Falls URCNA church plant.
- November 1 – Trumpet.
- **November 4 & 5 – Trip to Michigan**
 - Presentation in Kalamazoo Independent Reformed Church – Bill Boekenstein.
 - Visit with Rev. Jeremy Veldman.
 - Meeting with Rev Casey Freswick and Rev. Brian Vos concerning upcoming trip to Costa Rica.
- Meeting with MC chairman Rev. Greg Bylsma.
- November 15 – Preach URCNA New Horizons – Scarborough, ON
- November 23 – Meeting in Canadian Reformed Seminary – internship for URCNA student.
- November 27 – Meeting with Rick Postma – Word & Deed
- **November 30 – December 8 - Trip to Costa Rica**
 - Prayer/encouragement with the Greens
 - Preached in two pastor association meetings in San Jose area.
 - Spoke for teachers of Reformed Christian school.
 - Spoke in CLIR “Grace and Truth” pastor’s conference in San Jose.
 - Preached in “El Pacto de Gracia”.
 - Visited with Rev. Nick & Rosie Lamme
- December 1 - Trumpet
- December 11 – Meeting/workshop about sponsoring Syrian refugees - Rev. Thabet Megaly
- **December 15 & 16 - Trip to Michigan**
 - Met with representatives from council of Trinity URC to review trip to Costa Rica.
 - Met with representatives from council of Cornerstone URC to talk about the work of Rev. Poleman and our upcoming visit with a council member in 2016.
 - Met with Rob Brinks of Reformed Mission Service (RMS).
 - Met with Rev. Martin Vogel.
- December 25 – Niagara Migrant Ministry.
- December 29 - Visit with URCNA church-planter Rev. Brian Z. of Ajax, ON.
- December 31 – Niagara Migrant Ministry.
 - Year end report
- January 1 - The Trumpet
- **January 5-8 –Attended OPC Domestic Church-planting Conference, San Antonio, TX.**
- **January 26-28 - Missions Committee Meeting, Orlando, FL.**
- **February 3-8 Trip to Quito, Ecuador & Pablo Landazuri**

- Spoke in men's conference and Preached
- Met with elder and deacon of sending church
- February 9-10 Pastor's retreat.
- February 14 - Visited with Jose Ramirez.
- February 18 – Visit with CAN Ref. church-planter Tim Scouten.
- February 25 – 2016 Prayer Maps printed and received.
- February 28 – Preached in Redeeming Grace URC and Living Hope – URC Church Plant.
- **February 29–March 2** – **Classis Western Canada** – reported and spoke for area churches.

Included above are visits, trips and activities completed during this past year. I have included only the most pertinent activities out of my personal log book. Days between trips were typically spent preparing messages and speeches, keeping up with correspondence, working on mission related projects and documents and making travel arrangements.

Specific MC Projects:

- The Trumpet. At the outset, I worked with the committee on ideas for format, logo, design and message. The first edition was in April, 2015. Each month I correspond with our missionaries, edit articles, and work on layout with a designer.
- Prayer Map. Initial design, collection of information, and write-ups took a considerable amount of time. We have just produced the 2016 edition and distributed it to the churches.
- Website. I have worked with our webmaster and our missionaries to update the missions page of the URNCA website. At the present time I am developing a new site that will be launched soon.
- Foreign Missions Manual. This will be submitted to Synod for June 2016.

Mission Coordinator Finances - 2015

- All receipts for accounting work were sent through the chairman of the Missions Committee to Canadian treasurer Pam Hessels.
- In the places I have spoken or preached I have asked the remuneration be sent directly to the URCNA office (but did accept mileage), as this is considered a part of my duties as MC.
- Total cost for travel in 2015 (flights, hotels, parking, etc.) was **\$9232.25 US** (\$8313.25 US + \$1195.00 CAN)
- Total expenses (office, books, sending of materials) was **\$3400.00 US** (\$3243.59 CAN + \$897.89 US)

Recommendation 2: That Synod receive and express its gratitude for the work of the Missions Coordinator to date.

Recommendation 3: That Synod pray for both the ministry of our Missions Coordinator and the ministry of all our missionaries/church planters after receiving his report.

IV. Growing in Foreign Missions

One of the major activities of the Missions Committee over the last two years has been the attempt to create a manual for foreign missions. The work on this manual included significant research of missions protocol from some of our sister churches, most notably the OPC. As we researched some of the documents and goals of our sister churches in missions we were humbled by how much they had learned, and how little we knew in comparison! While we are thankful for God's gracious work among our churches in sending missionaries to the field and adding His blessing to their labours, we are also deeply aware that we remain a very young federation with many areas for growth in this particular field. Very practical aspects of missions like adequate preparation of missionaries, spiritual support for them while on the field, or how the work of building a church will extend beyond a single generation or single missionary to leave a mature, indigenous church have not been significantly addressed by us as a federation.

Our awareness of the need to strengthen the manner in which the URCNA approaches foreign missions was further brought to the fore in hearing the reports of our mission's coordinator from the field. As noted in his report, his on the field experiences revealed some of the difficulties of meaningful supervision and encouragement for those on the mission field by the home churches. He also noted that our federation cooperates in missions primarily through supporting each other financially. Financial support of missions is a wonderful thing, however our cooperation has not yet extended to the point where we, as churches, unite our resources of time and manpower on the mission field. This has resulted with some mission works being isolated from others, and with missionaries finding themselves lacking the meaningful, personal support on the mission field that comes through having co-workers in Christ's kingdom. We have also not considered deeply as a federation how the work of missions involves more than simply Gospel preachers, and we can grow in the way in which we involve both ordained and non-ordained kingdom workers in establishing the church of Christ around the world.

Thus in drafting principles and ideas for a foreign missions manual, our committee recognized that there could be tremendous benefit in increasing the level of cooperation we have as churches in building Christ's kingdom in a foreign field. To that end we include in this report not only a proposed Foreign Missions Manual, but the following points of discussion and affirmation for the consideration of Synod. We have done our best to include background and grounds for all these suggestions to help Synod in its deliberations. We also hope that including this rationale will help the Consistories of the federation to understand why the suggestions are made and what benefit we hope to gain for God's glory and the wellbeing of missionaries and missions within the URCNA.

Recommendation 4: That Synod add the following italicized and underlined words to point A.1 of the Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator so that the new wording reads as follows:

A. Functions and Tasks of the Synodical Missions Committee, and of the Missions Coordinator

1. The committee would function as an information hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication *and facilitating cooperation* among URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils, joint venture committees, classis mission committees, and congregations by doing the following:”

Grounds:

1. Our current policies call for us to be, “generally promoting the cause of missions in the URCNA in a way that consistently represents our commitment to function as a covenanted body,” (Pt. A.1.c. in the policies, pt. 1.c. on p. 527 of the Acts of Synod Nyack). To fulfill the Missions Committee’s current calling the Missions Committee should be facilitating cooperation between the various works in our churches wherever possible as an expression of our commitment to function together as a covenanted body. This goes beyond merely encouraging communication, and thus should be clearly stated in the tasks and functions.
2. Cooperation in missions is of the greatest possible importance if we are to be faithful in using all our resources as a federation (manpower, finances, giftedness, etc.) for the growth of Christ’s kingdom around the world.
3. The word, “Facilitating,” means to make an action or process easy (or easier). This addition does not give the committee any authoritative power, but does allow the churches to recognize that the Missions Committee has a Synodically given task to make cooperation in missions easier for all the churches.

Recommendation 5: That Synod add the following to our Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator, and to renumber the other points accordingly.

A new point (d) to section A.1. (Functions and Tasks of the Missions Committee) as follows:

“(d) serving as an advisory committee to local consistories who are considering sending an ordained man to the foreign mission field in a long-term capacity. The advice of the Missions Committee should be sought by local consistories if they are considering sending such missionaries to the field.”

A new point (e) to section A.2. (Specific Tasks of Committee Members) as follows:

“(e) Committee members shall work with the URCNA Missions Committee in giving advice to missionaries, consistories, joint venture committees or classical Missions Committees as requested by either party.”

A new point (d) to section A.3. (Specific Tasks of the Missions Coordinator) as follows:

“(d) He shall work with the URCNA Missions Committee to give advice to missionaries, consistories, joint venture committees or classical Missions Committees as requested by either party.”

Grounds:

1. Sending an ordained man to the mission field in a long term capacity is a significant sacrifice for a local church, the missionary (and his family, if applicable) and the federation (through financial support, etc.). Such an action warrants the importance of seeking advice from a multitude of counsellors. Our federational Missions Committee, with its knowledge of current URCNA missions and the lessons learned from them, is in a unique position to give good advice to local consistories regarding such an action.
2. Because of the breadth of our federation, local congregations are not always aware of the needs of other works within the URCNA where their cooperation may serve to greatly bless the work of missions within a foreign context. The advice of the Missions Committee might help partner churches with works already ongoing and allow a stronger presence on the foreign field. DV, this could result in a healthier, more focused missions direction for us as a federation where we see local, indigenous churches founded and strengthened for God’s glory.

Recommendation 6: That Synod add the following point (e) to A.1. of the Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator, and renumber the other points accordingly.

“(e) serving as an advisory committee to foreign missionaries, sending consistories, JVCs, and classical committees (where applicable) to help them develop entrance, continuance, and exit strategies that are in line with our adopted guidelines for foreign missions.”

Grounds:

1. Our church order recognizes that churches are not to lord it over other churches (Art. 65), but rather are to see Christ’s local churches growing and functioning as members of the whole. This applies not only for churches within North America, but also for churches planted by God’s grace in a foreign field. Our missions must have a goal of seeing churches on the foreign field growing in sustainability to a point where they exist and extend Christ’s church apart from an unhealthy reliance upon the URCNA in North America. Developing strategies for establishing a local, faithful congregation or federation/denomination is important for all our church planting mission works, and the Missions Committee can greatly aid in this.
2. An exit strategy keeps missions focused on the task we set out to accomplish, and allows us to adjust how foreign missionaries remain involved with mission works in a way that promotes a mature congregation on the mission field.
3. An exit strategy requires steps, however flexible they need be, to arrive at the goal of a mature and faithful local church. For this reason overseeing consistories and missionaries should be thinking in terms of entrance, continuance, and exit strategies in a

way that submits to God's leading over time and yet maintains a biblical goal of an established and faithful local congregation.

Recommendation 7: That Synod affirm that our shared strategy for missions include additional training for foreign missionaries that is above and beyond ordination (where applicable), for all men and women (serving as pastor's wives or missionary helpers) called to the foreign mission field.

Grounds:

1. The work of missions calls for specialized training in cultural understanding, language, and more that seminaries are not all able to provide for the many cultures of the world.
2. The work of missions carries unique difficulties and blessings which additional training would greatly help in preparing people for.
3. Many faithful Reformed denominations require this for all their missionaries, and their experience has found it to be a great practical benefit for Gospel ministry in a foreign context.

V. The Foreign Missions Manual

Introduction

In presenting the Foreign Missions Manual to the churches the Missions Committee has both a majority and a minority report. The majority report begins on the next page, and is presented as a complete document. The names of the committee members supporting the majority report are at the conclusion of that report. The minority report comes after the majority report, again carrying the names of those supporting that report. Our one caveat to Synod is that the minority report was received by the committee on Mar. 24, 2016 (one day before the Synod deadline). For that reason our chair emailed the minority report out to committee members and asked that should they wish to attach their name to the minority report they could do so even after the Synodical deadline, and we would send out a separate communication from the Missions Committee clarifying who supports which report. Apart from any further communication, please assume that the names listed below each report are accurately recorded. If you receive another communication from the Synodical Missions Committee before Synod, that communication will contain the correct listing of names supporting the relevant reports. Thank you for your understanding, and we apologize in advance for the confusion caused through this last minute reception of a minority report.

URCNA Foreign Missions Manual [Majority Report]

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- E. Strengthening Current Fields before Spreading to Others
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- A. Phase 1 – Exploration of the Prospective Mission Field
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I. Principles of Foreign Missions for the URCNA¹

Introduction

In the Great Commission, the risen Lord Jesus calls the apostles, and through them his whole church, to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). Ever since, the church has confronted man's post-fall plight by seeking to equip all of God's people to participate in the church's mission to the world, and by sending missionaries to preach the gospel to the unconverted. This great task belongs to the church today as much as ever, and it must involve every local congregation.

Without involvement in foreign missions, the local congregation will become disconnected from the body of Christ that exists throughout the world; but then that congregation can even become uninterested in the lost souls that surround it. By contrast, the more meaningful contact our churches have with the unconverted and with churches of other countries, the better we will understand the gospel's power.

The Missions Committee prays that the Lord of the church will use this manual for foreign missions to help URCNA congregations and missionaries more effectively to fulfill the task that the Lord has given us. As a federation, we must share the conviction that greater preparedness for missions will result from a wise plan and sound principles. What follows are those foundational principles that should guide us in foreign missions.

A. The Need to Work Together

Our Reformed churches recognize that the best way for us to walk together in practice is for us to have agreement in our principles (Amos 3:3). For this reason, we have agreed to order our ecclesiastical relations and activities on the basis of clearly defined biblical and confessional commitments (see the introduction to the Church Order of the URCNA). But this has not always been applied to the arena of foreign missions. For the sake of more effective and responsible work in foreign missions, the churches of our federation must agree upon a shared strategy for our cooperation.

In the work of foreign missions, a federation of churches could hardly conduct itself "decently and in good order" (1 Cor. 14:40) if it were unable to answer some very basic and important questions. What is the church's mission? Who are its missionaries? Who should oversee missionaries? How should they be prepared for their work? But there are also more nuanced questions that a well-ordered church must ask (and answer) in a unified way. Are there regions of the world in which our combined efforts might be most effective? Are there particular forms of mission work in which our churches could participate more productively than in others?

¹ See the URCNA study committee report, *Biblical and Confessional View of Missions* (Acts of Synod 2001, pp. 101-114); the Church Order of the URCNA, sixth edition (2007), Article 47; "Fulfilling the Great Commission: A Shared Strategy in URCNA Missions" (Acts of Synod 2012, pp. 516-526); *How to Plant a Reformed Church. The Church Planting Manual of the United Reformed Churches in North America*, 2015 edition (Acts of Synod, 2014, pp. 359-423).

Our churches have agreed to “make every effort to unify all of our resources (gifts, talents, and finances) as one united federation in order to bring the gospel from our homes and churches to the nations of the world.”² To that end, our missions committee and coordinator have been called to “function as an information hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregations.”³ As more of our churches better understand the existing fields of foreign ministry, as well as the future opportunities, we will more faithfully be able to partner together through prayer, personal involvement, financial support, the sharing of ideas, and encouragement.

B. The Consistory Calls and Sends the Missionary

It is the local Consistory that has the authority to call and send ordained missionaries, then to oversee the missionary and supervise the mission work. The possession of such authority, however, does not mean that every Consistory is adequately equipped to engage in foreign missions. Therefore, it is important to seek education and training for foreign missions well in advance of sending a man to the field, and to seek assistance from the Missions Committee and Coordinator for their input. The specific responsibilities of the sending Consistory are as follows:

1. Overseeing the Missionary, and Supervising His Work:

It is vital for the sending church to have a strong relationship with its missionary, both for his own wellbeing and for the health of the mission work. The Consistory can develop and maintain such a relationship by:

- a. acquiring a thorough knowledge of the particular foreign field;
- b. maintaining regular contact with the missionary through phone calls and other means of live communication (the mission work should be on the agenda for monthly Council meetings);
- c. visiting the missionary; visits should be made –
 - i. at least once every two years;
 - ii. by at least two representatives of the Consistory, who would make a thorough report to the sending church after the visit;
 - iii. in consultation with the Missions Committee and Coordinator, for the sake of greater cooperation throughout the federation;
 - iv. with the purpose of having a “house visit” with the missionary and his family, and of providing the missionary with pastoral encouragement and advice regarding his work;
 - v. with the purpose of reviewing progress regarding short and long-term plans for the work, and adjusting those plans for the future;
 - vi. with the purpose of obtaining feedback from any national groups with whom the missionary cooperates.

² *Acts of Synod Nyack 2012*, pp. 516-517.

³ *Ibid.*, 527.

2. Ensuring Adequate Financial Support for the Missionary and His Family:
 - a. by providing adequate information and regular updates about the work to the local congregation, the surrounding classis, and the federation (the establishment of a Joint Venture Committee within a classis often provides the sending church with steady financial support for its missionary from the other churches that participate in the JVC);
 - b. by organizing opportunities for the missionary, while on furlough, to visit the churches of the federation for preaching and mission presentations.

C. Those Who Are Sent to the Foreign Field

1. Ordained Missionaries:

While there are diverse ways for our churches to be involved in foreign missions, our federation is especially committed to sending out ordained missionaries whose focus is the making and growing of disciples through the ministry of the Word and sacraments.⁴ Ordained missionaries are sent out on a long-term basis, and funded by the churches of the federation.

2. Missionary Helpers:

It is appropriate in many instances, and sometimes necessary, for elders, deacons, and non-ordained people to assist ordained missionaries on the foreign field. Missionary helpers might be sent to serve in such roles as teachers, doctors/nurses, evangelists, Bible translators, etc.⁵ We therefore need to encourage all our church members to consider how they might use their gifts to serve the Lord in reaching the nations.

- Missionary helpers should be considered for service only with the agreement of the ordained missionary on the field.
- They will work under the direction of the ordained missionary and his Consistory.
- They are responsible to raise their own financial support, under the supervision of their local consistory.

D. Involvement of the Synodical Missions Committee & Coordinator

The New Testament clearly shows that in various ways the churches partnered with each other to advance the spread of the gospel throughout the world. The Philippian church gave financially to the support of Paul's missionary work (Phil. 4:14-18); the Colossian church sent ministry associates to aid the apostle (Col. 4:9, 12). There was a great deal of missionary traffic between the churches of the first century. Such cooperation was vital to the spread of the apostolic church, and it is something we must strive to imitate.

⁴ Church Order of the URCNA, Article 47: "The church's missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. When this task is to be performed beyond the field of an organized church, it is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor..."

⁵ *Biblical and Confessional View of Missions* (Acts of Synod 2001, pp. 105-106).

The work of foreign missions is a complex undertaking. It is very difficult for a Consistory to provide a mission work with meaningful and effective oversight from afar. The Lord does not guarantee the “success” of any mission work, but since he directs us to seek safety in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14), Consistories must avoid the practice of making uninformed, unilateral decisions. The wise course would be for a Consistory to seek advice from others, not only before sending a man to a foreign field, but also throughout the duration of his work.

Advice may come from various quarters, but our federation has established the Synodical Missions Committee, and has appointed a Missions Coordinator, for this very purpose: to advise and aid Consistories that are engaging in missions, both at home and abroad. If the federation is to maintain a common strategy in our missionary endeavors, the committee and coordinator should be involved throughout the process. For the sake of unified efforts in foreign missions, sending churches and missionaries should consult with the Missions Committee and/or Coordinator:

- when investigating and visiting a potential field;
- when considering candidates who might serve as missionaries;
- when making long-term plans for an existing work;
- when addressing problems on the field;
- when there are special financial needs;
- when considering the closing of a work;
- when planning for a work to federate with other churches.

E. Strengthening Current Fields before Spreading to Others

In keeping with our Lord’s command, the churches of our federation desire to make disciples of people from all nations. But the massive scope of that mission will not excuse the practice of multiplying foreign fields in such a way that many are rendered weak and vulnerable. Our foreign mission works may spread far and wide, but then our federation can easily find itself spread too thin. With a united concern for our missionaries and their families, for the congregations that they serve, and for the effectiveness and longevity of all our foreign works, our federation must keep its focus on strengthening current fields before spreading to new ones.

Missionaries rarely worked alone in the apostolic period. It seems that the Lord was pleased in most cases to establish his gospel through the testimony of two witnesses (Luke 10:1ff; Acts 13:2ff); but he was also pleased in most cases to spread his church *not* by means of isolated missionaries but rather through the labor of missionary teams (evident throughout the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul). Our federation should strive to approximate the pattern of missionary labor that we find in the New Testament by guarding against the isolation of any missionary on a foreign field. With more cooperation among our own churches, and with more effort to work (where possible) with national churches abroad, we will be able to ensure that our foreign missionaries have co-laborers who can visit them, aid them, and even relieve them when necessary.

F. Biblical Contextualization on the Foreign Field

1. Avoid Paternalism:

In many countries the very presence of a foreign missionary will have a significant impact on a national people. Missionaries must be very careful not to lord it over those to whom they minister (Matt. 20:25-28), and must continually strive to become all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22). A missionary will render his ministry ineffective unless he diligently assumes the humble posture of a learner before a national people.⁶ Our goal on the foreign field is not to reproduce a North American church.⁷

2. Avoid Dependency:

Dependency occurs when the missionary and his sending church engage in a ministry that aims to take care of all the financial needs of the nationals, encouraging their perpetual dependence on their caretakers. Our foreign mission works must strive from the start to develop responsible national congregations that will not be perpetually dependent on the missionary or his sending church for their sustenance, governance, and propagation.⁸

3. Promote a Word and Deed Ministry:

Many so-called ministries have abandoned the gospel in exchange for social rehabilitation. We must not, however, make the opposite mistake of teaching the gospel while showing little interest in the temporal needs of the listeners (cf. Luke 4:18f; James 2:14-17). Our foreign missions must seek to emulate the holistic ministry of our Lord, whose mercy went out to sinners in all of their spiritual and physical brokenness.

G. The Training of Indigenous Men

Our goal in foreign missions is the establishment of indigenous, national churches that have the resources and responsibility not only to maintain and govern their own ministry, but also to spread that ministry elsewhere through the planting of other churches. To that end, it is important that indigenous men who are interested in pursuing the ministry of the Word be directed to Biblical and theological education that will help to prepare them for ministry. Ideally, these men could obtain a sound theological education in their home country, either at a faithfully Reformed seminary or by means of extension courses; this would allow them to remain involved in their local congregation where their gifts would continue to develop. Where a sound theological education cannot be obtained at home, an indigenous man from another country may seek training through a foreign seminary (in North America or elsewhere), though particular challenges are often attached to this scenario.⁹

⁶ Cf. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 109-113.

⁷ See J.H. Bavink, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1960). "Too frequently we have failed to see that the education we give and our whole attitude toward life is to a strong degree propaganda for Western culture, with its extremely dangerous elements. Therefore one of the requirements of every missionary is that he must be critical of his own life and of the culture which he always carries with him even though he may be unaware of it" (107).

⁸ Peter Beyerhaus, *The Responsible Church and Foreign Missions* (1964).

⁹ See the online article by Douglas L. Rutt, "Hiring National Missionaries: A Good Idea?"

Conclusion

It is the Lord Jesus, our only Head, who gathers, defends and preserves for himself the one, holy, catholic church. Since he is primarily doing this great work through the church's execution of the Great Commission, may the Holy Spirit further equip the URCNA in all its missionary activity be faithful to the Lord and to his Word.

II. *Five Phases in Foreign Missions*

A. Phase One – Exploration of the Prospective Mission Field

Though it is occasionally the way churches begin to engage in mission work, responding to every foreign opportunity by sending missionaries would not help our federation to develop a shared strategy for greater effectiveness and long-term sustainability in our missionary endeavors. Consistories that desire to be more proactive in foreign missions, and that seek greater cooperation in their efforts, will explore potential foreign fields in consultation with the Missions Committee and Coordinator. While we have been given a mission to the whole world, the reality is that certain fields are fallow, others are infertile (currently, at least), some are very fertile, and then a few are ripe for harvest. A Consistory will want an intimate knowledge of any particular field (the country as a whole, as well as the smaller regions) before considering potential candidates for the ministry. Ideally, Consistories will partner with the Missions Committee in the identification of the right foreign field, in the deeper investigation of that field, and in the implementation of a specific strategy for reaching that field. This ground work will put a Consistory in a good position to send, supervise and support a foreign missionary; and the cooperation with others will result in greater effectiveness and longevity.

B. Phase Two – Preparing the Missionary & His Family for the Foreign Field

1. Searching for the Right Missionary to Send:

Once a Consistory has taken the steps necessary to gain an intimate knowledge of a particular mission field (e.g. by visiting the location, and by consulting with those who have already served there), it will begin searching for the right man for the job. He must not only have the spiritual maturity that is required for ordained ministry but also be suited for laboring in the foreign field. In order to determine a man's competence and suitability for a particular work, the Consistory needs to engage in a thorough interview process, including careful examination of all references.

(<http://www.lutheranmissiology.org/Hiring%20National%20Missionaries.pdf>)

2. Training the Missionary before He Is Sent:¹⁰

In order to be prepared for labor in foreign missions and in a particular field, a minister of the Word will need more specific training than he could have received through a typical seminary education. In addition to providing the man with an adequate wage, the sending Consistory will also need to underwrite the expenses that accrue on account of the following steps of preparation:¹¹

a. *General Training for Foreign Missions:*

New missionaries should be sent to one of the various institutions that provide intensive education and training that will help to prepare them for ministry in foreign missions.

b. *Training in a Specific Language:*

Significant time and money must be invested in learning the primary language that is spoken on the field. It can take a year of intensive study to gain the most basic facility in a new language; it may take another year or so of immersion in the language to gain the fluency needed for ministry among its native speakers.

c. *Cultural Training:*

In order to serve profitably in a foreign context, missionaries must have thorough knowledge of that culture in which they hope to labor. In many cases, such knowledge can be acquired only through a course of education that is focused on that culture, and through a course of training for life within it. Cultural education and training will help the missionary not only to avoid making many embarrassing or offensive cultural blunders among the foreign people which he plans to serve, but also to grow in his love for that people and in his ability to communicate God's truth to them more effectively. A good deal of cultural training must take place before the missionary is sent; but for its completion, the missionary may need to visit the foreign field for a season of culture immersion. Of course, even after beginning their service among a foreign people, a missionary and his family will want to continue growing in their knowledge of the people whom they serve.

d. *Orientation:*

The reality of living on the mission field is often very different from what is initially imagined. Therefore, before sending a man, the Consistory must ensure that he receives a thorough orientation pertaining to the particular location in which he will labor (unless he is already intimately familiar with it). If possible, the Consistory and their missionary should also consult with others who have experience in that country. In some cases, it will be necessary for the man to make an introductory visit to the field. Of course, the Consistory will also have to work through numerous practical matters with the missionary and his family

¹⁰ The following material applies to missionaries whose origin and/or language is not the same as that of the people whom they serve.

¹¹ If the missionary has a wife and children, the Consistory will also need to see to their preparation.

before sending them (e.g. housing, transportation, immigration, health insurance, education of children).

e. *On-Field Training:*

A pioneering missionary (one who goes to a place to begin a work from the ground up) may not have the privilege of much on-field training; in which case he may find Christian fellowship among missionaries from other Evangelical or Reformed denominations. But for those new missionaries who are seeking to join a team that is already in existence it is important to have sufficient time after arrival during which they may become acclimated to their new surroundings. Of course, before beginning his labors, the new missionary will also need a sufficient period of time to move his family and get them settled in a foreign country. Ideally, he would have very limited, if any, involvement in the daily workings of the mission for the first year, followed by a gradual transition into the ministry. This allows for a missionary to understand and grow familiar with the context in which he will labor. Ideally, new missionaries would have two to three years of overlap with senior missionaries.

C. Phase 3 – Establishing an Entrance Strategy

Since the URCNA is a federation composed of churches that aim to assist one another in our mission to the world, our Consistories should generally not plan to begin isolated foreign mission works. Instead, when determining where to work in the world, it would be appropriate for a Consistory to consider where our federation or another is already working, if those active missions could be fortified by the addition of another missionary, or if weary missionaries should be relieved of their service. This teamwork mentality is essential to the longevity of faithful Reformed missions in all foreign fields.

1. Prioritize Partnership with Missionaries from Other Denominations (where possible):
When exploring the potential of a prospective mission field, it would be wise to seek partnership with any biblically sound churches and missionaries that are already working in that field. In many cases, their experience will provide them with a much better sense than we could have with regard to the assets and needs of that particular field. Our churches should seek to work with groups that are compatible with the Reformed faith that we confess and practice.
2. Prioritize Partnership with National Reformed Denominations (where possible):
The vastness of the mission field, as well as the scarcity of biblical and Reformed witness throughout the world, should compel our federation to form partnerships with sound Reformed denominations that are already established in foreign nations. Why would we work to establish a new Reformed church or federation where one already exists? Unless we want to create an ecclesiastical rivalry, the URCNA must consult with any faithful Reformed denomination or church of another country where we hope to labor.

3. Prioritize Partnership with Other URCNA Churches and Missionaries:
As a Consistory and missionary explore a prospective field, they should consider whether laboring in that place would be in keeping with the overall strategy of working together in our mission endeavors. Each new mission work will either strengthen or weaken the current labors of the federation. If we are to avoid “flash-in-the-pan” mission works that will dilute our limited resources, our Consistories need to know that there is sufficiently broad support throughout the federation for the sustaining of a mission work for many years to come. In consideration of such matters, Consistories ought to consult with the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator, which have been established in large part to help facilitate greater cooperation among the churches of the federation.
4. Prioritize Long-term Sustainability, While Tending to Short-term Goals:
Failure to count the cost of ministry abroad can result in doing a great disservice to the cause of the Gospel. Since foreign mission works usually take many years to be firmly established, it is vital that Consistories and their missionaries plan for long-term engagement with any particular field. While a strategy must be determined with a view to the long-term sustainability of the mission, short-term goals must also be made in service to that long-term vision. The Consistory and their missionary should make one-year, two-year, and five-year plans which are then periodically reviewed in order to see that goals are being accomplished.
5. Determine Times of Service in a Mission Field:
While a Consistory would not typically set an end date for the service of their missionary before his service begins, it is important to determine the length of his terms of service between furloughs. The scheduling of terms and furloughs will be tentative, and adjustments will be made along the way. But for the health and endurance of the missionary, of his family, and of the mission work itself, a Consistory must remain committed to a basic plan for service terms.¹²

D. Phase 4 – Establishing a Mission Church

What is the initial task for the missionary on the foreign field? There will be some cases in which a Consistory sends a missionary to a foreign field that has no Reformed church, perhaps where there is no faithful Gospel witness at all. In such a context, the missionary’s initial task will be to spread the Gospel to people in that particular locale with the goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ, and eventually establishing them as a congregation with his blessing – the following points begin with such a situation in view. There will be other cases, however, in which a Consistory sends a missionary to a foreign field where he will serve as pastor for a group of Christians who already gather regularly for worship and fellowship (perhaps they were previously served by another URCNA missionary) – the third point below begins to address this situation. Of course, there will also be cases where a Consistory sends a missionary to serve a mission work that is overseen by a different Reformed denomination (national or otherwise). In

¹² In its manual for foreign missions, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church stipulates that single missionaries have a term of three years, and that married missionaries have terms of four to six years. See section 4.8 of the *Manual of the Committee on Foreign Missions of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, p. 31.

such a context, the missionary will need to follow the guidelines of that denomination to which he is loaned for service on the foreign field.

1. Initiating Discipleship by Evangelizing the Unconverted:

To whatever degree he might be employed in other work, the ordained missionary's primary calling will be to serve continually as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, spreading the Gospel to as many of his neighbors as possible, prayerfully seeking for God to change hearts and bring sinners to a true faith in the Savior. This primary evangelistic task will require the missionary to develop meaningful relationships with the people around him, as he publicly and privately seizes every opportunity to share the truth of Christ.

While he may initially cast a wide net, involving himself in a variety of activities across a broad area, the missionary will likely need to narrow his focus to a particular community (ideally, the one in which he lives). This will allow the man to love and serve people around him in tangible ways, providing him with opportunities more naturally and effectively to testify about Christ. The missionary's hospitality will be a vital component in his ministry, as it will allow him to bring people into his home where a meal can be shared and the Gospel can be discussed in a personal manner. Eventually, Bible studies will take place in his home, and then also in the homes of those he is evangelizing.

2. Making Disciples through Profession of Faith & Baptism:

Through God's gracious blessing upon the missionary's evangelistic work, sinners will come to faith in Christ. While new converts may readily claim to believe in private, it will be important for the missionary to encourage them to profess their faith publicly (Luke 12:8-9; 1 Tim. 6:12). To prepare them, the missionary will want to take converts through an essential outline of the Christian faith – context will largely determine the degree to which he uses the Reformed confessions. He will also need to make it clear that making public profession of faith requires new converts to make solemn vows before God and His people, the congregation to which they are joined by means of professing faith (these vows made on the mission field should not substantially differ from the vows of church membership that are made in any established congregation in North America).

If new believers have not already received a valid Christian baptism, their official inclusion into the church through profession of faith must be attended by their receiving the covenant sign (Matt. 28:19; Acts 10:44-48; 16:30-34). Consistories should therefore send missionaries to the foreign field with the working assumption that this ordained servant is going to baptize people before a local congregation is established. In fact, the baptism of those first professing believers and their children should constitute the beginning of a new congregation that also includes the missionary and his family.

Once new converts have received adequate instruction, a ceremony should be planned for professions and baptisms to take place in the presence of the missionary, his family, and other believers. Where it is safe and feasible, numerous other people should be invited to witness the joyous occasion to the praise of God. The significance of these professions and baptisms should

be explained through the reading and exposition of Scripture, and God's blessing on the new church members should be sought in prayer.

3. Growing Disciples through the Ordinary Means of Grace:

Sinners are saved in order to become true worshipers of God (1 Pet. 2:9); but public worship is also the context in which disciples grow more mature and fruitful through the ministry of the Word and sacraments (Heb. 10:19-25), those ordinary means that God has appointed for the working of His saving and sanctifying grace. In North America, a core group of people may meet as a Bible study for a year or two before a worship service takes place. On the foreign field, however, the missionary will usually want to begin holding worship services as soon as a few converts form a fledgling congregation (even though it would lack a body of elders).

Throughout his ministry, the ordained missionary will need to continue going from house to house (Acts 20:20) in order to care for believers and their families, and to train them in family worship. But since he is seeking to establish a core group of Christians as a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, his early instruction for the people should give careful consideration to the subject of public worship – its nature and purposes; the basic elements; the proper conduct of the people; the leading of the pastor. When the initial core group of disciples is ready, the missionary should bring them together for the public worship of God (ideally, in a centralized location on the Lord's Day). If their simple service is to approximate what we find in Acts 2:42, it will include the reading and preaching of the Word, prayer and song, and the regular administration of the Lord's Supper, as approved by the missionary's Consistory. Private modes of discipleship and worship should always continue, but the communal discipleship that occurs in public worship through the ordinary means of grace will be used by God to grow the saints in their love for God and for each other. The following four points should be considered in connection with gathering the mission's initial members.

a. The Location of the Gathering for Study and/or Worship:

The missionary's home may serve well as a meeting place for a group Bible study, and initially it might also be adequate for public worship services. But with God's blessing, the core group will eventually outgrow the missionary's home (and any other private residence) so that it will be necessary to look for a larger facility. If the fledgling church is to be accessible to the greatest number of people, not just conveniently located for those initial participants, it is important to find a building in the most central location possible; and it would be ideal for the church building to be very visible to the surrounding community, as long as such visibility is legal and safe. Of course, the missionary will also have to take account of the affordability and suitability of the facility (its size, safety, availability).

b. The Ultimate Goal of Gathering as a Core Group:

The missionary will need to make it clear to those whom he serves that his goal is *not* to plant among them a church belonging to the URCNA, or even to duplicate that federation on foreign soil. Rather, he must clarify that his ultimate goal is to glorify God by making and growing Christian disciples who might be established one day as a healthy congregation with its own ordained leadership. If that mission is accomplished through

God's gracious blessing upon his Word, this new congregation will in turn seek to advance God's Kingdom further by spreading the Gospel to others and planting churches that will belong to a national Reformed federation of churches – a federation with which the URCNA could have fraternal relations. Finite and fallen men are not sufficient for such a task. Therefore, the members of the mission must steadfastly continue in prayer that God would richly bless the ministry of the Word so that the saints are equipped to share the Gospel with others, and to adorn it with godly lives.

c. The Course of Biblical Instruction:

The missionary must be rigorously committed to using God's Word to edify professing believers and their children so that they would grow more mature in their Christian faith, and demonstrate that growth in their love for one another and for those outside the church. Key in the discipleship of new converts is grounding them firmly in the Gospel, and training them to rely daily upon God's grace in Christ through Bible study and prayer. The saints will also need to be given a Christian worldview that is rooted in the general flow of redemptive history (creation, fall, redemption, consummation). While the Scriptures must have pride of place, the Reformed confessions should also be carefully implemented in the discipleship of the core group, which must gradually be taught what it will mean for them to be a confessional church (studying a basic church order would also be important in this connection). It will also be vital for the missionary regularly to confront the falsehood of the other religions and ideologies that pervade in that place; to expose the national customs and sensibilities that are antithetical to Christianity; and to warn the people of the deceptive power of sins that they face each day. Disciples of Christ must be trained not only to know the truth about Christ but also to observe all that He commanded (Matt. 28.20).

d. Publicizing the Core Group Gathering for Study or Worship:

In countries where it is not legal or safe to publicize a Christian gathering, the missionary will have to spread the word very carefully and privately. However, in countries where it is both legal and safe to advertise a Christian gathering, the missionary will want to use every available means to inform as many people as possible that at a certain time and place the Word of God is going to be proclaimed to all who wish to come. The mission work should seek to use the following means of advertisement: local TV and radio; social media and an internet site for the church; printed fliers that can be posted in public places; postcards that can be mailed to surrounding residences. Bible conferences can also be a very helpful means of getting the word out that a new church is being established in the area. But of course word of mouth remains the most effective means of bringing the truth to people, and eventually bringing people into the church where they will hear more of the truth.

e. Always Evangelizing and Training in Evangelism:

For this reason, the missionary must continually practice personal evangelism, and should take every opportunity to invite his neighbors to gather with the core group for Bible study or for the worship of God. Since he must be an example to the rest of the saints, they should see him reaching out to others, and they should be able to join him the work so that he can give them hands-on training in evangelism to their neighbors. He will also

want to encourage the members of the core group to do all they can to let their friends, family and neighbors know about the ministry of the mission work. It will be vital for the establishment of a healthy church that the disciples get caught up in God's mission of bringing His saving truth in Christ to lost sinners (Phil. 2.14-16; 1 Thes. 1.6-10; 1 Pet. 2.9-12).

4. Assessing the Spiritual Maturity of the Core Group:

As the missionary engages continually in teaching and training, he must also try to gauge that the disciples are in fact growing in some concrete ways. The saints should demonstrate a love for God's Word and a firm knowledge of the truth which leads to godliness (Phil. 1.9-11; Col. 1.9-10; Titus 2.11-14). Godliness will be especially evident in their active love for one another (Rom. 12.9-13; Gal. 6.10; Phil. 2.1-4; Col. 1.4). The authenticity of their piety will be clear from their regular attendance to the means of grace (Heb. 10.25), their practice of continual prayer (Eph. 6.18; Col. 4.2f), their desire to evangelize the unbelieving (Col. 4.5f; 1 Pet. 3.15f); their willingness in giving financially for the support of the Gospel ministry (Gal. 6.6; Phil. 4.15ff); their cheerfulness in giving financially for the relief of the poor among them (1 Cor. 16.1f; 2 Cor. 8-9); and their practice of discipleship in the home (Eph. 6.4). Eventually, the maturity of the saints should also be evident in their possessing men who may one day serve as ordained leaders in the church (Acts 14.23; 1 Tim. 3.1-13; Titus 1.5-9).

5. Training Indigenous Leaders for the Mission:

If the mission work is ever to organize as a particular congregation, it will need to have mature men who will serve as the church's indigenous leaders for years to come. While it is wrong to ordain a recent convert (1 Tim. 3:6; 5.22), it is never too soon for the missionary to begin praying and looking for men who exhibit something of that spiritual maturity and gifting that pertain to ordained service – godly men who in their words and deeds manifestly love God, his Word, his people, and those who are still perishing in sin. It may take many years to find and train an indigenous man who can serve as minister of the Word and sacraments; but within the first few years of the mission work, the missionary should be able to train at least a couple men to serve as elders or deacons.

It is often necessary for the missionary to form a mission "steering committee" that will assist him in various practical matters (upkeep of the meeting facility; transportation of members; planning/execution of fellowship and outreach events; collection and distribution of financial gifts; service projects to church members and to their neighbors). The missionary will naturally look for competent men who will cheerfully serve in this capacity; but of course such service will also provide the missionary an opportunity to test these men. If they serve faithfully, they may begin at least to demonstrate, both to the missionary and to the rest of the saints, that they are called by God to serve as elders or deacons in the church.

When he believes that he has possibly identified such men, the missionary should not only encourage them to aspire to the noble calling of ordained service (1 Tim. 3.1), but also begin to mentor these men well beyond the regular discipleship he provides for others. In addition to the testing they will receive as members of the steering committee and by various other means, they

should also be given a thorough education in the Bible, Reformed confessions, ecclesiology (the offices of the church in particular), and the care of souls. Their growth in knowledge and spiritual maturity should be evident in their speech, and should bear fruit in their loving outreach to people both within and outside of the church.

E. Phase 5 – Developing an Exit Strategy

When is a mission work completed? This question is usually not easy to answer because each mission field is unique, and the circumstances can vary greatly. There is quite often a tension between leaving too early and staying too long. Nevertheless, a mission work is essentially ready for its missionary to leave when it has organized as a congregation with its own indigenous leadership, and it has integrated into a national Reformed denomination. This should be our end-goal for our foreign church-plants.

There may be, however, extenuating circumstances when the missionary may have to come off the field before the mission church has organized. In consultation with the Missions Committee, the sending church is responsible to determine what they will do to replace a man if the urgent need arises. (This is why working in teams is essential; team members can possibly step in for a time to cover in the absence of a fellow missionary.) If a missionary foresees his need to come off the field ahead of time, he should communicate this in a timely fashion so that his church can begin the process of looking for another man to replace him. Unforeseeable circumstances would be sickness, family emergencies, or real threats to his person or family. Foreseeable circumstances would include family needs, a call to another work, or retirement.

Another possible scenario is that, after working in a place for a time, there is little visible fruit in the mission work. The missionary, his team, and the sending church should regularly evaluate the viability of the work. This is not to be a matter of impatience or unbelief, but rather a careful consideration of whether we are wisely and effectively using the time and resources that the Lord has granted. The Synodical Missions Committee and the Missions Coordinator should also be consulted in a question such as this, since a decision to close a work affects the federation as a whole. If a decision is made to close a field, the missionary could then entertain a call to another place of service within the federation.

Policies regarding exit strategies should be agreed upon by all parties before the missionary embarks on his task and should include financial planning and provision for handling the logistics of a returning missionary family. (See Part E of General Guidelines for Foreign Missions, below)

III. *General Guidelines for Foreign Missions*

A. Guidelines for Furloughs

Sending Consistories need to give careful consideration to the matter of furloughs – scheduled, mandatory breaks that the missionary will have from the field so that he and his family can return home, (particularly, to their sending church). Traditionally, returning home for a furlough or home-assignment has been considered a normal and necessary part of a missionary endeavour. It is generally recommended that a missionary have a furlough of six to twelve months for every three or four years of service on the field (or one to two months for each year of service). The reasons for furloughs are as follows:

- to give the missionary and his family a break from the field so that they may get some rest and refreshment, and reconnect with their culture;
- to help the missionary and his family remain connected to their extended family, friends, and supporting churches;
- to provide the missionary’s children with an opportunity to benefit from socialization in their native culture, and/or to pursue education;
- to provide opportunity to the sending church to evaluate the work that has been done on the field, and to make plans for the future;
- to provide the missionary with various opportunities throughout the federation to share the expertise he has gained through his labors;
- to provide an opportunity for any medical or other major personal matters to be addressed while at home;
- to allow time for the missionary to gain further professional development.

It is important for a clear understanding regarding furlough to be achieved between the missionary and his overseeing Consistory. For a missionary working alone in a country, finding a replacement during his absence could be so difficult that his Consistory will decide to grant a furlough only when possible and absolutely necessary. In any event, it is essential that the work on the field not be left unattended while the missionary is called home. For the sake of providing missionaries with regular and profitable furloughs, the following are recommended:

1. that the overseeing Consistory work with its missionary to determine a practicable plan and policy regarding furloughs;
2. that the overseeing Consistory take care of the missionary’s practical needs while he is on furlough (travel, housing, transportation, etc.);
3. that the overseeing Consistory assist the missionary in structuring his time away from the field (e.g. scheduling visits and presentations to be made to churches);
4. that the missionary be encouraged to take courses that would help him in his own spiritual growth and in his labor on the mission field;
5. that the spiritual and educational needs of missionary’s wife and children be properly addressed during their furlough;
6. that the overseeing Consistory and missionary use the furlough in part to evaluate the mission work, and to make specific plans for the coming term.

B. Guidelines for Compensation

Well in advance of sending their missionary and his family to the foreign field, the following matters must be carefully investigated and determined.

1. Salary: Cost of living varies greatly depending on the place of service.
2. Vacation: Four weeks of vacation, plus time for travel to and from the field.
3. Missions Conference
4. Housing Allowance
5. Vehicle Allowance
6. Healthcare & Life Insurance
7. Mission Expenses: rent for the church; utilities; diaconal causes; travel; etc.
8. Passport/Visa (other legal papers): consult with an immigration lawyer.
9. Immunization: which is needed for the particular geographical region.
10. Medical Examination: a complete physical with the doctor's written clearance.

C. Guidelines for Working Relations with Other Missionaries

Due to our sinful nature and Satan's efforts to ruin the church, it is important that neighboring missionaries have an understanding of one another which will help them to maintain a loving and fruitful working relationship.

1. Guarding against Conflict: Carefully defined roles and a proper understanding of authority structures will go a long way in helping missionaries to guard against conflict while working together on the same field. Specific responsibilities as to what is expected from each person should be laid out. At all times we must strive to maintain peace without sacrificing principle.
2. Confronting Wrongdoing: If the conduct or teaching of a missionary on the field is contrary to Scripture, fellow missionaries are under obligation to confront the offender for the sake of his own soul, and to inform the overseeing body for sake of the mission. When it is necessary to admonish a brother or sister, the confrontation should take place only after much prayer and careful consideration so that Satan will not be able to work division and disruption (Gal. 6.1-5; Eph. 4.26-27). All parties are obligated to follow the steps for discipline laid out in Matt. 18 and outlined in the Church Order.
3. Working with Minors and with the Opposite Gender: Special care must be given to avoiding even the appearance of evil. The missionary should not counsel or have Bible studies alone with women, nor should his wife counsel men alone. They should also be careful about how they minister to children and young people. It is wise in general for people of opposite gender to meet only in visible, public places.

D. Guidelines for Crisis Situations

1. War or Civil Disruption: Extreme caution should be taken not to become involved in the politics of the country, but it is important at the start to register with one's consulate or embassy in the host country. If a serious political or legal disruption arises, the missionary should be in contact with his embassy, and carefully heed its advice in all things lawful.
2. Kidnapping and extortion: It is the general practice of most churches and missions organizations not to pay a ransom to those who kidnap someone in the missionary family. Consistories should consult with the Missions Coordinator for specific directives that are available for dealing with a case of kidnapping.
3. Sudden death: In the event of a death on the field, the family and church should be notified immediately, representatives from both should be flown to the field, and the life insurance company should be contacted. There must also be a decision made as to the place of burial. It is important that these matters are specifically addressed before the missionary is sent.

E. Guidelines for Preparing Young Men for Mission Work

As we seek to be faithful to the Great Commission by sending labourers into the harvest, it is essential that we properly prepare our men for service on the foreign field. The following guidelines for this preparation are given with church planters in mind. However, men and women sent to serve in other capacities will also benefit from giving attention to applicable sections.

1. Church Youth:

At the level of the local church it is important that we foster among the youth an interest and involvement in missions and evangelism. When our children and young people experience the joy of serving the Lord at home, they will likely consider the possibility of serving the Lord on the mission field. We can foster more missions interest and involvement among the youth by:

- developing church ministries where young people can serve, and gain hands-on experience that will help them develop their gifts;
- maintaining a pulpit ministry that emphasizes the importance of evangelizing the lost, and being involved in missions;
- educating the church youth about God's use of missionaries throughout history for the expansion of his church;
- educating about the federation's missions, and making every effort to have missionaries visit our churches and homes for personal interaction;
- organizing short-term mission trips so that the youth can experience what God is doing, and even participate (see "Guidelines for Short-Term Mission Teams," below).

2. Seminary Students:

Men who sense the Lord calling them to preach and teach on the mission field need to maintain that focus with the help of their home church and seminary. This can be accomplished by:

- choosing a study track that focuses on missions and a foreign language;
- taking internships on the mission field during summer months;
- involving the student in a mentoring relationship with a missionary;
- exploring a specific mission field, and making tentative plans for service at some point after graduation (this is not premature, as it can take years to build a team on a particular field).

In order to be able to consider the possibility of serving on the foreign field, the seminary student interested in foreign missions must have the full support of his wife; moreover, she must be given a good measure of encouragement and education during these years. Wives of seminary students should in some way be involved not only in correspondence with their home church and mentor but also in relevant seminary course work.

F. Guidelines for Short-Term Mission Teams

1. STM teams should be organized at the request of the missionary and/or the calling church to meet a specific need on the field.
2. Potential team members should be those who have shown godly character, and who are recommended by their Consistory. Prior to their applying to a team, their commitment to evangelism should have been demonstrated through their activity in their home church.
3. In order to avoid giving offense on the foreign field, prior to their departure team members should learn some key words and phrases in the foreign language which will help them communicate about essentials; they should also be instructed about some basic cultural norms.
4. It is important that, prior to departure, team members check with the missionary concerning the use of alcohol and tobacco on the field.
5. Individuals desiring to participate in a STM trip should be expected to pay a large percentage of the cost of the trip, and possibly fund-raising for the rest.
6. The STM team and missionary must determine in advance the specific objectives and a clear plan of activities that will allow them most profitably to coordinate their work.
7. Upon arrival on the field, proper time should be given to orientation; a time of debriefing should take place at the conclusion of the trip.
8. For work teams, care must be exercised not to take away work opportunities from local people. Ideally, foreign and local workers should work together. This helps the national church to take responsibility for the project.

9. Training of leadership and delegation of responsibilities should be done prior to departure.
10. STM teams will typically focus on helping youth to witness in the culture they are visiting; but it is important for the young people to be encouraged to carry on their service and witness back in their home church.
11. STM teams should be prepared to give a presentation of their experience in their home church upon their return so that the entire church can benefit from the experience.

Recommendation 8: That Synod adopt the foreign missions manual, “URCNA Foreign Missions Manual,” as helpful guidelines to assist consistories, missionaries and church planters in the day-to-day activity of foreign missions.

Grounds:

1. The Missions Committee of the URCNA has written the manual in partial fulfillment of its mandate to develop helpful guidelines for the assistance of consistories and church planters in the work of missions.
2. We should assist each other as federated churches in accordance with the Scriptures, our confessions, and our Church Order (CO Art. 47).
3. There is a sense of standing alone that exists among many of our congregations and missionaries in the work of foreign missions.
4. The obstacles involved in foreign missions can be many, and guidelines that are represent the gathering of our collected wisdom will be tremendously beneficial.
5. Our churches, missionaries and prospective missionaries would benefit from the collective wisdom of a unified plan to guide them in their church planting efforts.
6. The manual will provide clarity regarding our church planting methods and goals for groups and individuals outside the URCNA who are interested in our federation or cooperating with our federation on the foreign mission field.

Majority Report Signatories

Pastor Richard Anjema

Pastor Jared Beaird

Pastor Harry Bout

Pastor Richard Bout

Pastor Michael Brown

Pastor Greg Bylsma

Pastor Jody Lucero

URCNA Foreign Missions Manual [Minority Report]

Background:

In their Mar. 22, 2016 web-conference meeting the Missions Committee finalized some changes to the Foreign Missions Manual based on input from missionaries who had read through the document and conveyed their suggested improvements to the committee. This is a request to make an inclusion that the Missions Committee voted against in their Mar. 22, 2016 meeting.

Recommendation of the Minority Report:

Under section I.C. of the proposed Foreign Missions Manual (the section entitled “Those Who Are Sent to the Foreign Field”) to add a point 2.b., making the current point 2 into 2.a. as follows:

2. a. Missionary Helpers: (language kept the same as suggested in the majority report)

2. b. URCNA missionaries with special tasks.

The missionaries with mission tasks that are not directly related to ordained missionaries on the field, and who are not missionary helpers, but who are members of local churches and doing mission work approved by consistory as being biblical, confessionally reformed and needed, will be under the supervision of an URCNA consistory for their spiritual life and doctrine and sent as URCNA missionaries. As consistory delegates responsibility for administration and specific ministry tasks, they are encouraged to cooperate with other consistories through JVC (Joint Venture Committees) and/or classis mission committees.

Grounds

1. All URCNA ordained ministers of the Word, office bears and members are under the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 28: 16-20; Mk. 16: 15-16; Luke 24: 36-53; Jn. 20: 21-23; Acts 1: 8) and therefore have mission responsibilities (See Synod Escondido Mission Committee report on comprehensive missions).

2. Not all Christians are ordained but all are anointed by Christ. All Christians have been anointed to be prophets, priests and kings (I Peter 2: 9, 10; HC LD 12). If the sovereign LORD calls our leaders and members to serve globally, they must respond, we must support and consistory must oversee and delegate when necessary.

3. All Christians are anointed to serve but not all Christians are sent to serve globally. Those who are not sent support in prayer, with finances and encouragement and so participate in the global mission harvest.

4. Christian mission refers to the evangelism of unbelievers, the planting and training of the Church and the witness to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ in all areas of life (taken from Gisbertus Voetius' classical Reformed definition).

5. The term missionary is a generic term referring to someone who is sent to do a task.
6. The URCNA Church Order does not have a fourth office of missionary or evangelist. Ministers of the Word, elders, deacons or members are sent out and become missionaries. Such sending is not tied to the authority of ordination but to the original church authority that lies with the Consistory. Therefore, missions must not only be associated to ordained missionaries and their helpers but includes non-ordained members working where there are no ordained missionaries.
7. The original church authority in the URCNA churches lies with the Consistory. Consistory has the responsibility to send out URCNA missionaries. They can send out and support ordained and non-ordained missionaries.
8. Not only ordained ministers of the Word and their helpers are URCNA missionaries. An URCNA missionary is an URCNA church leader or member who is sent by their consistory to fulfill the Great Commission to disciple (Mt. 28: 19-20), preach the gospel (Mk. 16: 15-16), give witness to the physically resurrected Lord (Lk. 24:39), announce the forgiveness and retaining of sins (Jn. 20: 21-23) and take the gospel into national and international settings (Acts 1:8).
9. There are members of the URC who are on fields where there are no ordained URCNA missionaries and these members are doing missionary work. This is the case with Karen Bultje with Coram Deo in Haiti, Rob Brinks with Reformed Mission Services in Mexico, Wycliffe Bible translators, Jesús Jose Ramirez with MINTS in Central America, and others.
10. Our consistories are spiritually and doctrinally responsible for their members who are involved with global missions.
11. The language of “special tasks” is the language used for ordained missionaries as well.
12. The Foreign Mission Manual and Synodical Missions Committee should fully promote and support ordained missionaries, missionary helpers as well as non-ordained URCNA church members working as volunteer, short term or long term missionaries.
13. A study is needed to rework or reword Article 47 of the URCNA Church Order in order to fully embrace the office of all believer’s role in global missions.

Minority Report Signatories

*Rev. Cornelius (Neal) Hegeman
Elder Paul Wagenmaker*

Miscellaneous Extras

Response to Synod Visalia

Synod Visalia recommitted to the Missions Committee a recommendation on streamlining the process of nominating a minister of the word to the position of Missions Coordinator (Acts of Synod 2014, p. 48 pt. 6). In light of that recommitment we propose the following:

Recommendation 9: That Synod rewrite the policy section on the appointment of the Missions Coordinator as follows (new areas underlined and italicized):

2. Missions Coordinator:

(a) Means of appointment:

- i. Each consistory desiring to nominate a man to the position of Missions Coordinator shall consult with the Missions Committee and then bring its nomination to its classis by means of overture. (See grounds 1 and 2, below)
- ii. Each classis, having decided on a nominee, shall forward its nomination to synod by means of overture.
- iii. Nominations shall include:
 - a. The church council that is prepared to supervise the minister of the Word who would also function as the federation's Missions Coordinator. This minister may already serve the council and their local church, or he might be a minister to whom the council would extend a new call, pending his appointment to the position of Coordinator by synod.
 - b. A clarification of whether the calling church would be lending this man to the work of the Missions Coordinator as a full-time position or whether the calling church envisions for the man a division of labor between the local church and the broader federation. (Although it would be ideal for the minister to be fully on loan to the federation for the work of missions, the calling council may wish to retain the man for some degree of local ministry, and this should be outlined to synod in the nomination.)
 - c. A compensation plan for the Coordinator in his work and, if applicable, the level of support that will be coming from the calling congregation. The compensation plan should focus on adequate provision of salary, housing, medical, and retirement needs (CO, Art. 10), based on cost of living in the area of the calling church, as well as suggested amounts for items like office, equipment, and travel. The Missions Committee will make itself available to interested churches to help set ballpark figures in this regard. Details of the proposed compensation will be subject to the approval of synod.
 - d. A brief introduction to the man; which should include a resume of service in the church and the particular gifts and experience that such a man would bring to the position of Missions Coordinator.

- iv. When the federation has an elected Missions Coordinator, nominees shall be allowed only when his term is up for reappointment. In such an instance Synod shall decide first whether to reappoint the current Missions Coordinator. Only if the current Missions Coordinator fails to be reappointed shall nominations for the position be considered by Synod. (see ground 3, below) When the federation does not have a man currently serving as the Missions Coordinator, synod shall elect a Missions Coordinator from the pool of nominees. The election shall be by a 2/3 majority vote, taken by ballot. (see ground 4, below)

Grounds:

1. The Missions Committee functions closely with the Missions Coordinator and understands well what the task involves. Its advice would thus be helpful for local consistories in putting together a nomination.
2. The Missions Committee's positive advice need not be given to a local consistory before it makes a nomination for Missions Coordinator to its classis. This keeps the Missions Coordinator position under the authority of the churches, rather than simply under the authority of the Missions Committee.
3. Any current Missions Coordinator should not be arbitrarily replaced. Appointing a new Missions Coordinator should only be done when the current coordinator no longer has the support of the churches or has asked to be released from the work.
4. The Missions Coordinator will be serving the churches in a significant and visible role. Because of this the position requires a 2/3 majority vote for reappointment. Similarly, any man appointed to this position should have the churches strongly behind him as demonstrated through a 2/3 majority vote.

Missions Conference

We are scheduling a missions conference open to all URCNA pastors (but with a focus on reaching the lost) for the spring of 2017. The goal is to host this conference at a retreat centre which can host pastors/missionaries and their wives as well as provide a single location where we can worship, learn, eat, and fellowship together. While speakers were still being arranged at the deadline for synodical material, we hope to have more to present to the churches about this conference during our report at Synod 2016.

Publications

Our Missions Coordinator has been instrumental in helping us to function as an information hub for URCNA missions. Beyond greatly improving our contact with missionaries and church planters through visitation and emails or phone calls, Pastor Bout has also taken the lead in creating a monthly edition of the Trumpet and in making a yearly prayer map to help the churches and families of the federation to remember our mission works in prayer. These publications allow our federation to receive official, timely and concise updates on the work of missions. We hope and pray that they are being utilized within local congregational life as an expression of our dependence on the Lord for His blessing in kingdom work.

The churches may also remember that we have been blessed to have the book, *How to Plant a Reformed Church*, printed for the use of the churches. We would like to remind the

churches once again that the first edition of this book contained a printing error. The publisher inserted the first chapter and dedication of a different book they were printing in the place of the first chapter and dedication that had been approved by Synod. Because of this, these books are in copyright infringement and must be destroyed. This error has been fixed in a second printing which is distinguished from the first through a new cover color scheme and the addition to the cover of the words, “2015 Edition.” Thank you for your help and patience as we sought to correct this mistake.

Recommendation 10: That Synod encourage the churches of the federation to distribute physical copies of the Trumpet to each household in their congregation.

Ground:

1. Physical copies of the Trumpet have a greater potential of being read, as digital distribution via email is easily ignored.

Recommendation 11: That Synod grant the Missions Committee an additional \$4,000 in its yearly budget for the printing and distribution of the annual prayer map.

Ground:

1. This has been an added cost in the work of the Missions Committee that fits our mandate and is of great benefit within the churches.

Recommendation 12: That Synod remind the churches to destroy all first printings of *How to Plant a Reformed Church*. (First printing is NOT dated on the cover, i.e. it does not say on the cover “2015 Edition.”)

Ground:

1. Due to an error with the publisher, the first copy of *How to Plant a Reformed Church* contains a significant copyright infringement.

Website

Our Missions Coordinator has been working under the oversight of the Missions Committee to create a more helpful website for URCNA missions. This website will be linked to the federation’s official website (urcna.org). The website will include not only information on the various mission works of the URCNA (and how they can be contacted), but will also have a growing resource library to help missionaries utilize work that has already been done with a missional focus whether at home or abroad. Our goal is that the website will have practical and helpful features not simply for those wanting to learn about missions, but for the missionaries themselves. This will help facilitate a greater level of cooperation on the mission field, and allow both missionaries and church members to benefit from the work of those who have gone before them.

DV, we hope that this website is up and functioning by Synod 2016.

Support for URCNA Mission Works

In line with our mandate as a committee we continue to encourage the churches in supporting the work of missions as conducted by our URCNA church planters, missionaries, and ministers serving in extraordinary capacities in the mission field. One of the great blessings of hearing reports from the field through our Missions Coordinator is the excitement this has created within the committee for our ongoing work as a federation. Although we are not a large denomination in some respects, God has allowed us to be very active in missions and we pray that He will continue to provide all things necessary for the spread of His gospel to the glory of His name. On behalf of all our mission works we thank the churches for their generous prayers and financial support in the past, and ask that they continue to remember both to pray and financially support our mission works in the future.

We have two additional notes regarding support for URCNA mission works. The first is a step we have taken as a committee to solicit from the various mission works a yearly update if there are areas of great financial need. This information is in turn given to churches or individuals who ask us if there are particular works that would benefit from financial gifts. Should you wish to learn more about how you can help in this regard please contact your classical Missions Committee representative.

The second note we make to encourage the support of URCNA mission works is for Synod to consider how the work of our missionaries can be more recognized during our synodical meetings. While we often receive greetings from other denominations and federations, both within North America and without, we rarely hear reports from our missionaries on the field regarding their work even though some of them may travel great distances to join us for our synod meetings. To that end we propose the following:

Recommendation 13: That Synod instruct the calling Consistory of each Synod to invite all ordained foreign missionaries to address Synod for 5-10 minutes on God's work in their area of service.

Grounds:

1. The work of missions, both foreign and domestic, is a matter of importance that is held in common by all the churches.
2. Presentations on mission causes allow the Synod meeting to be punctuated by constant reminders of our priorities as churches. This strengthens the focus and comraderie of our deliberations, and is a positive influence on the minds of those present as we consider the overtures and reports brought before us.
3. Synod has historically given time to greetings from sister churches. While the desire of most delegates is to see the time for those greetings kept to a reasonable amount, we give times for these greetings because ecumenicity is important. In the same vein, however, we must recognize the importance of missions and supporting our missions in a practical way in the corporate synod meetings.
4. Allowing missionaries to report to Synod encourages them by showing that they truly belong to the URCNA, and have the support of the churches of the URCNA.
5. Allowing missionaries to report to Synod reminds the churches that we have a real and on-going responsibility for our mission works. This reminder would go, through press releases of the work of Synod, to members of the federation at large.

6. Some missionaries travel significant distances to come to Synod. These men have limited opportunities to know and be known by our churches, and it is a shame if we cannot give such men an opportunity to share, however briefly, something of the work of the Lord in their area.
7. We give opportunity through CECCA and CERCU for other churches, both foreign and domestic, to report to our Synod. It hardly seems right that we give opportunity to brothers outside our denomination from a foreign field to address Synod while withholding this opportunity from our own missionaries who may travel equal or greater distances to be with us.

Recommendation 14: That Synod instruct the calling Consistory of each Synod to invite 3-5 domestic church planters to address Synod for 5-7 minutes on God's work in their area of service. Domestic church planters who address Synod in one meeting would not be invited to address Synod again at the next meeting, allowing for a rotation of men.

Grounds:

1. See grounds for recommendation 12 above as they pertain to domestic church planters.

Financial Support for the Missions Coordinator

Synod Visalia (2014) witnessed the appointment of Rev. Richard Bout to the position of the federation's Missions Coordinator. Having just come off the mission field, the Bout family took some time to settle back in to the Canadian culture, and brother Bout began his work as Missions Coordinator officially on January 1, 2015. To ensure that Pastor Bout can focus upon his work, Synod Visalia set a salary and budget to help him in his work. The figures approved and relevant to our current proposals were as follows (from p. 56 of the Acts of Synod 2014): Salary \$58,551; Housing \$19,633; Medical Benefits \$6,500; RRSP \$7,821.

Since Synod Visalia we have recognized a few things in this regard that need attention from Synod Wyoming. Perhaps of greatest significance is determining the national currency in which Pastor Bout's salary shall be paid, but there are other notes on this matter as well. Having consulted with the Canadian treasurer, we thus propose the following regarding Pastor Richard's Bout financial package as the federation's Missions Coordinator, recognizing that these recommendations may best be reviewed by Synod's committee of advice on finances, rather than by Synod's committee of advice on missions.

Recommendation 15: That Synod determine the Missions Coordinator's housing, salary, pension and medical benefits based on the currency of the nation in which he resides.

Grounds:

1. Fluctuation in exchange rates can result in significant changes in salary during the two to three years between Synod meetings. This can result in inconsistent pay (either favourably or unfavourably) for the Missions Coordinator.
2. The calling Consistory of the Missions Coordinator recommend a pay scale based on their own nation's currency as well as the cost of living for that specific geographic area.

Recommendation 16: That Synod set the Missions Coordinator's pay scale at the following Canadian currency numbers: Salary \$62,525; Housing \$22,172; RRSP (pension) \$8,470; Medical Benefits \$6,500.

Grounds:

1. The deacons of Living Water Reformed Church (Pastor Bout's calling church) have recently re-worked their salary grid taking in to account the decisions of Synod Visalia and changes to local costs of living. These numbers reflect that grid in light of Pastor R. Bout's years of experience in the ministry.

Recommendation 17: That Synod instruct the URCNA Board of Directors (finance committee) to give the Mission's Coordinator a yearly raise based on the rate of inflation as announced by the federal government of the nation in which he resides. This raise will affect the Missions Coordinator's housing, salary, pension and benefits. Should the rate of inflation be negative the Missions Coordinator will receive neither a raise nor a decrease in pay.

Grounds:

1. We do not currently have any practice for increasing the wages of our Missions Coordinator from year to year when Synod is not meeting.
2. A raise which matches the cost of inflation is reasonable.
3. Utilizing the federal government's stated rate of inflation is a clear and viable standard for the finance committee to work with.
4. Decreases in the wages of the Missions Coordinator, in the case of a widespread economic collapse, should be done at a meeting of Synod.

Missions Committee Budget

Recommendation 18: That Synod increase the Missions Committee budget from \$9,000/year to \$12,000/year.

Grounds:

1. The Missions Committee is a fairly labour intensive committee to be a part of, even should there be no changes made to the Missions Committee's functions and tasks at Synod Wyoming.
2. The task assigned to the Missions Committee by Synod is greatly facilitated by two face-to-face meetings per year.

Conclusion

We again wish to thank the churches for allowing us to serve you and Christ's growing kingdom through the labours of the Missions Committee. We recognize that the labours of this committee are a very small part of the URCNA's overall work in missions, and pray that God will strengthen His front-line servants by His word and Spirit and through the decisions that are made by Synod Wyoming in this regard.

Recommendation 19: That Synod receive the work of the Missions Committee to date.

Recommendation 20: That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Synodical Missions Committee present during the discussion of this report.

VI. Review of Recommendations

Recommendation 1 (from Section I): That Synod thank Pastor Michael Brown for his work as chairman of the Missions Committee.

Recommendation 2 (from Section II): That Synod receive and express its gratitude for the work of the Missions Coordinator to date.

Recommendation 3 (from Section II): That Synod pray for both the ministry of our Missions Coordinator and the ministry of all our missionaries/church planters after receiving his report.

Recommendation 4 (from Section IV): That Synod add the following italicized and underlined words to point A.1 of the Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator so that the new wording reads as follows:

A. Functions and Tasks of the Synodical Missions Committee, and of the Missions Coordinator

1. The committee would function as an information hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication *and facilitating cooperation* among URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils, joint venture committees, classis mission committees, and congregations by doing the following:"

Recommendation 5 (from section IV): That Synod add the following to our Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator, and to renumber the other points accordingly.

A new point (d) to section A.1. (Functions and Tasks of the Missions Committee) as follows:

“(d) serving as an advisory committee to local consistories who are considering sending an ordained man to the foreign mission field in a long-term capacity. The advice of the Missions Committee will be sought by all local consistories if they are considering sending such missionaries to the field.”

A new point (e) to section A.2. (Specific Tasks of Committee Members) as follows:

“(e) Committee members shall work with the URCNA Missions Committee in giving advice to missionaries, consistories, joint venture committees or classical Missions Committees as requested by either party.”

A new point (d) to section A.3. (Specific Tasks of the Missions Coordinator) as follows:

“(d) He shall work with the URCNA Missions Committee to give advice to missionaries, consistories, joint venture committees or classical Missions Committees as requested by either party.”

Recommendation 6 (from section IV): That Synod add the following point (e) to A.1. of the Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator, and renumber the other points accordingly.

“(e) serving as an advisory committee to foreign missionaries, sending consistories, JVCs, and classical committees (where applicable) to help them develop entrance, continuance, and exit strategies that are in line with our adopted guidelines for foreign missions.”

Recommendation 7 (from section IV): That Synod affirm that our shared strategy for missions include additional training for foreign missionaries that is above and beyond ordination (where applicable), for all men and women (serving as pastor’s wives or missionary helpers) called to the foreign mission field.

Recommendation 8 (from section V): That Synod adopt the foreign missions manual, “URCNA Foreign Missions Manual,” as helpful guidelines to assist consistories, missionaries and church planters in the day-to-day activity of foreign missions.

Recommendation 9 (from section VI): That Synod rewrite the policy section on the appointment of the Missions Coordinator as follows (new areas underlined and italicized):

2. Missions Coordinator:

(b) Means of appointment:

- v. *Each consistory desiring to nominate a man to the position of Missions Coordinator shall consult with the Missions Committee and then bring its nomination to its classis by means of overture.* (See grounds 1 and 2, below)
- vi. *Each classis, having decided on a nominee, shall forward its nomination to synod by means of overture.*
- vii. [This point is unchanged]
- viii. *When the federation has an elected Missions Coordinator, nominees shall be allowed only when his term is up for reappointment. In such an instance Synod shall decide first whether to reappoint the current Missions Coordinator. Only if the current Missions Coordinator fails to be reappointed shall nominations for the position be considered by Synod.* (see ground 3, below) When the federation does not have a man currently serving as the Missions Coordinator, synod shall elect a Missions Coordinator from the pool of nominees. The election shall be by a 2/3 majority vote, taken by ballot. (see ground 4, below)

Recommendation 10 (from section VI): That Synod encourage the churches of the federation to distribute physical copies of the Trumpet to each household in their congregation.

Recommendation 11 (from section VI): That Synod grant the Missions Committee an additional \$3,000 in its yearly budget for the printing and distribution of the annual prayer map.

Recommendation 12 (from section VI): That Synod remind the churches to destroy all first printings of *How to Plant a Reformed Church*.

Recommendation 13 (from section VI): That Synod instruct the calling Consistory of each Synod to invite all ordained foreign missionaries to address Synod for 5-10 minutes on God's work in their area of service.

Recommendation 14 (from section VI): That Synod instruct the calling Consistory of each Synod to invite 3-5 domestic church planters to address Synod for 5-7 minutes on God's work in their area of service. Domestic church planters who address Synod in one meeting would not be invited to address Synod again at the next meeting, allowing for a rotation of men.

Recommendation 15 (from section VI): That Synod determine the Missions Coordinator's housing, salary, pension and medical benefits based on the currency of the nation in which he resides.

Recommendation 16 (from section VI): That Synod set the Missions Coordinator's pay scale at the following Canadian currency numbers: Salary \$61,525; Housing \$21,172; RRSP (pension) \$8,270; Medical Benefits \$6,500.

Recommendation 17 (from section VI): That Synod instruct the URCNA Board of Directors (financial committee) to give the mission's coordinator a yearly raise based on the rate of inflation as announced by the federal government of the nation in which he resides. This raise will affect the Missions Coordinator's housing, salary, pension and benefits. Should the rate of inflation be negative the Missions Coordinator will receive neither a raise nor a decrease in pay.

Recommendation 18 (from section VI): That Synod increase the Missions Committee Budget from \$9,000/year to \$12,000/year.

Recommendation 19 (from section VI): That Synod receive the work of the Missions Committee to date.

Recommendation 20 (from section VI): That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the Synodical Missions Committee present during the discussion of this report.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Greg Bylsma (Classis Southwestern Ontario, chair)

Pastor Michael Brown (Classis Southwest US, vice)

Pastor Jared Beaird (Classis Pacific Northwest, clerk)

Pastor Richard Bout (Classis Southwestern Ontario, Missions Coordinator)

Pastor Richard Anjema (Classis Western Canada)

Pastor Harry Bout (Classis Ontario East)

Pastor Cornelius Hegeman (Classis Eastern US)

Pastor Jody Lucero (Classis Central US)

Elder Paul Wagenmaker (Classis Michigan)

United Reformed Churches of North America Compensation and Retirement Study Committee (AD-Hoc) Synod Wyoming, 2016

Introduction

The committee commenced its work by reviewing its mandate of Synod 2014. Because regulations concerning pension and retirement are governed by federal law in both the USA and Canada we proceeded with determining various sources of expert advice in the respective countries and assigning portions of the mandate to various members.

The committee conducted its work via regular telephonic conference calls and through exchanging various proposals via email. Although we expected to incur budgeted expenses to obtain advice from retirement experts, we are pleased to report that the committee was able to obtain this expert advice without incurring any expense.

We believe our report fulfills the mandate given and will put to rest for the foreseeable future the concerns of the federation.

Mandate (Acts of Synod Visalia 2014, Art 55. Pg. 48-49)

That the ad-hoc committee investigate and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of a federation-wide retirement plan for pastors in Canada and the United States.

That the committee explore what options are available and recommend to the next synod the feasibility and potential implementation of such a plan.

That consideration should include but not be limited to:

- “Projecting the future needs of URCNA ministers relative to their retirement needs (25-40 years)”
- “Any other financial issue relative to compensation and retirement concerns deemed appropriate by Synod so as to put this question to rest and establish a workable framework for many years into the future”

The committee is to consider factors such as:

- ✓ Voluntary or mandatory participation
- ✓ Feasibility
- ✓ Cost effectiveness
- ✓ Portability and Vesting
- ✓ Tax deferability
- ✓ Accessibility

Due to the complexity of these matters, we recommend that Synod reappoint the present ad-hoc committee (Regulations for Synodical Procedure 5.3.1.a) to:

1. Engage several professional consultants who can advise the ad-hoc committee on these matters,
2. Oversee the fulfillment of this mandate, and
3. Recommend a course of action regarding the implementation of this mandate.

Committee Research on Retirement Plan Options

A. Pension plan considerations (USA):

403(b) Plans

A 403(b) plan is an employer-sponsored retirement plan for certain employees of public schools, tax-exempt (501(c)(3)) organizations, and churches. The employer can purchase annuity contracts for eligible employees, or establish custodial accounts to be invested in mutual funds or other investments. In the case of annuity contracts, a 403(b) plan is sometimes referred to as a tax-sheltered annuity (TSA) plan. It is the only plan that would apply to a church sponsored retirement plan in contrast to an individually controlled plan.

How does a 403(b) plan work?

Depending on the specific type of 403(b) plan, contributions may be made by the employee, the employer, or both the employee and employer. Many 403(b) plans are similar to 401(k) plans: you elect either to receive cash payments (wages) from your employer immediately, or to defer receipt of all or part of that income to your 403(b) account. The amount you defer (called an "elective deferral") can be either pre-tax or, if your plan permits, after-tax Roth contributions.

Employer contributions, if made, may be a fixed percentage of your compensation, or may match a specified percentage of your contribution, or may be discretionary on the part of the employer. One unique characteristic of 403(b) plans is that your employer is allowed to make contributions to your account for up to five years after you terminate employment.

Who can participate?

In general, if any employee is eligible to make elective deferrals, then all employees must be allowed to do so. This is called the "universal availability rule." However, your employer can exclude certain groups of employees from participation (for example, employees who normally work less than 20 hours per week, or who are eligible under another deferral plan--for example, a 401(k) plan--of the employer).

Your employer may also require that you attain age 21 and/or complete up to two years of service before you're eligible for employer contributions. Some 403(b) plans provide for automatic enrollment once you've satisfied the plan's eligibility requirements. For example, the plan might provide that you'll be automatically enrolled at a 3% pre-tax contribution rate (or some other

percentage) unless you elect a different deferral percentage, or choose not to participate at all. If you've been automatically enrolled in your 403(b) plan, make sure that your assigned contribution rate and investments are appropriate for your circumstances.

What are the contribution limits?

You can defer up to \$18,000 of your pay to a 403(b) plan in 2016. If your plan allows Roth contributions, you can split your contribution between pre-tax and Roth contributions any way you wish. Unlike 401(k) plans, employee elective deferrals to 403(b) plans aren't subject to discrimination testing (which in 401(k) plans can often significantly limit the amount higher-paid employees can defer). If your plan permits, you may also be able to make "catch-up" contributions to your account. You can contribute up to an additional \$6,000 in 2016 if you'll be age 50 or older by the end of the year. If you have 15 years of service with your employer (even if you haven't attained age 50) a special Section 403(b) rule may also allow you to make annual catch-up contributions of \$3,000, up to \$15,000 lifetime. If you're eligible for both rules, then any catch-up contributions you make count first against your 15-year \$15,000 lifetime limit. If you also contribute to a 401(k), 403(b), SIMPLE, or SARSEP plan maintained by the same or a different employer, then your total elective deferrals to all of these plans--both pre-tax and Roth--can't exceed \$18,000 in 2016, plus catch-up contributions. It's up to you to make sure you don't exceed the limits if you contribute to plans of more than one employer.

Traditional IRA / Roth IRA

The committee recognizes that an IRA is not strictly a church controlled plan, but given that it is often used in combination with other available individual retirement planning options including a 403 (b) plan, we provide a general overview for information.

A **traditional IRA** is an individual retirement arrangement (IRA). The IRA is held at a custodian institution such as a bank or brokerage, and may be invested in anything that the custodian allows (for instance, a bank may allow certificates of deposit, and a brokerage may allow stocks and mutual funds). Unlike the Roth IRA, the only criterion for being eligible to contribute to a Traditional IRA is sufficient income to make the contribution. However, the best provision of a Traditional IRA — the tax-deductibility of contributions — has strict eligibility requirements based on income, filing status, and availability of other retirement plans. Transactions in the account, including interest, dividends, and capital gains, are not subject to tax while still in the account, but upon withdrawal from the account, withdrawals are subject to federal income tax. This is in contrast to a Roth IRA, in which contributions are never tax-deductible, but qualified withdrawals are tax free. The traditional IRA also has more restrictions on withdrawals than a Roth IRA. With both types of IRA, transactions inside the account (including capital gains, dividends, and interest) incur no tax liability.

Traditional IRAs (originally called Regular IRAs) were created in 1975 and made available for tax reporting that year as well. The original contribution amount in 1975 was limited to \$1,500 or 15% of the wages/salaries/tips reported on line 8 of the Federal form 1040 (1975).

Traditional IRA contributions are limited as follows:

Year	Age 49 and Below	Age 50 and Above
2005	\$4,000	\$4,500
2006–2007	\$4,000	\$5,000
2008–2012*	\$5,000	\$6,000
2013–2016	\$5,500	\$6,500

Roth IRA (Individual Retirement Arrangement) is a retirement plan under US law that is generally not taxed, provided certain conditions are met. The tax law of the United States allows a tax reduction on a limited amount of saving for retirement. The Roth IRA's principal difference from most other tax advantaged retirement plans is that, rather than granting a tax break for money placed into the plan, the tax break is granted on the money withdrawn from the plan during retirement.

A Roth IRA can be an individual retirement *account* containing investments in securities, usually common stocks and bonds, often through mutual funds (although other investments, including derivatives, notes, certificates of deposit, and real estate are possible). A Roth IRA can also be an individual retirement annuity, which is an annuity contract or an endowment contract purchased from a life insurance company. As with all IRAs, the Internal Revenue Service mandates specific eligibility and filing status requirements. A Roth IRA's main advantages are its tax structure and the additional flexibility that this tax structure provides. Also, there are fewer restrictions on the investments that can be made in the plan than many other tax advantaged plans, and this adds somewhat to the popularity, though the investment options available depend on the trustee (or the place where the plan is established).

The total contributions allowed per year to all IRAs is the lesser of one's taxable compensation (which is not the same as adjusted gross income) and the limit amounts as seen below (this total may be split up between any number of traditional and Roth IRAs. In the case of a married couple, each spouse may contribute the amount listed):

	Age 49 and Below	Age 50 and Above
1998–2001	\$2,000	\$2,000
2002–2004	\$3,000	\$3,500
2005	\$4,000	\$4,500
2006–2007	\$4,000	\$5,000
2008–2012	\$5,000	\$6,000
2013–2016	\$5,500	\$6,500

B. Pension plan considerations (Canada):

Registered retirement Savings Plan (RRSP)

A Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP) is a type of Canadian account for holding savings and investment assets. RRSPs have various tax advantages compared to investing outside of tax-

preferred accounts. They were introduced in 1957 to promote savings for retirement by employees and self-employed people. They must comply with a variety of restrictions stipulated in the Canadian *Income Tax Act*. Approved assets include savings accounts, guaranteed investment certificates (GICs), bonds, mortgage loans, mutual funds, income trusts, corporate shares, foreign currency and labour-sponsored funds. Rules determine the maximum contributions, the timing of contributions, the assets allowed, and the eventual conversion to a Registered Retirement Income Fund (RRIF) at age 71.

At present, ministers are urged to use the funds earmarked as retirement from their churches to invest them in a growth fund of their choice. Given the present rates of return, the cumulative total may be well below the amount required to retire comfortably, even after decades of investment.

Example: Deposit \$8000.00 per year / 25 years / @ 3% = approx. \$300,000.00. While this may be a substantial sum, the payout is taxable. Withdrawing \$3000.00 per month will deplete the fund in less than 10 years. Of course, over 25 years many variables may come into play, such as higher / lower rates, and / or other income.

Disadvantages of a self controlled registered retirement savings plan (RRSP):

1. Monies can be withdrawn at any time, for any reason by the owner at which time they are taxable in his hands.
2. Owner makes the choices of investment, possibly without professional assistance or advice and may result in poor returns. On the other hand, depending on his expertise these could also be considerably higher.
3. If there is no matching investment from the owner, he can develop the mindset that it is of little or no perceived value.

Alternative RRSP options:

RPP: Defined Contribution Plan

Contributions are put into a locked-in RSP account. Contributions can be matching by the employee, or not. It depends on how the employer decides to set it up.

Benefit: It guarantees a pension for the employee as they cannot withdraw the funds (since they're locked in), until they actually retire. At retirement, there is a minimum and maximum withdrawal amounts. This means that the pensioner cannot withdraw the entire account in the first couple of years in retirement. This provides a lasting cash flow through retirement.

Although they can't withdraw or move it during employment, the accumulating pension account is theirs and they can take it with them if they leave the employment, i.e. at that point they're able to transfer it to another institution, but it will always remain locked-in.

Negative: Employees cannot withdraw from a locked in plan until retirement. No exceptions – not even for Home Buyers Plan, Life Long Learning Plan, or emergency income.

At retirement, locked-in accounts have a minimum and maximum withdrawal rate to “guarantee” a lasting pension. This is good in theory, but it’s restrictive in practice. For example, a 76yr old man with \$215,000 in their locked in retirement income fund (what it becomes when it starts paying), can only withdraw \$12,600-\$19,500 this year. The amount changes every year, but not significantly. If his living expenses are \$3000 a month, he cannot get that much out.

Fees are also typically more than a regular RRSP plan. There are also the investment management fees from whatever firm manages the investments. However, although the fees are more, they’re not typically prohibitive. Many companies justify them in order to lock-in the employee’s retirement benefit.

Employees do not have much flexibility in how the contributions are invested. Typically, it’s through the investment manager chosen by the employer and that manager gives a few options on different investment strategies, such as low, med, high risk traditional mutual fund options.

This is still only a defined CONTRIBUTION plan, not a defined BENEFIT plan. The difference is that the pension will only be as much as the contributions contributed by the employer and employee. It may not provide a full pension amount at the end of the day and this is really important to communicate to employees.

Group RRSP option:

In order to avoid the actuarial costs a group RRSP plan can also be an option.

These are less expensive to administer but it requires the CDN federation to be on the same page with respect to how it wants to provide the benefit. Companies such as Manulife, Sunlife, Great West Life are some of the more popular group RRSP providers.

Under a group RRSP structure, the employee has more flexibility since this is only a regular RRSP plan (i.e. They can withdraw the money if they wanted – such as for First Time Home Buyers Plan, or Life Long Learning Plan, or simply for income).

However, the investment options are still limited to the company you go with. These are typically segregated funds (more expensive), and the options are relatively limited.

The RRSP cannot typically be transferred to another institution until you leave the employer or retire.

The Canadian Council of Christian Charity Pension option:

The Retirement Committee contacted the Canadian Council of Christian Charities (CCCC) to provide information as to the issues / concerns with establishing a pension plan with the United Reformed Churches. The following is the information that we received from them.

“We are providing this information as a CCCC Member service, therefore it does not constitute legal advice nor a legal opinion. Also, this commentary is provided at a high, general level to aid you in understanding the basics.

To start, it might be helpful by recapping the salient parts of our discussion as to the highest level discernment issue that first needs to be addressed, namely:

Do your churches or federation wish to set up a pension plan arrangement, or not?

If an organization provides absolutely no explicit or implicit guarantee to assist their workers in their retirement needs, beyond a general desire to help them at that point in their lives "as the Lord provides" (i.e. if money is available), there is an argument that there is no contract being entered into. Accordingly, legislation – such as a provincial Pension Benefits Act (PBA) – would not come into play.

However, as soon as any retirement payout arrangement is formally committed to by an employer, in any shape or form (e.g. a set amount, percentage of earnings, etc.), in writing or not, the government takes an interest in ensuring the employee’s right to that promised money is protected. This invokes provincial authority under the applicable provincial PBA and federal authority under the Income Tax Act (ITA).

This government authority requires a pension plan be registered under both a provincial PBA and the ITA. Contributions into those plans then become subject to provincial regulatory bodies (e.g. The Financial Services Commission of Ontario - FSCO) and Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) oversight. This includes reporting requirements to each of these government bodies.

The benefits are tax deductible contributions and tax-deferred earnings while the funds are held in the pension accumulation account, with pension payouts in retirement at a (hopefully) lower tax rate.

Though you had noted the desire for a “federation-wide retirement plan” for pastors in both Canada and the United States, pension plans are country specific. In Canada’s case, the pension authority rests at the provincial level with the tax issues at the federal level.

Accordingly, there will need to be two separate pension plans for each country’s employees, though you may choose to administer them from one office, for the sake of efficiency.

We can now address the specific matters raised in your e-mail, not covered in the above background comments above.

Pension Plan Types

The most common are, in no particular order:

Registered Pension Plan (RPP), in the form of either:

a) Defined Contribution RPP (“DC Plans”) – where the contribution from the employer and employee are defined, creating an accumulation account for the employee which is converted to a pension payout mechanism at retirement to provide a retirement income stream.

b) Defined Benefit RPP (“DB Plans”) - where the benefit is defined and fixed at retirement. This requires sufficient employer and employee contributions and earnings to provide a pool of assets from which a set retirement payment. To ensure this, a periodic actuarial assessment is required to determine if the plan is sound and can meet its commitments.

Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP), in the form of individual accounts or a group RRSP. Employer and employee contributions are placed in the RRSP account for the employee to accumulate, along with earnings. Similar to the Defined Contribution RPP, it’s the balance in the account at retirement that will determine what level of retirement benefit will be paid out.

Pros, Cons and Other Comments on Pension Plan Types

RPP - These are the more traditional types of pension plans. The contributions are usually immediately vested and are locked in until a minimum age of 55. Payouts do not start until the employee retires. Early access to the money is only allowed under specific circumstances (e.g. small account rules; hardship due to impending death).

An RPP is given special status in the Income Tax Act where the Employer contribution is listed as one of the very limited payments an employer can make on an employee’s behalf that is not subject to statutory deductions (i.e. Canada Pension Plan contributions, Employment Insurance premiums, and tax withholdings). This makes it commonly referred to as a “fringe benefit”, as its not a taxable benefit.

An employee’s RPP contributions are made from income after statutory deductions have been applied, though CRA administratively allows an exemption from tax withholdings without the employee needing to file a form T1213 to request relief.

RPPs are governed by a Plan Text. It sets out the administrative rules for the running of the RPP, any special rules, and to ensure compliance with the law. To answer a few of your specific points, some rules would be:

> Enrollment eligibility - the concept is that those defined as eligible to be enrolled must enroll, unless they sign a waiver.

> Contributions - normally a mandatory Employer contribution is required. Whether Employee contributions are to be mandatory will be plan-specific. Voluntary Employee contributions are also normally allowed. The total of all contributions cannot exceed 18% of earnings, up to an absolute dollar limit set by law each year.

Virtually all RPP accounts are portable nowadays, but must be transferred to a "locked-in" account (e.g. transferred to another RPP or Locked-In RRSP) to retain the rule the funds can’t be accessed ahead of age 55. Some plans, like ours, the Canadian Council of Christian Charities Employees

Pension Plan (the CCCC Plan for short), allow employees who leave employment with a Participating Employer to stay in our CCCC Plan if they have not account to transfer to (note: new contributions are not allowed, but they are not forced out, like some plans require).

DB Plans are becoming less popular outside of large companies or the government. The administration costs can be higher, as actuarial assessments are legally required and there's more in-depth government reporting. The risks to the employer are higher when a guaranteed payout is promised. However, that surety of payment is also a strength, in comparison to concerns that the payouts a Defined Contribution RPP account has no guarantees and an RRSP account can run out of money if the pensioner outlives its principal.

DC Plans are becoming more common for employers who want a more traditional pension plan, but without the risk that an underfunded DB Plan can bring. However, these plans usually allow the employee to determine where the money in their account is invested. However, the employer can retain that responsibility as well. In either case, there's still a risk that if any "foolish" investment is made, there is no "safe haven" clause in Canadian law that would prevent the employee from taking legal action against the employer if the account doesn't perform as expected. The positives are that these accounts are easier to administer and should, in the normal course, provide a good pension payout and more flexibility (i.e. though the yearly payout ranges are set by law, the account holder can arrange for withdrawals at the low, high, or in between part of the range to create cash flow to fit their needs).

RRSP - These are fully accessible by the employee anytime. The contributions are immediately vested for the employee's benefit.

The popularity of these types of accounts is that they require minimal employer administration. However, in light of the fact they are "porous" (i.e. can be accessed by the employee with no encumbrances), some have argued they are retirement savings in name only, as the account could be empty at retirement.

Employer contributions to RRSPs do not have the special privilege in the ITA that Employer RPP contributions have. Both employer and employee contributions to an RRSP are made after statutory deductions have been applied (i.e. an employer's contribution is added to the employee's gross pay as a taxable benefit). CRA administratively allows an exemption from tax withholdings at source without the employee needing to file a T1213 to request relief.

RRSPs can be accessed and paid back without tax penalty for specific programs set out in the ITA (e.g. first time home buyers; life-time learning). These rules do not apply to RPPs.

There is the opinion that RRSPs are less "paternalistic" in that they allow the employee to be fully in charge of their retirement account. This can be both a good or bad thing, depending on the individual employee's skill with money.

The main decisions to go with an RPP or RRSP often come down to:

- RPP, if there is a desire for funds to be insured as being there at retirement.

- RRSP, if the desire to have flexible access to retirement funds, either ahead of retirement or at retirement, is an important issue that trumps the higher level of certainty an RPP provides that a pension account will exist and be distributed more evenly over an employee's retirement years.

Special Issue:

If a US citizen pastor serves here in Canada, it may be appropriate for that pastor to sign a waiver and not contribute to a Canadian RPP. The reason is that he and his spouse would be tied down to filing a Canadian tax return until their passing, as the pension payout must come from a Canadian financial institution as Canadian-sourced income (i.e. they will get a Canadian "T-slip" that is reported by the financial institution to CRA). In this case, an equivalent to the Employer pension contribution amount might be paid so the US pastor as additional salary so he can personally contribute to a private pension plan or account in the US.

The information above was echoed by an portfolio investment manager and certified financial planner that was also contacted by the committee. The following are the comments that we received:

RPP: Defined Contribution Plan

You basically decide how much the contributions will be per employee and they're put into a locked-in RPP account. Contributions can be matched by the employee, or not. It depends on how the employer decides to set it up.

Benefit:

- It guarantees a pension for the employee as they cannot withdraw the funds (since they're locked in), until they actually retire. Also, a good point to note is that at retirement, there is a minimum and maximum withdrawal amounts. This means that the pensioner cannot withdraw the entire account in the first couple of years in retirement. This truly provides a lasting cash flow through retirement.
- Although they can't withdraw or move it during employment, the accumulating pension account is theirs and they can take it with them if they leave the employment. (i.e. At that point they're able to transfer it to another institution, but it will always remain locked-in).

Negative:

- Employees cannot withdraw from a locked in plan until retirement. No exceptions – not even for Home Buyers Plan, Life Long Learning Plan, or emergency income.
- At retirement, locked-in accounts have a minimum and maximum withdrawal rate to "guarantee" a lasting pension. This is good in theory, but it's restrictive in practice. For example, a 76yr old man with \$215,000 in their locked in retirement income fund (what it becomes when it starts paying), can only withdraw \$12,600-\$19,500 this year. The # changes a bit every year, but not significantly. If his living expenses are \$3,000 a month, he cannot get that much out).
- Fees would be similar to the US option you sent. They are also typically more than a regular RRSP plan (usually you pay a start-up fee and then an actuarial administrative fee per the US structure you provided. There are also the investment management fees from whatever firm

manages the investments). However, although the fees are more, they're not typically prohibitive. Many companies justify them in order to lock-in the employee's retirement benefit.

- Employees do not have much flexibility in how the contributions are invested. Typically, it's through the investment manager chosen by the employer and that manager gives a few options on different investment strategies (i.e. Low, medium, high risk traditional mutual fund options).
- This is still only a defined CONTRIBUTION plan, not a defined BENEFIT plan. The difference is that the pension will only be as much as the contributions contributed by the employer and employee. It may not provide a full pension amount at the end of the day and this is really important to communicate to employees.

Group RRSP option:

If you wanted to avoid the actuarial costs and were comfortable with a non-locked in structure, a group RRSP plan can also be an option.

- These are less expensive to administer but it requires the Canadian federation to be on the same page with respect to how it wants to provide the benefit. Companies such as Manulife, Sunlife, Great West Life are some of the more popular group RRSP providers.
- Under a group RRSP structure, the employee has more flexibility since this is only a regular RRSP plan (i.e. They can withdraw the money if they wanted – such as for First Time Home Buyers Plan, or Life Long Learning Plan, or simply for income).
- However, the investment options are still limited to the company you go with (i.e. Sunlife's mutual funds). These are typically segregated funds (more expensive), and the options are relatively limited.
- The RRSP cannot typically be transferred to another institution until you leave the employer or retire (although I have seen some exceptions in the past which allow the employee to transfer at the end of the year to the institution of their choice. Thus permitting them to invest the way they want. This is good and bad, depending on the employee's level of fiscal responsibility)."

After reviewing the different types of pension plans and pension options, the Committee has determined that establishing a registered pension plan (RPP) is not feasible for the following reasons:

1. It is too costly and time consuming for the URCNA to administer on its own: An annual information return would need to be filed yearly, an actuary would need to be hired (defined benefit plan), plus potential audit fees (as the fund grows) and yearly administration fees;
2. It does not meet the accessibility requirement (it would not be accessible to the future retiree until he reaches 55 years of age);
3. American ministers, working in Canada would need to file a tax return in Canada until they pass away (extra cost to the future retiree); and
4. Investing options are limited.

One option presented to the committee which would offset the cost and time issue was that of establishing an umbrella group under the CCCC defined contribution plan. The following is a brief overview of this option as sent to us:

If your Canadian member organizations of your federation are interested in making use of a DC RPP without going through the set up of such a plan themselves, the CCCC Plan is a viable option that is well worth considering. Full details can be found here:

<https://www.cccc.org/pension>

and in the sub-sections providing CCCC Plan details, information (including helpful FAQs) for both Employers and Employees. All but the administrative forms are accessible without passwords.

We also have a unique option that would allow the federation to join as an “umbrella group”. Here your main office would gather pension contributions from all member organizations for their employees and remit them as group to the CCCC Plan. This could be a creative way for you to meet one of the goals you said you may have, namely: providing a more consistent pension contribution for all pastors in the federation, independent of whether the employing church is small or large. This would allow the sharing of the financial burden by the federation office taking in the funds and the allocating the contributions evenly among the pastors. The only stipulation would be that the amount so allocated would always need to represent the minimum 5% Employer contribution required by the Plan Text. If you wish to pursue this option, we can offer more specifics.

Also, as an umbrella group, the underlying churches would not need to individually be CCCC Members (though its beneficial for other reasons to have membership with us).

The alternative would be for each church or ministry to individually decide to join or not. Those that wish to join would need to sign a Participation Agreement with their own unique contribution rates (the umbrella group is required by CRA to have Sub-Participation Agreements sign that would all have the same contribution rates).

The Committee sees the CCCC defined contribution plan as a viable option for Canadian churches if the body determines that having the money locked in and inaccessible until the retiree reaches 55 is a desirable feature.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Based on our study of the factors Synod mandated us to consider, we do not recommend that the URCNA adopt a federation wide pension plan for the following reasons:

1. Differences in pension/retirement laws in Canada & the U.S. make a singular federation wide plan infeasible.
2. Costs of administering a federation wide plan (one for Canada, one for the U.S) are no different than if a church initiates its own plan.
3. A U.S. church retirement plan (403b) can be initiated by any individual church or group of churches if they so desire. It does not require a URCNA U.S.- wide 403 b plan, nor is there any

advantage to making it a U.S.-wide plan. There are churches in the federation that have already established their own 403 b plan and have found it feasible and beneficial.

4. All the advantages of planning, administering, and choosing options for a plan can be tailored by an individual church plan without a federation wide plan.

5. The cost burden on smaller churches is not lessened by a federation wide plan. The targets for a church's % contributions to the plan would be the same, and added to it are the increased yearly administrative costs. A feasible alternative for helping smaller churches meet their budget in providing for their pastor's retirement needs is found in "Church Assistance / Needy Church Fund" functioning well within some classes in the federation, e.g. Classis PNW and Classis Western Canada.

6. Both countries already provide for multiple options for retirement plans which do not necessitate a URCNA Canada -wide federation plan.

Recommendation #1. That Synod refer the Compensation and Retirement Study Committee Report to the churches for study.

Grounds:

a. The report provides information that can assist the churches in assessing how they may honorably provide for the retirement needs of their ministers.

b. Referring a Study Committee Report to the churches for study is in accord with the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix D, 3.2.

Recommendation #2. That Synod dismiss the Compensation and Retirement Study Committee and thank them for their work.

Humbly submitted,
Huibert den Boer, Sr.
Pam Hessels
Robert Huisjen
Mark Van Der Molen
Rev. Hank Van der Woerd, Chairman

Report of the Committee on Church Membership Departures To the Synod of Wyoming 2016

Esteemed Brethren,

Mandate

Synod Visalia 2014 (Article 61) established a study committee with the following fourfold mandate:

- To review and evaluate the various ways by which members leave or attempt to leave a local congregation, whether under discipline or not. The various ways include but are not limited to transfer, withdrawal, resignation, desertion, or forsaking the church;
- To define the various ways and recommend which ways of leaving may be appropriate and under what circumstances;
- To recommend pastoral advice on how consistories may deal with the various ways of leaving; and,
- To consider and, if appropriate, recommend for information what changes may be necessary to the Church Order.

Introduction

Our mandate calls for a treatment of the various ways by which members leave or attempt to leave the local church. The majority of the report will focus on members who do so in some way other than by transfer to a church with which we have ecumenical relations. Some attempt to be released to join churches with which we do not have ecumenical relations, others to resign their membership in order to escape church discipline and/or to depart for another church. Such attempts gave rise to the overtures that prompted the appointment of our committee.

We will deal with transfers to churches with which we have ecumenical relations and other less controversial types of leaving in the pastoral advice near the end of this report.

We want to acknowledge our indebtedness to two sources upon which we have heavily relied. The first is a self-published paper entitled *Reformed Church Polity Concerning Withdrawal of Church Membership* by Rev. Dr. R. Dean Anderson. His article can be found at <http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/pdfs/withdrawal.pdf>. The second is a synodical study committee report from the Reformed Church of New Zealand, *The Discipline of Those Who Resign*. That report was submitted to the RCNZ synod of 2002. It is available from any member of our committee from the chairman of our committee at rpontier@xplornet.com.

1. Historical Perspectives

1.1 Overview

The history of Reformed church polity in the Netherlands indicates a shift or evolution of thought regarding those who withdraw or resign from the church. In the 1570's, all who left the Reformed church to join a sect, a false church, or no church were to be excommunicated. By the mid 19th century, especially after Abraham Kuyper, the church

came to be viewed as a voluntary society to which members could not be bound against their will or subject to discipline after resignation. In the following paragraphs we trace that transition of thought and practice.

1.2 The 16th and 17th Centuries

Dr. R. Dean Anderson, making reference to a study by Prof. A. Th. Van Deursen, concludes that during this period, members could only separate from the Reformed churches by death or excommunication. Only the consistory had the authority to determine a person's membership status; whether to establish membership and whether to end it, apart from death. Any who left the Reformed church without the consistory's authorization were excommunicated.

Anderson summarized this period with two points:

- 1) No one can of his own volition terminate his membership in the church of Christ. Only the overseers appointed by Christ can come to that decision.
- 2) Even when a church member no longer values being a member of the Reformed Church and joins another (sectarian or false) church, then the entire procedure of admonition, suspension from the Lord's Supper, and the 3 steps of excommunication, is followed.¹

1.3 The Secession of 1834

The churches of the Secession of 1834 did not initially make provision for members to voluntarily leave or withdraw from the church. Excommunication remained the only way to terminate the membership of those who did not adhere to the Reformed faith in doctrine or life.

A major change was established at the 1863 synod in Franeker and confirmed at the 1866 synod in Amsterdam. These synods decided that members who were under discipline for joining an independent Reformed congregation could withdraw from their present consistory's jurisdiction by resigning their membership. If they continued to profess the Reformed faith and were not guilty of a gross public sin, then, instead of proceeding to excommunication, the consistory would issue a statement that they were no longer members of the church.

This decision, although narrowly focused, eventually served to undermine the principle that only the consistory has the authority to determine church membership. Subsequent synods attempted to limit its application to those who absented themselves from their churches while maintaining a commitment to the Reformed faith. Some consistories began to apply it more broadly by allowing members to resign while under discipline for false doctrine or ungodly living.

1.4 The Doleantie

The church polity of the *Doleantie* was influenced primarily by Abraham Kuyper and F. L. Rutgers. Drawing a distinction between the organic / invisible body of Christ and the instituted / visible body of Christ, Kuyper believed church polity concerned only the

¹ Anderson, Rev. Dr. R Dean, *Reformed Church Polity Concerning Withdrawal of Church Membership* (<http://anderson.modelcrafts.eu/articles>, 2013), p. 4.

visible church, voluntarily constituted by those who confessed the faith. No one could be forced to become or to remain a member of the visible church against his or her will. An individual's will was thought to determine their membership status. Therefore, no consistory could discipline a person who had renounced membership in the church or be forced to receive or keep members who did not qualify for membership. The church retained the authority to excommunicate members whose profession of the faith was no longer credible.

1.5 English and Scottish Presbyterianism and the OPC

The report submitted in 2002 to synod of the RCNZ contains a more extensive treatment of this history than presented here. The report describes a lively debate between Hodge, Thornwall, and Dabney regarding this statement in their book of discipline, "The church is so far a voluntary society, that no one can either be made to join it, or required to remain it it, against his will." The report's treatment of Presbyterianism concludes thus:

"It is interesting to see how this debate eventually informed the OPC's Book of Discipline. There we find the following helpful distinctions. Removal from the roll may be by transfer when the congregation to which the member moves is approved by the session. Removal from the roll, without censure, takes place when the congregation to which the member moves is not approved as a church of like faith and practice, but it appears that the spiritual interests of the member will nevertheless be advanced by their uniting with such a church. Erasure takes place when the member insists on moving to a church not of like faith and practice, where the session deems that this will not advance his spiritual interests. Likewise, erasure may take place where a member simply informs the session he is resigning, without indicating a desire to join another church. In this last case, allowance is made that the session may institute "other disciplinary actions." The word, "other," would seem to indicate that erasure is regarded as a disciplinary measure. Finally, erasure may be used where a member simply unites with another church without obtaining a certificate of dismissal.

"In all cases where the session does not see the move as furthering the member's spiritual interests, it is expected that every effort will be made to dissuade the member from this course. In cases where the member seeks to join another church and where transfer is not possible, a certificate of standing is given. The circumstances are also recorded in the session minutes."

(2002 Acts of Synod RCNZ, p. 4-196-197.)

1.6 The CRCNA

The CRCNA vigorously debated between two positions during the first half of the twentieth century. The Synod of 1918 adopted the position that resignation of membership, although a grievous sin, ends the consistory's jurisdiction. Therefore, discipline must cease or may not be initiated when a member resigns. This position was reaffirmed by the Synods of 1924, 1926, 1936, and 1953. Those who frequently protested this position argued that it is inconsistent to call resignation a grievous sin and then to exempt from church discipline someone who commits that sin. By doing so, a consistory would become complicit in that sin.

In their well-known *Revised Church Order Commentary*, Van Dellen and Monsma offer this comment on the topic of resignation:

“It is true that membership in the organized church cannot be forced and should remain to be the result of voluntary acts on the part of all its members. But it is also true that the members at the time of their confession of faith solemnly promised to be true to the Church and to submit themselves to church discipline if discipline should become necessary. Resigning one’s membership is a very grievous sin, and a consistory should proceed with censuring such a one unless he determinately persists in breaking his relationship with the Church. Very often we fear consistories have accepted resignations rather quickly in order to be free from the sad duty of excommunicating the party in question. This should never be done. Discipline must ever run its full course unless the object of discipline makes it impossible [i.e. by resignation]. Then the full responsibility will also rest on his shoulders. And, consistories should so labor with resigning members that they can truthfully announce to the churches that the utmost has been done to restrain the member in question from taking this step and that the responsibility is his.”

(Revised Church Order Commentary, 1967, p. 316)

In 1974, the CRCNA introduced a set of rules for “lapsing” memberships. These rules applied to baptized and communicant members alike who did not maintain meaningful contact with the church for a period of two years while remaining in the vicinity, claiming commitment to the Christian faith and attendance at other churches, and maintaining a witness free of any public sin that warranted discipline. Synod urged consistories to take this form of administrative discipline rather than making “an automatic application of a rule to the circumstances”. [1974 Acts, pp. 81, 82].

Consistories may be tempted to do the very thing Synod warned against, by automatically “lapsing” members rather than dealing with difficult cases. Furthermore, the term “lapsing” describes a member’s action. Therefore, it is inappropriate to use it to describe a Consistory’s response to their action.

The CRCNA did not commonly practice the “erasure” of memberships. Even so we note that Synod 1950 mentions it as a “traditional” ecclesiastical action applied to members who had become delinquent. [1950 Acts, p.40; 1953 Acts, p. 49].

1.7 The OPC

The Orthodox Presbyterian *Book of Discipline* applies “erasure... an act of discipline without full process” when members depart in an irregular manner (e.g. withdrawal, resignation, or joining a church of unlike faith).

“Chapter V

Cases without Full Process

1. When a person comes before a judicatory as his own accuser, the judicatory may proceed to judgment without full process, determining first, what offense, if any has been committed, and, if a serious offense (cf.

Chapter III, Section 7.b [6]) has been committed, what censure shall be pronounced.

2. Erasure is an act of discipline without full process.
 - a. The names of members may be removed from the roll of the church by erasure according to the following provisions:
 - (1) When a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice, nor a church which will advance his spiritual interests, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a certificate of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; on being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.
 - (2) When a member of a particular church, whether or not he be charged with an offense, informs the session that he does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the efforts of the session to dissuade him from his course have failed, it shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes, unless the session institutes or continues other disciplinary action against him.
 - (3) When a member unites with a church of another denomination without a certificate of dismission, the session may erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.
 - (4) When a member cannot be found, the session may, after two years, erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.”

This provision for erasure essentially covers the circumstances of concern to our committee, i.e., that of member withdrawal, resignation, or joining a church not of like faith and practice. The church retains discretion in taking this action and when making it known together with its precipitating circumstances. While erasure effectively ends the church’s oversight of an individual, it does not indicate the church’s approval of, or acquiescence to, the irregular circumstances of the departure.

1.8 The RPCNA

Chapter 4 of the RPCNA *Book of Discipline* provides for the removal / dismissal of members who withdraw, desert, or resign:

2. Where appropriate, the court may elect to remove members from church membership without formal censure, as follows:
 - a. If a member does not attend or show other signs of interest in the church, his session may, after sufficient attempts to reclaim the person, inform him that his actions have caused the session to remove him from church membership. The session should warn the person that outside the visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. A Certificate of Dismissal shall be sent to the person removed. (See Suggested Form 2-A.)
 - b. If a member requests that he be removed from membership, his request may be granted. If it appears to the session that a member has requested removal merely to avoid church discipline, the request shall not be given effect until the disciplinary process has been properly concluded. If no transfer to another church is planned, the session should warn the person that outside the visible church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

A Certificate of Dismissal shall be sent to the person removed. (See Suggested Form 2-B.)

- c. If a member cannot be located or contacted, he may be removed from the membership of the church.
- d. The session shall inform the people under its oversight of the member's removal and the reasons for it.
3. The following shall apply as appropriate:
 - a. In giving information to the people under its oversight regarding any censure, the court should use discretion in determining how much to reveal to those under its oversight of the details of the case. Only that which is necessary and proper should be stated, and then normally only to the members. The court shall seek to protect the sinner from undue exposure and those under its oversight must not engage in gossip or improper curiosity.

1.9 The RCUS

The Constitution of *the Reformed Church in the US* includes “erasure of name” as means of formal discipline:

Article 114.

Discipline shall be exercised in the form of admonition, censure, erasure of name, suspension, deposition, excommunication and restoration. The Spiritual Council shall inform the disciplined offender(s) of the right to appeal, the right to counsel, and the necessary procedures in filing an appeal.

“Erasure” can apply to a member who has withdrawn or deserted the local church:

Article 119.

If a member is negligent in partaking of the Holy Communion, or refuses to contribute to the support of the Church, or continually absents himself from public worship, such conduct, in one or all of these requirements, shall be regarded as an offense against the Church, and he shall be admonished by the pastor or elders. If after admonition he continues in such negligence of duty, the Spiritual Council shall notify him that he is no longer in good and regular standing. If after not less than six months and not more than one year of such suspension he continues in such neglect of duty, the Spiritual Council shall erase his name.

If any member shall unite with another congregation of the Reformed Church or of another denomination without a certificate of dismissal, the Spiritual Council shall likewise erase his name.

When a member is erased, it shall be specified in the minutes of the Spiritual Council whether this action is administrative or judicial.

Every case of discipline by erasure is either “judicial” or “administrative”.

Article 116.

Every case in which there is a charge of offense against a church member or officer shall be known, in its original and appellate stages, as a judicial case. Every other case shall be known as a nonjudicial or administrative case.

1.10 The RCNZ

In 1992, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand appointed a study committee to deal with the matter of unilateral resignation of church membership. In 1995, the Synod deemed the committee's report unsatisfactory. In 1998, Synod did not act on a second report because it lacked time to deal with the report and new criticism. Synod recommitted the matter to a reconstituted committee that reported back to Synod 2002, which adopted the majority of the committee's recommendations of pastoral advice.

These three reports demonstrate how the RCNZ changed its position regarding the discipline of persons who resign their membership in the church. In 1992, the committee recommended that all discipline cease upon resignation. By 2002, the committee recommended that discipline may continue after resignation in some instances; i.e. against members who resign under discipline or without affiliating with another church. Such discipline should involve concurrence by presbytery and be abbreviated in form; e.g. a clear warning to the individual that he or she is outside the kingdom of God, and a similar announcement or statement to the congregation.

At their 24th synod, in April of 2002, the RCNZ adopted the following guidelines:

Art. 86 - Report 18 – Discipline of Those Who Resign

Rev. P. Archbald presented the report on the Discipline of Those Who Resign.

Synod decided:

1. To receive the report.
2. That with regard to those who unilaterally resign from the church, the session shall, depending on the persons, times, places and sins, do what is edifying according to the judgement of the session, with advice or concurrence of the presbytery as needed.
3. To adopt the following guidelines with regard to those who unilaterally resign from the church (These guidelines presume that the resignee is still accessible. If he is not, then discipline should not be pursued, for there is no direct evidence as to the resignee's state):
 - a. The elders should evaluate their prior relationship with the would-be resignee, seeking:
 - To remove any stumbling blocks that might drive the member away,
 - Forgiveness for any lack of care on their part,
 - To build a more positive relationship, if possible, before it is too late.
 - b. The elders should weigh the needs of the resignee, as to whether he may be helped by being under the care of a church to which he cannot be transferred.
 - c. The elders should decide whether a disciplinary approach is necessary to serve the Lord's honour, the church's purity, and the member's welfare. In order to make this decision, the following should be investigated:

- Will the profession of faith vows necessarily be broken by the resignee's choices, or does he simply place himself in danger?
 - Is the member resigning in order to escape discipline, or to pursue false worship in a false church, or to give up public worship altogether?
 - Is the member resigning due to apostasy?
- d. If discipline is not warranted, a statement may be made, stating the church's desire that the Lord may still bless the departing brother/sister, or sadness about the outcome, warnings to the congregation about the danger of joining churches that are not confessionally Reformed, and so on, according to the situation.
- e. If discipline is warranted, the elders should decide whether to use the existing procedures, or a procedure which cuts short the usual process, as per the following steps:
- If dissuasion fails to move the resignee, the elders should admonish/rebuke him.
 - The resignee should be suspended from the Lord's Table.
 - If there is no resolution of the problem, concurrence should be sought from the presbytery as soon as is practicable.
 - First the resignee, and then the congregation, should be informed of the date and time of the church service in which the disciplinary statement will be read out.
- f. Disciplinary statements may include the following details:
- The resignee's name,
 - Summary of the resignee's sin(s),
 - A proclamation of repentance as the way of restoration,
 - An expression of grief in the outcome,
 - A warning to the congregation to avoid taking the same path,
 - A declaration that the former member is to be regarded as outside the Kingdom of God.

Synod decided to take no action on 5.6 of the report's "Guidelines": "In the case of a member acknowledging unbelief, a disciplinary statement should be used, rather than the existing process."

Synod further decided:

4. That these decisions regarding the discipline of those who unilaterally resign from the church be referred to the Church Order Committee to determine how they should be read in the light of our present church order.
5. That this study committee be thanked and discharged.

(2002 Acts of Synod RZNZ, pp. 1-17f)

1.11 The URCNA

The Church Order of the United Reformed Churches of North American deals with voluntary departures in Article 64 alone:

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

Article 64 only addresses the transfer of membership between Reformed congregations; one Consistory to another. It does not anticipate any request from current members seeking membership in churches with no ecumenical ties to the URCNA. Furthermore, it does not anticipate anyone deserting, withdrawing, or resigning their membership (whether or not they may be worshipping at another church).

The first Synod of the URCNA defeated a motion that sought to include a Church Order provision for “lapsing” members who do not merit ecclesiastical discipline (*Minutes of Synod 1996*, Art. 17). On September 10, 2012, Classis Central U.S. tabled indefinitely an overture to add a provision for “lapsing” membership of “long distance members.” Both attempts raised the concern that to incorporate “lapsing” into our Church Order could lead to laxity in consistorial discipline like that experienced in the CRCNA.

At Synod 2010, the revised Provisional Joint Church Order (PJCO)² contained the following provision regarding the departure of members:

B. The Departure of Members

Members departing to a church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory shall send a letter of testimony concerning their doctrine and life to such a church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care, and shall furnish a copy thereof to the members. The departure of members shall be appropriately announced.”

(Acts of Synod 2010, p. 366.)

Unlike our current Church Order, the PJCO makes it clear that a “letter of testimony” is appropriate for a member departing to church “within the federation or a church which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship.” This is what we commonly call a “transfer” of membership; to another URC or a church with which we have ecclesiastical fellowship.

The 2010 PJCO was intentionally silent with regard to members who do not request a letter of testimony, or who have withdrawn, deserted, or resigned from the church (without regard to whether they may be worshipping at another church). The PJCO Committee offered this explanation for deleting a portion of the 2007 PJCO section on “withdrawal”:

The ‘c’ section, called “The Withdrawal of Members,” stimulated much input and deliberation. In the end we decided to eliminate reference to “withdrawal” from the PJCO altogether and to simply specify in the article that all receptions and departures of members should be appropriately announced. Following are some of the considerations for this decision:

- Having a provision for withdrawal in the Church Order has no precedent in Reformed Church Polity.

² While the PJCO has not been adopted, we take note of this PJCO section since the churches have been encouraged to “harvest the good fruit” of this labor when we consider amendments to the Church Order, (*Acts of Synod 2010*, Art. 41, p. 26).

- Having such a provision would also mean trying to specify or defining [sic] exactly what withdrawing actually is.
- It is true that “withdrawals” is [sic] very much a sinful reality of our day. In spite of much discussion we have not been able to draft anything that is satisfying. We can distinguish between one who leaves to join another church (e.g. Baptist) and one who leaves for other reasons. We can speak of “sinful withdrawal” and “non-sinful withdrawal.” “Non-sinful” could still be “unwise.” PJCO 2007 simply sought to stipulate appropriate announcement of a withdrawal. This single line in PJCO 2007, however, only served to raise questions at the conferences.
- Specifying that all departures of members be appropriately announced would address this need for appropriate announcing withdrawals.
- If we drop the mention of withdrawal, then we are saying that it is a matter of local regulation.
- We cannot address everything in the Church Order, and mere mention of something can inadvertently legitimize the practice.”

(*Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 329, 330)

We believe the 2010 PJCO is correct in not proposing a separate section entitled “withdrawal”, since it merely describes a member’s action. We also note that it does not recommend or prescribe a consistory’s response to a member’s withdrawal.

Our committee solicited and reviewed feedback from our churches concerning how they handle cases involving members resigning while under discipline, withdrawing or disappearing, or joining churches not of like faith or practice. We also reviewed the overtures that led to the formation of our study committee. Such situations, handled on a case-by-case basis, necessarily lead to different outcomes. The silence of our Church Order contributes to ongoing difficulty and confusion in consistories trying to handle them.

We understand why some of our consistories have filled this void by adopting *ad hoc* procedures for the “Release of Membership” to churches with which we do not have ecumenical relations (e.g., CRCNA, RCA, Baptist or independent churches). The consistory sends appropriate membership information and attestation to the receiving church and informs the congregation that the member has “been released to affiliate” there. The nature of affiliation is subject to the ecclesiology of the receiving church.

Such *ad hoc* “release”, similar to what other churches call “erasure”, should not be confused with “lapsing”. The former (i.e. release and erasure) describe ecclesiastical action while the latter (i.e. lapsing) describes a member’s actions. A Consistory may choose to not to “release” a member to a church that does not bear one or more marks of a true church (Belgic Confession, Article 29).

In summary, our current Church Order describes only three (3) ecclesiastical actions with regard to departing members:

1. regular transfer to another church in ecclesiastical fellowship,
2. excommunication of a communicant member, and
3. exclusion of a baptized member.

We have no ecclesiastical provision for how to respond to members who withdraw, desert, resign, or seek membership in a church with which we have no ecumenical relations.

2. Legal Considerations

The attorney member of our committee reviewed material from the Alliance Defending Freedom, a national organization well versed in this area of law. He informs us that civil laws concerning termination of church membership vary according to jurisdiction. Therefore, we limited this section to providing some general principles to help guide our consideration of potential ecclesiastical actions.

Generally speaking, a church cannot be held liable for disciplining a church member or terminating his or her membership. Civil courts generally will not second-guess the relationship among members (or former members) of a church. Churches are afforded wide latitude when they impose discipline on members or former members.

Even so, civil courts have also upheld a citizen's constitutional right to terminate one's membership in a church. The civil courts can view resignation of membership as a withdrawal of consent to church doctrine and/or procedure. Ignoring a member's resignation could be viewed by the courts as an attempt to force a person to remain a member against his or her will.

Does a church expose itself to legal jeopardy if the Consistory disciplines someone who has revoked or resigned his or her membership? At least one state court has allowed a suit to proceed against church elders who attempted to discipline an individual after she had formally withdrawn her membership.³ That same court also upheld the right of individuals to voluntarily and intentionally waive their constitutional right to withdraw from church membership. Such a waiver presupposes two things: first, the church has a written statement (e.g. standalone policy, bylaw article, or Church Order provision) prohibiting the resignation of members; and second, members must sign a document that explicitly declares they have read, understand, and agree to abide by this statement.

We found nothing that explicitly prohibits the resignation of members in our review of NAPARC church policies and the URCNA Church order. We do not recommend such a policy or practice. We thus recognize that churches are circumscribed in their ability to continue and complete church discipline after a member has resigned. However, this does not mean that churches cannot take *any* ecclesiastical action in response to a resignation. As we noted above: the OPC, RCUS, and RPCNA have established forms of disciplinary declarations (i.e. "dismissal" or "erasure") which constitute formal ecclesiastical responses to a member's resignation under certain circumstances.

Our churches may also face claims that church discipline violates some civil code of non-discrimination that grants civil rights protection of sinful lifestyle choices. Nonetheless,

³ Although courts are generally reluctant to adjudicate ecclesiastical matters, they may intervene when there are claims the church failed to comply with its own procedures and bylaws. See, e.g., *Konkel v. Metropolitan Baptist Church, Inc.*, 572 P.2d 99 (Ariz. 1977) (finding that the court had jurisdiction to determine if removal of church members complied with the procedures in the church bylaws).

the committee cautions churches against an inordinate fear of civil litigation; whether in the form of a lawsuit by individual members or by government regulators seeking to prohibit biblical censure of sinful conduct. Such fear can invite consistories to neglect the responsible exercise of Christ-given authority. Scripturally revealed truth is our standard over against any conflicting human law and is an absolute defense to civil defamation actions; especially when applied with love.

3. Confessional Perspectives

3.1 The Belgic Confession

Articles 28 and 29 are particularly relevant to the subject of church membership and its resignation. The relevant portions of those articles are here cited:

Article 28

We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and outside of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it; maintaining the unity of the Church; submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof. . . . Therefore, all those who separate themselves from the same or do not join themselves to it act contrary to the ordinance of God.

Article 29

Hereby the true Church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.

We believe and confess that no one has the right to resign his or her membership in a true church. It is a grievous sin, “contrary to the ordinance of God.” Consistories are therefore obligated to warn all church members against it, especially those who have already submitted their resignation or who indicate they may.

We believe and confess the distinction between the true church and the false. Therefore, although individual consistories ought not declare other churches true or false (we do that as a federation – CO Articles 34-36), a consistory should utilize these marks to assess the relative purity of any church⁴ a member may desire to join. In this way, the consistory can better determine the appropriateness of encouraging or discouraging a member’s desire.

3.2 The Heidelberg Catechism

Questions 84 and 85 of Lord’s Day 31 are of particular importance to the matter of resignation of church membership:

Question 84

The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent,

⁴ Westminster Confession of Faith, Article 25.5.

the anger of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this Gospel testimony.

Question 85

According to the command of Christ: if anyone, though called a Christian, professes unchristian teachings or lives an unchristian life, if after repeated brotherly counsel, he refuses to abandon his errors and wickedness, and, if after being reported to the church, that is, to its officers, he fails to respond also to their admonition - such a one the officers publicly exclude from the Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from him, and God Himself excludes him from the Kingdom of Christ.

The keys of the kingdom, the preaching of the gospel and the exercise of church discipline, serve to exclude both unbelievers and hypocrites, who claim Christ but profess unchristian teachings and/or live an unchristian life.

The 1998 RCNZ study committee report on *Discipline of Those Who Resign* states:

Helpful for our discussion is the view of the Catechism on excommunication, that it is a declaration of exclusion from the fellowship of Christ, **in the same way that the pulpit declares unbelievers and hypocrites to rest under God's anger and eternal condemnation** [emphasis theirs]. There are two keys of the kingdom, and the 'two keys' are part and parcel of the one task of discipline. The discipline exercised by the preaching speaks explicitly to those who as of yet stand outside the kingdom of Christ. The discipline exercised by 'Christian discipline' speaks explicitly to those who have become members of the kingdom of Christ. Although they are directed towards different persons, they exercise an identical function.

. . . Although casual hearers are not mentioned by name, yet the preached Word expressly declares them to be outside the kingdom of Christ **until such time** [emphasis theirs] as they repent. Until such time, they "are excluded from the fellowship of Christ, of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual blessings and benefits which God promises to and bestows upon his church; and are counted as Gentiles and tax collectors, according to the command of Christ. . ." (form for excommunication). Such casual listeners may claim that the church has no authority over them - but the Word of God does speak to them authoritatively whether they like it or not. The church can be so bold as to make this declaration because it speaks in the Name of Christ with the authority of the Word of God.

(Report 9, *1998 Acts of Synod RCNZ*, p. 4-59)

In the use of these keys, consistories generally ought not be afraid to make judgments or disciplinary pronouncements about those who separate themselves from the church; even those who have renounced the consistory's authority. However, the form and content of such judgments and pronouncements will vary according to particular circumstances.

4. Scripture

4.1 Old Testament

The Old Testament includes many examples of covenant members who rebelled against the Word of God and his appointed leaders. It is difficult to draw direct parallels to our own situation because the administration of the old covenant community involved both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. The administration of the new covenant community is ecclesiastical and universal; exercised in the context of, but distinct from, the civil administration of believers and unbelievers (cf. URCNA Church Order, Article 51).

Even so, it is clear in the Old Testament that those who sought to throw off God's authority did not escape his covenantal sanctions. They simply exchanged covenant blessings for covenant curses. Those seeking to throw off Christ's authority today, likewise do not exempt themselves from his church's discipline; even when civil constraints may frustrate the discipline prescribed in Matthew 18:15-20 and applied in the URCNA *Church Order*.

4.2 Vows

The elders, delegated by Christ with ruling authority in the church, have magisterial authority to require members to take public vows when making a public profession of faith in our churches. Members must vow "by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession" of the "doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian Church." Furthermore, they must vow to "submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or life, to submit to its admonition and discipline."

God takes lawful vows seriously and he holds us accountable to those we make (Numbers 30:2; Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12). Consistories should warn members that resigning membership in Christ's church is a violation of their lawful vows.

These membership vows do not require anyone to forever remain a member of the congregation in which they are made. Professing members do not renounce their vows by relocating to another true church, even one that is less "pure", under the authority of local elders.

Members ought to transfer to churches with which the URCNA has ecumenical relations. Any who seek to affiliate with non-Reformed churches should be discouraged; even when church discipline may not appropriate.

4.3 New Testament

We offer the following comments to a list of New Testament passages compiled in the committee report to the RCNZ Synod of 1995:

- 1 Corinthians 5:1ff – Paul instructs the church to remove an immoral brother from among them. They were to "deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 2:5ff –

Subsequent to this man's repentance, Paul instructs the church to restore him and reaffirm their love for him.

- 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 – Paul instructs the church to have nothing to do with anyone who disobeys his letters; even so, they should warn him as a brother rather than regard him as an enemy.
- 1 Timothy 1:19-20 – Paul “handed over to Satan” Hymenaeus and Alexander so “that they may learn not to blaspheme.”
- 2 Timothy 2:16-18 – Paul publically condemns Hymenaeus and Philetus for teaching the false doctrine that the resurrection has already taken place.
- 2 Timothy 4:10 – Paul publically condemns Demas for loving the world and deserting him.
- Titus 3:10-11- with regard to a person who stirs up division in the church, Paul instructs the church to warn him once; twice if needed. If these warnings bring about no repentance, the church is to have nothing more to do with him.
- 1 John 2:19 – John counsels the church to consider those who leave the church as “antichrist.” Their departure is evidence that they had never been one with the church.

Only two of these passages deal with people who apparently left the church of their own volition: Demas and the group of which John speaks. In both instances, Scripture is silent as to whether any ecclesiastical action was taken against them. We must not argue from silence that discipline should not be administered against those who voluntarily leave the church. In both cases, those who left were publicly denounced in the church. Such public denouncements help maintain the Lord's honor while warning the church against such sin.

Some, who argue from John 6:66-67 that Jesus allowed disciples to leave without censure, ignore his censure of such disciples for weak or false faith. Jesus did not “entrust” himself to many who “believed in him” for “he knew their hearts” (John 2:24). When we remember that the ecclesiastical structure of the New Testament church was not yet in place, we should be wary of using such historical descriptions to make ecclesiastical prescriptions.

Matthew 18

Jesus describes the process of church discipline in Matthew 18:15-20, which is progressive in both severity and scope when applied to an unrepentant sinner. Reconciliation is to first be sought privately between the persons involved. Should the sinner be unwilling to repent and be restored, then the sin may be made known to others: two or three witnesses. The sin is to be made known to the church only if the sinner remains unrepentant. A sinner who remains unrepentant under formal church discipline, is ultimately to be excommunicated; treated as a “Gentile and a tax collector” (i.e. as one in need of salvation). Whatever is bound or loosed on earth by church discipline is likewise bound or loosed in heaven (Matthew 18:18-20; cf. Matthew 16:19).

The 2002 RCNZ committee report noted several implications of Matthew 18 pertaining to those who unilaterally resign church membership.

Some additional comments are needed in regard of Mt. 18:15-17. There is an important difference between the context in this passage and the usual situation with unilateral withdrawal. Mt. 18 deals with the case of someone who wishes to remain within the church, but who, in a sense, does not belong. Resignation often involves someone who should remain, but wishes to go. This is an important difference so far as the process is concerned. The disciplinary steps of Mt. 18, reflected in our CO steps (Articles 69, 76-78), are appropriate for the situation where the guilty party, denying guilt, remains in the church. They do not seem so suitable for dealing with unilateral withdrawal, even in the case where discipline appears to be warranted.

At the same time, there are a number of basic principles that underlie the procedure laid down in Mt. 18. For one thing, the purpose of discipline, spelled out in CO Article 67 – to vindicate the honour of the Lord, to maintain the purity of the church, and to promote the welfare of the believer – undergirds these instructions. Mt. 18 also demonstrates that hardness of heart – stubborn refusal to repent – moves the procedure along, from milder to more severe measures.

The inferential case for the possible discipline of resignees derives from these principles. For the one who resigns under circumstances that warrant discipline, if he does not repent, must be treated in a way that vindicates the Lord's honour, maintains the purity of the church, and seek [sic] the welfare of the resignee. Note that we are not now saying that every resignee must be disciplined, but rather that resignation does not, by definition, immediately remove the resignee from the jurisdiction of the elders.

It is sometimes argued that unlawful withdrawal actually serves these purposes, because the sinner is removed, albeit voluntarily, from the church. There is some truth in this, but it does not go far enough. The church's purity is still protected in such a case, but not as much as when the church uses the "keys" to declare the sinner outside the Kingdom of God, thus giving a stronger warning to the other members of the church not to go this way. Perhaps the most serious deficiency of all is that a mercy is withheld from the sinner, because he is not told that he is outside the Kingdom of God, handed over to Satan, in order that he may repent and be reclaimed. In many cases, resignees tell themselves that they have simply left the local congregation, but are still members of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps they tell themselves they are private Christians, for they attend no church; or faithful Christians because they have left for a faithful church – when it is in fact a false church; or persecuted for no just cause because they were under discipline – yet the cause is just. If the church cannot discipline such people, then there is no authoritative declaration given them, no declaration from the church, using the "key" of discipline, to declare the sad news about their spiritual state. And if the church is left unable to make such declarations – because the resignee is by definition outside her jurisdiction – then individual Christians, members of our churches, cannot easily make such judgements either. The sinner is left without the clear call to repentance that discipline, and most strongly, excommunication, provides. Even allowing that the details of the Mt. 18 situation are different, justice is not completely done to the underlying principle of the passage.

(2002 Acts of Synod RCNZ, pp. 4-200-201)

The Case of Apostasy

Some have argued that the church should not discipline someone who resigns membership and declares to have never been a true believer. The unbeliever cannot be brought to true repentance and faith through the key of discipline; but only through the key of gospel preaching. According to this view, church discipline is reserved for the restoration of a believer who denies guilt for sin while wanting to remain in the church.

This argument does stand up to scrutiny. Church discipline is always primarily for the sin of unbelief. In the *Form for Excommunication* in the 1976 *Psalter Hymnal*, we pray, “bring back this excommunicated person, together with all those who through unbelief and recklessness of life go astray.” All who publicly profess faith in Christ, together with their baptized children, are members of the visible church; whether the faith they profess is true or not. A declaration of unbelief does not immediately separate a member from the visible church; neither does it exempt such from church discipline. The 2002 RCNZ report succinctly states, “If unbelief prevents discipline, no one could be excommunicated” (p. 4-202).

5. Conclusions

Our churches are dealing with a variety of situations. Consistories are generally willing and able to follow our Reformed Church Order with regard to members wishing to remain in the church and refusing to repent of known sins.

Yet we continue to struggle with how to act toward members who desire to leave, or actually leave, the church; just as our Reformed forefathers have struggled since the 19th century. The struggle continues between two positions: first, that resignation ends the consistory’s jurisdiction (e.g. consistory should not initiate or continue church discipline after resignation); and second, that resignation does not end the consistory’s jurisdiction (e.g. consistory should proceed with church discipline, even unto excommunication.) We continue to struggle whenever:

- a. a member wishes to leave the church; refusing to repent of known sin;
- b. a member wishes to leave the church; not known to be unrepentant of known sin or to be an unbeliever;
- c. a member leaves the church; refusing to repent of admitted sin and openly denying the Christian faith.
- d. a member leaves the church; unreachable or unwilling to respond to the Consistory’s communications.

We are convinced that a consistory’s jurisdiction is not ended by resignation. An abbreviated form of discipline seems appropriate for unrepentant members who resign and deny the Christian faith; limited to warnings and pronouncements, subject to classical concurrence (to help prevent neglect or abuse). Pastoral guidance toward membership in another true church, charitably considered, seems appropriate for members who choose to leave or resign while still affirming the basics of the Christian faith.

We are also convinced that our consistories need great wisdom, love, and perseverance in shepherding members of Christ’s church; especially those seeking to resign or otherwise

leave. History demonstrates that churches have at times been too eager to erase memberships or let members lapse; expending little or no effort to communicate or to restore. Fear of potential consequences has also tempted consistories to procrastinate in responding to such members; further complicating the disciplinary process. We must avoid all forms of administrative (perfunctory) discipline and hold one another accountable to “pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28).

6. Pastoral Advice

Synod Nyack 2012 adopted the following definition and authority for Pastoral Advice:⁵

Pastoral Advice is Synod's application of the Scriptures, the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity to particular circumstances in the life of the churches.

- 1.1. Pastoral Advice expresses the collective wisdom of Synod to guide the churches in their pastoral care.
- 1.2. Pastoral Advice should be received with respect. It would be unwise to disregard Pastoral Advice in preaching or writing. It may not, however, serve as grounds in matters of discipline.
- 1.3. Pastoral Advice may be appealed as outlined in Church Order Articles 29 and 31 (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B).

6.1 Membership Transfer

A consistory may transfer a person's membership only to churches with whom the URCNA has established Ecclesiastical Fellowship⁶ or with whom we share membership; in NAPARC.⁷ Therefore, when a member asks the consistory for transfer to such a church, he or she should clearly identify the receiving church (see URCNA Church Order, Article 64).

When the consistory accedes to the member's request, they should send appropriate membership information (i.e. the dates for birth, baptism, profession of faith, and/or marriage, as applicable) directly to the elders of the receiving church; including an attestation to the member's good standing or disciplinary status. Attestations should be written to orient the receiving elders to the member we are asking them to receive and oversee.⁸

The consistory should request the elders of the receiving church to provide confirmation that the person has been received into their membership. Ordinarily, the consistory should not consider the member transferred until they have received the requested

⁵ Acts of Synod Nyack 2012, Article 45.1, p. 37

⁶ Acts of Synod London 2010, Art. 68.1, pp. 31, 213-215

⁷ See *NAPARC Agreement on Transfer of Members and Congregations*; adopted at the 13th (1987) meeting of NAPARC (North American Presbyterian & Reformed Council); <http://www.naparc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/InfoDoc-10-NAPARC-Agreement-on-Transfer.pdf>.

⁸ Scripture provides many examples of such attestation by the apostles; e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:10-11, Ephesians 6:21-22, Colossians 4:7-9, 2 Timothy 4:10-15, 1 Peter 5:12, and 3 John 12.

confirmation. Once confirmed, the consistory should inform the congregation that the member has been transferred to another church, giving the name of the church.

6.2 Membership Release

A consistory may release a person's membership to churches who have neither Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the URCNA nor membership in NAPARC. Apart from Synodical actions (see URCNA Church Order Articles 34, 35 and 36), a consistory may charitably consider another church to be a true church (Belgic Confession, Article 29) if therein the gospel of Jesus Christ is preached and the two sacraments Christ instituted are administered under the oversight of elders who exercise church discipline. Therefore, a member who asks the consistory for release to affiliate with such a church should not only identify the particular church (see URCNA Church Order, Article 64), but also allow time for the consistory to carefully consider it. The consistory should then act in the way they are convinced will best serve the Lord's honor, the purity of the church, and the member's welfare.

If the consistory accedes to the member's request, they should send appropriate membership information (i.e. the dates for birth, baptism, profession of faith, and/or marriage, as applicable) directly to the elders of the receiving church; including an attestation to the member's good standing or disciplinary status.

A member should be disciplined rather than released if he or she has embraced heretical doctrines or is seeking to join a false church.

Many churches not in Ecclesiastical Fellowship function with a different understanding of church membership, and may not acknowledge the reception of members released to their care. Even so, the consistory should request the elders of the receiving church to provide confirmation of the person's affiliation there. The consistory need not await a confirmation before informing the congregation that the member "has been released in order to affiliate" with another church, giving the name of the church.

If the consistory has publicly announced the name of a member under discipline, prior to releasing them, then the consistory should not only inform the congregation that the member "has been released under discipline in order to affiliate" with the named church, but also urge the congregation to continue to pray for his or her repentance.

In the event that a member becomes affiliated with a church without first asking the consistory to release his or her membership, the consistory should initiate correspondence with the other church to confirm whether the elders there have assumed, or are willing to assume, responsibility for the person's spiritual care. Upon confirmation, the consistory should release the member to affiliate and inform the congregation.

6.3 Membership Resignation

A member seeking resignation is taking premeditated and deliberate action. It is a grievous sin to forsake Christ's church; resigning one's membership in order to escape church discipline or to openly reject Jesus Christ and/or his church. The Heidelberg

Catechism (Lord's Day 21) and the Belgic Confession (Articles 28 and 29) rightly condemn this sinful attempt to escape the spiritual oversight of elders and mutual accountability in the communion of saints.⁹ The consistory must warn members against it, not encourage anyone to resign in order to avoid church discipline, and not infer from one's mere absence that a member has resigned.

Church members cannot escape the authority and oversight of the consistory by an act of resignation. Jesus Christ gave the keys of the kingdom to the church.¹⁰ He ordains elders to establish and terminate membership in the church; welcoming believers to commune with Christ at his table and excommunicating those bound by unbelief or hypocrisy. Therefore, the consistory should not refer to resignation as "self-excommunication".

Some may seek to resign membership in the church for very clear reasons: e.g. to escape the discipline of the church for what they profess and/or how they live; to openly reject Jesus Christ and/or his church. Others may do so because they lack understanding and/or maturity to recognize their obligation to join and unite with the true church (see Belgic Confession, Articles 28 and 29) and/or the ramifications of resignation.

Those acting out of ignorance and/or immaturity should be instructed in the doctrine of the church and warned at least twice (Titus 3:10) against the grievous sin of separating from Christ's body. Members that heed the consistory and desist from resignation should continue to receive appropriate instruction and care. Those who persist in resignation by refusing and/or disregarding the consistory should be treated in the same manner as those who resign in order to escape church discipline or who openly reject Jesus Christ and/or his church.

If a member seeks to resign while under church discipline, the consistory should suspend discipline while they warn the member against resignation. If the member remains impenitent and persists in resigning, the consistory should seek the advice of classis before acting to exclude him or her from membership; recognizing the person to be outside the communion of the saints. The consistory need not seek advice if classis has previously advised them to proceed to the second step of public discipline.

Having been advised by classis, the consistory may proceed to exclude from membership someone who forsakes Christ's church. The consistory should notify the person of this action; admonishing them and calling them to repentance. The consistory should also inform the congregation of this action and solicit their prayers for the former member. In this way, the congregation is also warned against this grievous sin.

6.4 Membership Erasure

Consistories may erase the membership of those with whom they have had no contact for at least two years; thus rendering them unable to assess that member's doctrine or life. Lack of contact must not be for lack of effort on the part of the consistory, but may be because the consistory cannot locate the member, or because the member is too distant to

⁹ Acts 2:42, 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12; Hebrews 10:24-25, 13:7; 1 Peter 5:1-5

¹⁰ Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:19, 18:18

visit and will not respond to communication attempts. The consistory should seek the advice of classis before acting to erase a membership; demonstrating due diligence in their efforts to contact and give pastoral care to the member. The consistory should inform the congregation of this action and the reasons for it.

7. **Church Order Information**

In keeping with our mandate “To consider and, if appropriate, recommend for information what changes may be necessary to the Church Order”, the committee offers the following emendations to Articles 55 and 64 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America:

New material is in italics.

Article 55

Anyone whose sin is properly made known to the Consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the Scriptural admonitions of the Consistory, shall be suspended from all privileges of church membership, including the use of the sacraments. After such suspension and subsequent admonitions, and before proceeding to excommunication, the impenitence of the sinner shall be publicly made known to the congregation, the offense explained, together with the care bestowed upon him and repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may speak to him and pray for him. This shall be done in three steps. In the first, the name of the sinner need not be mentioned, that he be somewhat spared. In the second, the Consistory shall seek the advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon his name shall be mentioned. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that, unless he repents, he will be excluded from the fellowship of the church, so that his excommunication, if he remains impenitent, may take place with the full knowledge of the church. The interval between the steps shall be left to the discretion of the Consistory.

In the event a member seeks to resign while under church discipline, the consistory may suspend discipline while they warn the member against resignation. If the member remains impenitent and persists in resigning, the consistory may seek the advice of classis before acting to exclude his membership. The consistory need not seek advice if classis has previously advised them to proceed to the second step of public discipline. Having been advised by classis, the consistory may proceed to exclude the membership of that person who is forsaking Christ's church. The consistory should notify the person of this action; admonishing him and calling him to repentance. The consistory should also inform the congregation of this action and solicit their prayers for the former member.

Article 64

Those who seek *transfer of membership to another congregation within the federation or one in ecclesiastical fellowship* shall request in writing that their current Consistory send to the receiving Consistory an official letter including pertinent membership information and testimony concerning doctrine and life, *requesting the receiving Consistory to accept*

them under its spiritual care.* The Consistory may release members in order to affiliate with congregations not in ecclesiastical fellowship when the consistory judges that doing so may aid the spiritual growth of the members. The Consistory may erase the membership of those with whom they have not been able to communicate for at least two years.

*Comment: The phrase “requesting the receiving Consistory to accept them under its spiritual care” is added to make explicit what many consistories already do (cf. The Proposed Joint Church Order, Article 57, B; Synod London 2010).

8. Recommendations

8.1 That Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the committee chairman and secretary when committee matters are being considered (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 5.4.2).

8.2 That Synod refer to the churches for consideration the Church Order information (Section 7 of this report) for consideration and possible future action by way of overture.

Ground:

Adoption of the Pastoral Advice of this report does not absolutely require a change in the Church Order. It is outside the Church Order, not contrary to the Church Order. However, codifying the Pastoral Advice by appropriate additions to the Church Order will clarify the matter and lead to a more consistent dealing with membership departures among the churches.

8.3 That the Synod adopt and refer to the churches the Pastoral Advice of this report.

Grounds:

- a. The churches have asked for advice on this subject.
- b. The advice is not contrary to the existing Church Order.
- c. The advice will assist churches in dealing with membership departures.

8.4 That Synod dismiss the Membership Departures Committee and thank them for their work.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Steven Donovan, secretary
Rev. Joghinda Gangar
Rev. Ralph Pontier, chairman

Committee member Dr. J. Mark Beach suffered an injury that impaired his ability to participate fully in the formation of this report. Consequently, it does not address some of his concerns and he cannot fully endorse it and recommend it to the churches.

Minority Report of the Committee on Church Membership Departures To the Synod of Wyoming 2016

Introduction:

At the outset, it must be said that there is much to be commended in the majority report. The comparative survey of sister denominations is a valuable resource for the churches. The marshalling of biblical and confessional material on the nature of church membership provides helpful guidance in handling difficult situations. The encouragement to the churches to apply the means of grace to wayward members, even in the face of threats, should strengthen our resolve to faithfully exercise the keys of the kingdom given to us by the Lord of the Church.

The majority report rightly acknowledges the struggles our churches have under our current polity in dealing with members that seek to resign membership or forsake the church. So while all members of the committee share the goal of bringing uniformity and accountability to our practices, we differ in the means by which this should be achieved in keeping with our *present* Church Order.

First, this minority report will explain its objection to adopting the majority report's "Pastoral Advice" and recommend instead, that this material simply be referred to the churches for their study. Second, this report will recommend alternative "Pastoral Advice" that *stays within* the present Church Order even as it retains the biblical and confessional essence of the advice found in the majority report. Lastly, this report will provide an alternative recommendation for the churches' consideration for future amendment to the Church Order by way of overture.

New Ecclesiastical Procedures Belong in the Church Order, Not in "Pastoral Advice".

The Introduction to our Church Order makes clear that we govern our ecclesiastical actions according to its terms in specific subject areas:

"Introduction

[material omitted]

*The churches of the federation, although distinct, voluntarily display their unity by means of a common confession and church order. This is expressed as they cooperate and exercise mutual concern for one another. Since we desire to honor the apostolic command that in the churches all things are to be done decently and in good order (1 Cor. 14:40), we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities in the following articles covered under the following divisions:
Ecclesiastical Offices (Articles 1-15);
Ecclesiastical Assemblies (Articles 16-36);
Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks (Articles 37-50);
Ecclesiastical Discipline (Articles 51-66)."*

The majority report acknowledges the URCNA Church Order affirmatively orders our ecclesiastical actions concerning the departure of members:

“In summary, our current Church Order describes only three (3) ecclesiastical actions with regard to departing members:

- 4. regular transfer to another church in ecclesiastical fellowship,*
- 5. excommunication of a communicant member, and*
- 6. exclusion of a baptized member.”*

[Majority Report, Sec. 1.11]

The majority report correctly notes that the limited ecclesiastical options in our Church Order contributes to the confusion in our dealing with members who seek to resign, desert, withdraw, or seek membership in non-Reformed churches:

“Our Church Order’s lack of clear principles and mechanisms for handling such situations contributes to ongoing difficulty and confusion in consistories facing them.”

“...some of our consistories have filled this void by adopting ad hoc procedures...”

“We have no ecclesiastical provision for how to respond to members who withdraw, desert, resign, or seek membership in a church with which we have no ecumenical relations.”

[Majority Report, Sec.1.11]

The mechanism for adding ecclesiastical provisions to the Church Order is by way of an overture to amend the Church Order. Such amendments require a 2/3 approval vote of Synod and 2/3 ratification vote of the churches:

Article 66

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

[URNCA Church Order Article 66]

To address the ongoing confusion created by the void in our Church Order, our committee was mandated “[t]o consider and, if appropriate, recommend for information what changes may be **necessary** to the Church Order.” [emphasis added]. In keeping with this mandate, the majority report Section 8.2 recommends the churches consider changes to the Church Order that introduce new ecclesiastical procedures of “release” and “erasure”. To be clear, this minority report does not object to recommending these new procedures for future consideration by way of overture, albeit they will be offered later below in a different form. However, the Ground offered in support of the majority report’s Church Order recommendation states:

Ground:

Adoption of the Pastoral Advice of this report does not absolutely require a change in the Church Order. It is outside the Church Order, not contrary to the Church Order. However, codifying the Pastoral Advice by appropriate additions to the Church Order will clarify the matter and lead to a more consistent dealing with membership departures among the churches.

[Majority Report, Sec. 8.2]

Keep in mind that the “Pastoral Advice” referenced in this Ground would **presently** advise the churches to begin new ecclesiastical actions denominated “release” and “erasure”. These are the same ecclesiastical procedures being recommended as necessary **future** Church Order changes. It is contradictory on the one hand to recommend **necessary** changes to the Church Order, and on the other hand offer as its Ground that such changes are **not necessary**, presumably because they will have already been adopted in the form of “Pastoral Advice”. Since the churches are to receive Pastoral Advice with “respect”, the churches will consider it appropriate to start acting according to its advice, well before the churches have decided whether to incorporate such procedures into the Church Order.

This brings us to the heart of this minority report objection: adopting the majority report’s “Pastoral Advice” with its introduction of new ecclesiastical procedures is a functional amendment of the Church Order without actually having to amend the Church Order. While the adoption of Pastoral Advice does not carry the same weight as the Church Order, it is asking Synod to sanction ecclesiastical actions that properly belong to the Church Order. [Introduction to the URCNA Church Order]. If adopted, this “Pastoral Advice” could set a precedent of creating a “hybrid” Church Order, and thereby undermine the authority of the Church Order itself.

It is noted that the ground for the Majority recommendation argues that the Pastoral Advice is “*outside the Church Order but not contrary to the Church Order.*” In this case, this is a distinction without a difference. Ecclesiastical actions belong **inside** the Church Order. The majority report’s acknowledgement that its Pastoral Advice is “outside” the ecclesiastical actions sanctioned in the Church Order render them by definition contrary to the Church Order, and as such, should not be considered for adoption.¹³

Minority Report Recommendations

Recommendation # 1. That Synod refer the Membership Departure Study Committee Majority Report, including its Pastoral Advice, to the churches for study.

Grounds:

- a. The report has valuable material for the churches’ study and consideration.
- b. Referring the report for study avoids “adopting” Pastoral Advice that sanctions ecclesiastical actions outside the Church Order.
- c. Referring a Study Committee Report to the churches for study is in accord with the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix D, 3.2.

¹³ Cf. Synod deleted reference to “synodical deputies” from an overture because it assumed the function of synodical deputies that do not exist in our Church Order. *Acts of Synod 1997, Article LII, p. 30.*

Recommendation #2. That Synod adopt and refer to the churches the following Pastoral Advice:

1. It is a grievous sin to forsake Christ's church, to resign one's membership in order to escape the discipline of the church. The Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 21) and the Belgic Confession (Articles 28 and 29) rightly condemn this sinful attempt to escape the spiritual oversight of elders and mutual accountability in the communion of saints. The consistory must warn members against it, not encourage anyone to resign in order to avoid church discipline, and not infer from their mere absence that a member has resigned.
2. Church members cannot release themselves from the authority and oversight of the consistory by an act of resignation. Jesus Christ gave the keys of the kingdom to the church. He ordains elders to establish and terminate membership in the church; to welcome believers to commune with Christ at his table and to excommunicate those bound by unbelief or hypocrisy. Therefore, the consistory should not refer to resignation as "self-excommunication". Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:19, 18:18.
3. Members who act out of ignorance and/or immaturity should be instructed in the doctrine of the church and warned at least twice (Titus 3:10) against the grievous sin of separating from Christ's body. Members that heed the consistory and desist from resignation should continue to receive appropriate instruction and care. Those who refuse and/or disregard the consistory and persist in resignation should be treated in the same as those who resign in order to escape church discipline or who openly reject Jesus Christ and/or his church.
4. Resignation does not end the consistory's jurisdiction over a member. When a member resigns who is unrepentant for sin and/or denies the Christian faith, the consistory should warn the resigning member to repent of this sin. The consistory should make clear in any public announcements that the member bears responsibility for the grievous sin of resignation and not leave the impression the consistory acquiesced to the member's sin.
5. Churches should not act out of an inordinate fear of threats of civil litigation or government sanction which seek to deter the responsible exercise of Christ-given authority. Scripturally revealed truth applied in love is always a defense to threats of civil action.
6. We should avoid all forms of administrative (perfunctory) discipline while holding one another accountable to "pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." (Acts 20:28).
7. A consistory may charitably consider a church outside our ecclesiastical fellowship to be a true church (Belgic Confession, Article 29; URCNA Church Order Articles 34,

35 and 36). A member who asks the consistory to send a statement of membership to such a church should identify the particular church (URCNA Church Order, Article 64), and allow time for the consistory to carefully consider it. The consistory should then act in the way they are convinced will best serve the Lord's honor, the purity of the church, and the member's welfare.

8. Members who have had no contact for an extended period may make it difficult for the consistory to assess that member's doctrine or life. Lack of contact may be because the consistory cannot locate the member, or because the member is too distant to visit and will not respond to any attempted communication. A consistory should never consider a membership "lapsed" by virtue of such circumstances. The consistory may find it helpful to seek the advice of classis as to whether a form of discipline is appropriate or whether additional efforts at contact and discipleship should be pursued.

Grounds:

- a. This Pastoral Advice is a succinct and accessible form of advice addressing the issues the committee was mandated to study.
- b. This Pastoral Advice avoids advising the churches to perform ecclesiastical actions outside of the Church Order.
- c. This Pastoral Advice distills the confessional and scriptural advice found in the Majority Report within the context of the current Church Order.

Recommendation 3: That Synod refer to the churches for information the following recommended changes to Church Order Article 64:

Current wording:

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

Proposed wording:

Article 64—Member Departures

(1) Members seeking to transfer their membership to another church within the federation or a church with which the federation has ecclesiastical fellowship shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory shall transfer membership by sending a certificate of membership concerning their doctrine and life to such church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care, and shall furnish a copy thereof to the member.

(2) Members seeking to join a church not in ecclesiastical fellowship with our federation shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory shall release their membership so they may affiliate with such church by sending a certificate of membership concerning their doctrine and life to such church, requesting it to accept them under its spiritual care, and shall furnish a copy thereof to the members.

(3) When a member seeks to join a church which the consistory cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice, nor a church which will advance his spiritual interests, and he cannot be dissuaded, on being informed that he has joined such a church, the consistory shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(4) When a member informs the consistory that he desires to withdraw, resign, or terminate his membership in a congregation of the United Reformed Churches, and the efforts of the consistory to dissuade him from his course have failed, it shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes. If such withdrawal, resignation, or termination occurs prior to the consistory having instituted the second step of discipline under Article 55, the consistory shall seek the advice of classis before proceeding to erasure.

(5) When a member unites with a church of another denomination without requesting a certificate of membership, the consistory may erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(6) When a member cannot be found, the consistory may, after two years, erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(7) When a member, without adequate reason, persists in attending a church of another denomination or persistently absents himself from the stated services of the church, and he cannot be persuaded to return or present adequate reason for his absence, the consistory may erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(8) Since erasure is a form of abbreviated discipline, the consistory shall seek the advice of classis before erasing a membership; however, if the consistory had previously received the advice of classis regarding a member who is under discipline, then further advice of classis is not necessary to proceed to erasure.

(9) The consistory shall make appropriate announcement sufficient to inform the congregation of the nature of the departures of members. Given that erasure is a form of discipline without full process due to the actions of the member, the consistory should use discretion to reveal only that which is necessary and proper so as to protect the departing member from undue exposure and to guard the congregation from gossip or improper curiosity.

Grounds:

- a. The Committee was mandated to consider recommendations for the churches' consideration for future Church Order changes.
- b. These proposed changes, which include both "release" and the abbreviated disciplinary process of "erasure", would require changing only one article of the Church Order. Article 64 already addresses the subject of member departures and codification of new procedures addressing the departure of members properly belongs in Article 64.
- c. These proposed changes avoid amending Article 55 which addresses the subject of the steps toward a completed disciplinary process.

- d. These proposed changes avoid the majority report's application of the term "exclude" in its recommended change to Article 55 to describe an **abbreviated** disciplinary process. The term "exclude" is used in our history and in the Church Order to describe a **completed** disciplinary process for non-communicant members. Using the term "exclude" to describe an abbreviated process is a confusion of categories.
- e. These proposed changes include the application of erasure to members who do not ask for a statement of membership or who join a church which the consistory judges will not advance the member's spiritual interest. These categories are not addressed in the Majority report recommendations, but are subject areas that were given to the committee to address.
- f. These proposed changes are consistent with the practices found in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church U.S.

Respectfully submitted,
Mark Van Der Molen

Report on Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC) to Synod 2016

Esteemed Brothers,

Thank you for the privilege of serving as the URCNA liaison to the PRCC and of presenting this report.

I. Review of the Committee's Mandate

Synod 2014 adopted the following recommendations:

That Synod appoint the Consistory of Faith URC of Beecher, Illinois, to serve indefinitely without need of re-appointment as the URCNA liaison to the PRCC, and that Synod requests that this Consistory submit reports on the PRCC to future synods.

That Synod authorize the Consistory of Faith URC of Beecher, Illinois, to send one or two observers to PRCC meetings occasionally, at URCNA expense, leaving it to the Consistory's discretion whether and when such observers will be sent. Costs should be set at \$500 USD per annum. (Acts of Synod Visalia 2014, pp. 27-28)

II. Summary of the Committee's Activities

The consistory of Faith URC (Beecher, IL) sent one observer to attend the PRCC meeting in February 23-24, 2016, in Atlanta, GA. Minutes for the other PRCC meetings have been received and reviewed. We report our observations below.

III. Report on PRCC

A. The Mission of the PRCC

Synod Schererville 2007 voted to apply for affiliate membership in the PRCC (formerly PRJC) because serving as a U.S. Military chaplain requires an endorsement from "a qualified Religious organization." The PRCC's Mission Statement declares,

The Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel is a ministry of member denominations dedicated to obeying Christ's Great Commission by providing men to serve as chaplains in military and civilian organizations. The Commission endorses and ecclesiastically supports ordained, qualified chaplains; approves chaplain candidates; and helps presbyteries and congregations in biblical ministry to military personnel and their families.

The Commission is governed by representatives or *commissioners* from its five member denominations: the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). It is also the endorsing body for two associate member (non-voting) denominations: the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Ko-Shin) (KPCA), and the URCNA. Associate membership in the PRCC is limited to NAPARC denominations.

The Commission oversees the work of the full-time executive director, (ret) Chaplain (Brigadier General) Douglas E. Lee, who is assisted by an administrative assistant (Gary Hitzfeld) and some associate directors who help with visiting the chaplains, etc. The director not only provides endorsements for qualified men, but supports the chaplains in a variety of ways including retreats and training, advising, newsletters, and intervention when a chaplain faces conflict.

B. Chaplains Endorsed by the PRCC

The total number of military chaplains currently endorsed by the PRCC is 205 (137 of which are PCA). The PRCC also endorses 65 civilian chaplains (incl. 56 PCA). One URCNA chaplain is endorsed by the PRCC, Rev. Andrew Spriensma. He continues to serve as a U.S. Army Chaplain under the oversight of Faith URC (Beecher, IL). He is currently stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, where he has served for the past two years as a chaplain to an infantry battalion in the 101st Airborne Division. During this assignment, he deployed to serve as the chaplain to a small base in Eastern Afghanistan. In January 2016, the Army reassigned Chaplain Spriensma to 5th Special Forces Group. His primary work involves giving pastoral care and counsel to the soldiers within his battalion and their families. Rev. Spriensma is scheduled to deploy again in November 2016.

C. Items of Note

1. Retirement of Current Executive Director

The search is underway for a new executive director. The current executive director, (ret) Chaplain (Brigadier General) Douglas E. Lee, plans to retire in 2017.

2. Prayer for more Chaplains

Chaplain Lee and the associate directors are praying that the Lord will provide more chaplains. At the most recent PRCC meeting, Chaplain Lee said the most frequent question he is asked is whether faithful, Reformed chaplains may serve in the U.S. military without compromise. He feels strongly that while there are challenges, there is still a tremendous opportunity for faithful service and a great need among the military. He also noted the opportunities for civilian chaplains in hospitals and businesses. Civilian chaplains associate director, Rev. Del Farris, encourages seminaries to offer and pastors to obtain clinical pastoral education (CPE) since it is required to work in most hospital settings.

3. Budget

The PRCC did not meet its desired budget last year; thus, various opportunities for ministry were curtailed. The PRCC requires dues from their individual chaplains and from its member denominations. In February 2015, the PRCC voted to increase the denominational dues (previously \$500.00) to meet growing budget requirements. The commission decided to raise the dues incrementally (\$100 per year over the span of five years) to the rate of \$1,000 by the year 2020. The denominational due is \$700.00 for 2016.

4. Women and the Possibility of Draft Registration

One of the purposes of the PRCC includes “[k]eeping member denominations informed of significant developments, trends, issues and problems concerning chaplains and members of the Armed Forces . . .” (*Constitution* II.E). At the February 2015 PRCC meeting, the Commission voted “to establish a committee to draft a letter addressing our respective churches of the likelihood of a radical change of the Selective Service law of the United States, namely the required registration of 18 year old females on the Draft Rolls, most probably by 2016” (Minutes

2/24/15). The intention of the letter was to open discussion among the churches and allow them to make any necessary preparations. However, the letter that was produced, which we mistakenly amplified, overstated the matter by suggesting the law had already been changed. This misinformation was corrected quickly among the URCNA by a letter of response from a URCNA minister, and subsequently by a letter from our Consistory.

Some members of the PRCC still feel a responsibility to address the draft registration possibility with the churches. At its February 2016 meeting, the Commission remanded the issue back to its subcommittee to consider writing another letter.

Our attendance at the most recent PRCC meeting allowed us to hear a somewhat alternative (or, at least, cautionary) viewpoint from one of the commissioners who has served in the military judicial system and has reviewed numerous applications for conscientious objector status. (We summarize it here as food for thought and perhaps a counterweight to some earlier material that was disseminated.) This commissioner cautioned that while a move to require women to register would be of concern since it is preparatory to making them subject to the draft, nonetheless, refusing to register would be an unwise course of action which unnecessarily risks criminal sanctions. Since draft registration does not yet and might never equate to compulsory military service, is strictly clerical (a means of telling the government who you are and how to get in contact with you), and does not prove that the government will reject all faith-based objections to conscription, it would be unwise to refuse to register if it is required. He believes that since the government has a mechanism for considering faith-based objections to service, the proper time for a woman to assert her objection would be further down the line if and when she is actually drafted. He also suggested that church resolutions could better strengthen such an appeal by focusing on positively declaring a scriptural basis for the claim that women ought not to serve in combatant roles instead of potentially mischaracterizing government actions.

IV. Recommendations

We have only one recommendation: *That Synod set the budget for the PRCC Liaison at \$500 USD per annum.*

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Todd Joling
Rev. Andrew Spriensma
For the Consistory of Faith URC (Beecher, IL)

Report to the Synod from the URCNA Corp. (Canada)

Greetings in the name of the Lord.

The Board of Directors of the URCNA Corporation (Canada) has regularly met since our last Synod in order to administer our obligation to the churches. Since much of our work is done “behind the scenes”, it may be helpful that we review the place and role of the Federation’s Corporations.

Two Corporations, one American and one Canadian, were formed by our Synod in 1999. Our churches created these Corporations in order to fulfill the legal and financial obligations which result from our decisions as churches. Whether signing contracts, paying employees, or administering the funds of our churches, there needs to be an entity that is both able to administer these obligations and that is recognized by our governments. In order to satisfy the requirements of our governments, these Corporations must function at an arms-length from the Synod. The decisions and activities of our Synod are not of great concern for our governments. How our Corporations function and the activities they engage in are of greater concern to the government. For this reason, the Corporations function as self-contained entities. They exist, however, to fulfill the financial and legal obligations of the Federation.

In order to fulfil these works efficiently, the Canadian Corporation entered into a Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) with the American Corporation. The reason for this relates to our respective country’s tax laws. While it is a simple matter for an American church to send money to Canada, it is a far more challenging matter for a Canadian church to send money to the United States. It is for this reason that the Canadian Corporation established the JVA with the American Corporation. The advantage of the JVA is that we are able to pay all of the Federation’s costs through one account. The JVA Treasurer, Pam Hessels, issues all the cheques for all the financial commitments of our Federation. The Federation’s budget is divided according to the percentage of American and Canadian churches. Thus, the American churches contribute 65% to the total budget and the Canadian churches contribute 35%. Each Corporation contributes its portion to a joint account, from which all our bills are paid. Over the past number of years we have made refinements to this process, but continue to benefit from this arrangement.

This past year saw a significant drop in the value of the Canadian Dollar relative to the American Dollar. This has presented challenges to us in fulfilling our obligations. For this reason, as a Corporation we have asked our Canadian churches to increase their giving to the work of the Federation. At Synod 2014 the cost per family of our financial obligations was approximately \$35.00. We have increased that for the Canadian churches to \$45.00 in order to offset the drop in the Canadian dollar.

One of the largest expenditures of our Federation is the Missions Coordinator. When we established this position with its funding, we set the funding in American Dollars. The drop of the Canadian dollar has impacted this expenditure significantly. For this reason we are recommending that the salary, the retirement contribution, and the payroll expenses of the Missions Coordinator be paid in the dollar of the Mission Coordinator’s country of residence. Since the Missions Coordinator is currently a Canadian, this would mean paying Rev. Bout in

Canadian Dollars instead of American Dollars. In so doing we will protect our budget from the potential fluctuations of the currency market.

We are also recommending an increase to the honorarium paid to the JVA Treasurer. Currently our churches provide an honorarium of \$3000.00 to the three Treasurer positions: URCNA Corp. (USA), URCNA Corp. (Canada), JVA. The work of the JVA Treasurer takes up much more time than that of the other two positions. For this reason, we are recommending that the JVA Treasurer's honorarium be increased to \$7000.00. We are also recommending that the honorarium for the JVA Treasurer be paid in Canadian Dollars. We recommend this for the reasons mentioned above.

In the event that our churches will publish a booklet containing the Liturgical Forms separate from the new Song Book, we have obtained a quote from a reputable Canadian Publisher, Premier Printing in Winnipeg, Manitoba. They publish material for the Canadian Reformed Churches. We're including this in our report so that the churches can anticipate the cost commitment of publishing our Liturgical Forms separately.

We have also included a quote for publication of our new Song Book. The OPC has obtained a quote from an American publisher. We obtained a quote from Premier Printing in light of the value of the Canadian Dollar. The low Canadian dollar may mean there is value in having our new Song Book published in Canada.

In the event that our churches agree to publish a Song Book and a Liturgical Forms book, the Corporation will be responsible for entering into contracts and providing payment for these activities. We hope to serve the churches faithfully in the discharge of this responsibility and welcome any direction that the Synod will offer.

Recently the Government of Canada made changes to the rules regulating Corporations that are incorporated under Industry Canada. We updated our by-laws and other relevant paperwork in accordance with these new laws. One of the requirements that must be followed concerns oversight of our accounting. Our current budget does not require that we be audited each year, but we are required to have our books reviewed by an accounting firm. We have enlisted the Accounting Firm Deloitte to perform a review engagement for us. This will become a yearly expense for our Corporation and needs to be reflected in our budget. The cost of this requirement is approximately \$2,200.

As has become our practice, our Treasurer, Pam Hessels, is being sent to the Synod in order to answer any questions relating to our finances. Pam will also be available to any Committee of pre-advice dealing with budgetary matters. When discussing such matters, we ask that Pam be given the privilege of the floor.

May the Lord continue to richly bless the work of the churches and use our ministry to the glory of his name.

In Christ,

The Board of the URCNA Corp. (Canada),

Rev. R. J. Sikkema (Chair)

Rev. J. Dykstra (Secretary)

Mr. Stan Antonides

Mr. Cliffe Hodgkinson

Rev. H. Van Olst

Quotation

Attn: Rev. Joel Dykstra

January 12, 2016
Quote: 182060

Title: GCP Hymnals

Trim Size: 5.75 x 8.5 (no bleeds in text, bound along the 8.5" side)

Pages: 768 pages plus endsheets, plus casebound cover

Text: 40 lb. #1 Offset (Opaque) White (714 ppi); black throughout (web offset)

Endsheets: Offset White; no print

Hardcover: Arrestox (stocked colour only) over 100 pt. board; plus foil stamping (spine and up to 50 square inches on outside front) in one colour

Prepress: Customer to supply text and hardcover copy as application or PDF files to Premier specifications.
 Price Includes:

- One complete set of content proofs

Bindery: Gather, sew, round back, encase complete with headbands, and pack in cartons (20 books per carton, ECT 48 - 275# double wall)

Freight: F.O.B. Plant
A \$240 fee will be applied for each collect or 3rd party shipment.

Prices:

<u>1,000</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>10,000</u>
\$13.88/book	\$7.28/book	\$6.04/book	\$5.64/book	\$5.46/book
<u>15,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>Add'l 1,000's</u>		
\$5.26/book	\$5.16/book	\$4.85/book		

 Above prices **INCLUDE** one time preparation costs of \$1,200.00

 Select shipping insurance here, at a cost of 1% of your job invoice value (to a maximum \$185 charge). Insurance covers manufacturing replacement cost of the goods in transit, in an event of a total loss.

continued...

Option #1:

Text

35 lb. Custom Brite (756 ppi), prices are as follows:

<u>1,000</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>10,000</u>
\$12.05/book	\$8.42/book	\$7.13/book	\$6.71/book	\$6.52/book

<u>15,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>Add'l 1,000's</u>
\$6.31/book	\$6.20/book	\$5.90/book

- Notes:**
1. Allow 4 - 6 weeks for delivery of Custom Brite for this job.
 2. Paper availability is subject to change, and will be determined at time of order.

Option #2:

Text

35 lb. Custom Plus Vellum (678 ppi), prices are as follows:

<u>1,000</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>10,000</u>
\$13.19/book	\$9.46/book	\$7.48/book	\$7.04/book	\$6.85/book

<u>15,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>Add'l 1,000's</u>
\$6.08/book	\$5.99/book	\$5.68/book

- Notes:**
1. Allow 4 - 6 weeks for delivery of Custom Plus Vellum for this job.
 2. Paper availability is subject to change, and will be determined at time of order.

Option #3:

Bindery

For books to have blue *stained edges 3 sides only, add:

<u>1,000</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>10,000</u>
\$4.09/book	\$3.04/book	\$2.59/book	\$2.52/book	\$2.52/book

<u>15,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>Add'l 1,000's</u>
\$2.47/book	\$2.44/book	\$2.39/book

***Note: Stained edges are not recommended as this can cause warping of the stock plus there is a chance of inconsistent colour on pages. If you have concerns please speak with your sales or customer service representative.**

Option #4:

Hardcover

For cover stock to be Skivertex Series One (standard colours and finishes only), prices are as follows:

<u>1,000</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>10,000</u>
\$13.75/book	\$7.14/book	\$5.99/book	\$5.60/book	\$5.33/book

<u>15,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>Add'l 1,000's</u>
\$5.14/book	\$5.05/book	\$4.72/book

Option #5:

Hardcover

For cover stock to be Permalex Hi-Tear (standard colour only), add:

<u>1,000</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>10,000</u>
\$0.44/book	\$0.44/book	\$0.44/book	\$0.38/book	\$0.25/book

<u>15,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>Add'l 1,000's</u>
\$0.25/book	\$0.25/book	\$0.22/book

continued...

Option #6: Endsheets

For reinforced endsheets, add:

<u>1,000</u>	<u>2,500</u>	<u>5,000</u>	<u>7,500</u>	<u>10,000</u>
\$0.35/book	\$0.29/book	\$0.26/book	\$0.25/book	\$0.22/book
<u>15,000</u>	<u>20,000</u>	<u>Add'l 1,000's</u>		
\$0.19/book	\$0.18/book	\$0.13/book		

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QUOTATION # 190086a

Date: March 19, 2016

To: Rev. Joel Dykstra
 Company: United Reformed Churches of North America
 Re: URCNA Confessions/Liturgy Book – **perfect bound**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following quotation:

Size: 5 3/4 x 8 1/2" (bound along 8 1/2")

Pages: 208 pages text + cover

Stock: cover: C1S, 12 pt.
 text: #2 offset, 50 lb

Ink: cover: 4 cp, one side
 text: black, throughout

Prepress: one output-ready PDF file supplied in single page format
 file to have 1/8" bleeds (if bleeds are required)
 Premier to provide hard-copy proof

Binding: **perfect bind**

Finishing: laminate one side of cover with gloss lamination
 box & skid

Freight: FOB Premier Printing plant

Price:

8,000 books	\$ 10,546	\$ 1.32 / book
10,000	\$ 12,541	\$ 1.26 / book
12,000	\$ 14,540	\$ 1.22 / book

Option: as above but change to 448 pages text + cover

8,000 books	\$ 19,159	\$ 2.40 / book
10,000	\$ 23,046	\$ 2.31 / book
12,000	\$ 26,917	\$ 2.25 / book

Design/
 Layout: Option: design & layout to prepare files: \$ 55 per hour

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QUOTATION # 190086b

Date: March 19, 2016

To: Rev. Joel Dykstra
Company: United Reformed Churches of North America
Re: URCNA Confessions/Liturgy Book – **case bound**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit the following quotation:

Size: 5 3/4 x 8 1/2" (bound along 8 1/2")

Pages: 216 pages text + endsheets + cover

Stock: hard cover: Arrestox (stocked color) over 100 pt. board
text: #2 offset, white, 50 lb (512 ppi)
endsheets: Offset White

Ink: cover: foil stamping (spine and up to 20 sq. in. OFC) in one color
text: black, throughout
endsheets: no printing

Prepress: one output-ready PDF file supplied in single page format
file to have 1/8" bleeds (if bleeds are required)
Premier to provide hard-copy proof

Binding: sewn, **case bound** with headbands

Finishing: box & skid

Freight: FOB Premier Printing plant

Price:	8,000 books	\$ 21,360	\$ 2.67 / book
	10,000	\$ 26,000	\$ 2.60 / book
	12,000	\$ 30,600	\$ 2.55 / book

Option: as above but change to 456 pages text + cover

	8,000 books	\$ 28,720	\$ 3.59 / book
	10,000	\$ 35,000	\$ 3.50 / book
	12,000	\$ 41,040	\$ 3.42 / book

Design/
Layout: Option: design & layout to prepare files: \$ 55 per hour

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Report from the Board of Directors for the United Reformed Churches in North America (U.S.A.) to the 2016 Synod of the URCNA

Dear brothers,

The U.S. Board of Directors has met on five different occasions since Synod 2014. In addition to the Board meetings, delegations of various Board members have met with OPC officials regarding the psalter hymnal.

The U.S. Board of Chairman and the U.S. Treasurer report that the Annual Reports mandated by the Michigan Department of Labor and Regulatory Affairs have been filed and are current.

Our meetings with OPC officials resulted in a greater understanding of the many details that go into the development, printing and distribution of a songbook. During the course of this process, it became apparent to the Board that the OPC has much more of the necessary organizational structure and personnel in place to handle the many issues and details that go into the publication of a psalter hymnal.

During our July 2015 meetings with the OPC delegation, Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen of the URCNA and Dr. Alan Strange of the OPC were appointed as co-general editors. Printing and distribution options were discussed. The consensus was that the copyright permissions should be sought in the name of the Committee on Christian Education of the OPC and the United Reformed Churches In North America (USA). It was determined that it would be best to move forward with one psalter hymnal containing both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. The liturgical forms would not be included, but rather published separately. It was also determined that the content of the psalter hymnal should be controlled equally by the URCNA and the OPC throughout the lifetime of the project, including future printings.

It is anticipated that the Psalter Hymnal Committee and the Liturgical Forms Committee provide Synod with more comprehensive reports regarding the status of the psalter hymnal project and the anticipated course of action. However, the Board would also like to highlight the fact that a separate publication for the liturgical forms will require separate/additional funding unless it is determined that such expenses should come from the psalter hymnal fund. To date, Synod's mandates regarding the psalter hymnal have been general in nature and short of specifics. If Synod believes a specific course of action needs to be taken regarding the development, printing and/or distribution of the psalter hymnal, the Board invites Synod to provide such guidance.

As instructed by Synod 2014, the U.S. Board appointed an alternate Treasurer by appointing Rick Blauw to that position.

U.S. receipts for the Missions Coordinator have been forwarded to the Canadian Treasurer based on the understanding that the Missions Coordinator is not being treated as an employee of the calling church. The grounds for electing the current Mission Coordinator included the fact that "Both Consistories have the intention of lending Rev. Bout to the work of the Missions Coordinator as a full-time position." The Board would not want the Missions Coordinator to be

an employee of the U.S. corporation if and when a future Missions Coordinator resides in the U.S. The U.S. Board requests that Synod clarify whether the position of Missions Coordinator is to be an employee of one of the corporations as opposed to the calling church.

All of the current Board Members, Gary Veldink, Robert Huisjen, Rick Blauw, Ed Wierenga and Eric Brandt are willing to serve another term. The Board also believes it would be beneficial to increase the number of Board members from five to seven. Synod 2014 appointed an alternate Board member, Peter Smith, to fill any vacancy. If the number of Board members is increased to seven, perhaps no alternate Board member need be appointed. If the number of Board members remains at five, then the Board recommends the appointment of an alternate Board member.

According to Section 4.6.2 of the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, the U.S. Treasurer can only serve for three terms consecutively. The current Treasurer, Robert Huisjen, was appointed to fill a vacancy before being appointed by Synod 2012 and 2014 for two full terms. It is the Board's desire that Robert Huisjen be allowed to serve three full terms. To this end, the Board requests that Robert Huisjen be appointed to a third full term. If Section 4.6.2 is interpreted to preclude the reappointment of Robert Huisjen as U.S. Treasurer, the Board recommends that Synod appoint Rick Blauw as the U.S. Treasurer.

Recommendations:

The U.S. Board of Directors respectfully recommends that Synod take the following action:

- (1) That Synod provide guidance as to whether the Mission Coordinator is to be an employee of one of the corporations or an employee of the calling church.
- (2) That Synod expand the number of members/Board members (the corporation was set up on a membership basis and not a directorship basis per the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws) from five to seven. The U.S. Board believes that increasing the number to seven would help with the transition as members/Board members leave. The Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws do not set the number of members/Board members. Since members/Board members need not be residents of Michigan, expanding the number to seven would allow others from different parts of the country to contribute.
- (3) That Synod increase the U.S. Treasurer's stipend from \$3,000 to \$4,000 given the amount of work performed by the U.S. Treasurer.
- (4) That Synod appoint Robert Huisjen as the U.S. Treasurer.
- (5) That Synod appoint the five currently serving members and two new members to the U.S. corporation who will serve on the corporation's Board of Directors.

As the Board of Directors, we are grateful for the opportunity to serve the churches in this respect.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Board of Directors,
Gary Veldink, Chairman