

**PROVISIONAL AGENDA**  
For the ELEVENTH Synod of the  
**UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA**  
Convening Monday, June 11, 2018, at 7 p.m., Central Daylight Time  
At Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois  
Ending Friday evening, June 15, 2018  
Registration Monday, June 11, 2018 from Noon – 4:00 p.m.  
Prayer Service at 4:00 p.m.  
Convened by Oak Glen United Reformed Church, Lansing, Illinois

**I. OPENING MATTERS**

- A. Meeting called to order by the convening consistory, Oak Glen United Reformed Church, Lansing, Illinois.
- 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 a.m. to Noon
  - Lunch: Noon – 1:00 p.m.
  - Afternoon session: 1:00 – 5:30 p.m.
  - Supper: 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
  - Song Service – 6:45 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday
  - Evening session: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. except Tuesday: 7:00 p.m. -9:00 p.m.
  - 30-minute 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

**III. MATTERS BEFORE SYNOD**

- A. Convening Consistory's Report..... 4
  - Appendix 1 – Stated Clerk's Report ..... 9
- B. Financial Matters
  - 1. U.S. Treasurer's Reports
    - 2016 Letter and Financial Report ..... 13
    - 2017 Letter and Financial Report ..... 19
    - Synod Wyoming Financial Report ..... 25

2. Canadian Treasurer's Reports	
2016 Letter and Reports including JVA Report .....	26
2017 Letter and Reports including JVA Report .....	33
C. Overtures	
<i>Classis Central U.S.</i>	
1. Add New Material on Appeals to Church Order as an Appendix .....	40
2. Adopt "Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony" .....	41
3. Amend CO Article 64 Regarding Membership Departure .....	45
4. Classical Rotation for Hosting Synods .....	48
<i>Classis Eastern U.S.</i>	
5. Affirm URCNA Teaching on Marriage .....	49
6. Adopt an Appendix to the CO on Church Planting and Missions .....	52
7. Establish a Second Missions Coordinator Position .....	55
8. A Nomination for the Position of Domestic Missions Coordinator .....	59
9. Electronic Publication of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal .....	62
<i>Classis Michigan</i>	
10. Adopt "Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony" .....	64
<i>Classis Ontario-East</i>	
11. Appoint Statistician .....	68
<i>Classis Pacific Northwest</i>	
12. Adopt "Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony" .....	74
<i>Classis Southwestern Ontario</i>	
13. Amend CO Article 47 .....	78
<i>Classis Southwest U.S.</i>	
14. Amend CO Article 55 .....	80
<i>Classis Western Canada</i>	
15. Amend CO Articles 55 & 64 Regarding Membership Departure .....	81
D. Appeal	
Appeal 1 .....	86
E. Communication	
Communication 1 .....	93
F. Reports of Committees	
1. Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) .....	94
2. Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) .....	128
3. Liturgical Forms Committee .....	153
4. Missions Committee .....	156
5. Psalter Hymnal Committee .....	182
6. Website Oversight Committee .....	183
7. Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee .....	191
8. Study Committee on Appeals .....	192
9. Report of Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC) .....	210
10. Canadian Board of Directors .....	212
11. United States Board of Directors .....	216

#### 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

## **Convening Consistory's Report To Synod Wheaton 2018**

Brothers,

We are sincerely grateful for the privilege you have bestowed on us to act as your Convening Consistory of Synod Wheaton 2018, and deeply humbled by your faith in us to do so successfully. We hope that our efforts will be found acceptable, and that they will provide everything you need while conducting the work of the Federation and while fellowshiping with our brothers in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The following constitutes our initial Provisional Agenda report.

July 2016

On only two hours notice, our Clerk was able to meet with Rev. Casey Freswick and Mr. Al Rumph of Bethany URC, Wyoming, MI, the Convening Consistory of Synod Wyoming, 2016. We are extremely grateful for the extended time they were able to provide on such short notice, and the large volume of helpful information and advice received in such a short time period.

The Consistory formed a Synod Planning Committee to organize and manage the work required, with all activities of the Committee to be reported to the Consistory on a monthly basis for approval. All Consistorial matters were decided by the Consistory outside of this Committee.

After reviewing communications and conversations related to the matter, a motion was passed to release Rev. Talman Wagenmacher from the office of Stated Clerk and to accept and appoint the alternate Stated Clerk, Rev. Ralph Pontier in his place.

September 2016

The work of the Planning Committee began in earnest with a complete review of the work to be done, assignments of tasks, and sharing of communications from past Convening Consistories - which communications proved to be invaluable. Wheaton College was visited, facilities and contract terms discussed, the Rules and Regulations of Synod reviewed, and a meeting held with representatives from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

November 2016

Joint sessions and schedules were discussed and planned with OPC/URCNA cooperation.

Communications from Rev. John Bouwers (CERCU) and the Seventh Reformed Church of Grand Rapids (RCA) related to the denominational search Seventh Reformed was making to seek a new denominational affiliation were reviewed. Their particular question revolved around our Church Order requirement on Catechism Preaching and the relationship we maintain between Scripture and the Catechism. Letters of explanation were prepared, in conjunction with Rev. Bouwers and approved for distribution to Seventh Reformed. The final draft was approved and communicated to Rev. Bouwers on December 7.

The Stated Clerk sought advice regarding a request from the Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Middleton, PA to disseminate to all URCNA churches a notice regarding their open pastorate. We directed the Stated Clerk to NOT send out such a communication through his Federation office of Stated Clerk. While we understood their request, we did not deem it appropriate that the weight of the Federation Stated Clerk position be used to convey said request.

#### February 2017

Preparations and discussions continued regarding a Wheaton contract, joint OPC/URC sessions, a preliminary schedule of events for Synod 2018, gathering necessary contacts within the Federation and with the OPC, and plans were made for a large joint OPC/URC coordinating conference call on March 30, 2017.

#### March 2017

After much discussion and conversation with the OPC, a relatively final draft schedule was prepared for joint consideration. This included discussions on the nature of the URC Prayer Service as required by our Rules of Synod and their typical worship service. Agreement was made that the URC would conduct the opening prayer service with the OPC conducting the closing service. Joint morning devotions would alternate.

Joint evening sessions covering: the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, OPC/URC Ecuminicity, Home Missions and Foreign Missions were established.

An approximate 2 hour conference call on March 30, 2017 resulted in joint acceptance of the proposed schedule (with slight modification) and with presentations being made by the joint representatives responsible for each evening session. Each group's presentation concept was found to be acceptable by all.

#### May and June 2017

During this period the website was discussed and developed. A means of having registrations flow directly into spreadsheets was developed. And many other needs and decisions were approved leading up to a June 2017 "Save the Date" broadcast to the Federation.

#### August 2017

An Overture from Classis Western Canada to Amend Articles 55 & 64 of the Church Order was found to meet Synodical Guidelines for placement on the Provisional Agenda.

#### September 2017

After review and discussion of the pertinent background and details, we directed the Stated Clerk that he should NOT disseminate through his office a request from the West Sayville Reformed Bible Church seeking support for a worthy ministerial student from the Federation churches. We agreed in this matter with the Escondido URC that such requests are best done directly, rather than through the Federation office.

The following Overtures were examined and found to meet the Synodical Guidelines for placement in the Provisional Agenda.

- Overture from Classis Central US regarding adding an Appendix to the Church Order by way of Advisory Committee rather than by way of a Consistory.
- Overture from Classis Central US regarding changing Article 64 of the Church Order.
- Overture from Classis Central US regarding a Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony.
- Overture from Classis Central US regarding Classical Rotation for Hosting Synod.
- Overture from Classis Eastern US to Affirm the URCNA Teaching on Marriage.
- Overture from Classis Michigan US regarding a Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony.

October 2017

The final draft of the Wheaton College contract was approved and signed.

An Appeal was received from a member of the Covenant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa. The Appeal was carefully examined and found to NOT meet the Synodical Guidelines for placement in the Provisional Agenda. As it is the Convening Consistory's obligation to report the reasons why an Overture or Appeal is not accepted for the Provisional Agenda, we hereby state that those reasons are:

- It contained a significant amount of new material that was never seen by the Appellant's Consistory or Classis.
- The Appeal does not make "reference to the specific decision of the narrower body which is being appealed."
- Specific grounds for the Appeal to Synod were not stipulated.
- No specific passages from the Word of God or the Church Order were tied to any particular judgment of the narrower assembly, in an attempt to refute said judgment, as required by the Guidelines.
- No specific action or decision is being requested of Synod.

(In February 2018 we were informed that the Appellant had withdrawn his Appeal.)

November 2017

An Appeal from Mr. Peter Kok was examined and found to meet the Synodical Guidelines for placement in the Provisional Agenda.

An Overture from Classis Pacific Northwest regarding a Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony was examined and found to meet the Synodical Guidelines for placement in the Provisional Agenda.

A request was received from the Liturgical Forms Committee to add the Three Forms of Unity to the new Liturgical Forms booklet in the line by line format in which these forms were approved by Synod Wyoming 2016. The Three Forms were officially approved for inclusion in the Trinity Psalter Hymnal in the usual line by line format, but that format proved an obstacle to both size and cost in the publication of the Psalter Hymnal. In order to maintain a manageable size and cost, it was decided to use a block paragraph format in the Psalter Hymnal. Therefore, the

Liturgical Forms Committee, not wanting to lose the inherent value of the line by line format requested permission to exceed their mandate and publish the Three Forms of Unity in said format in the Liturgical Forms Booklet. Believing it to be a very good thing to have the Three Forms of Unity distributed as widely as possible, and agreeing with the Committee's assessment on the value of the line by line format, we approved of their request.

December 2017 and January 2018

During these months the Synod Planning Committee held meetings covering a myriad of details and made numerous decisions which were all approved and accepted in due time by the Oak Glen URC Consistory.

February 2018

Our Pastor, Rev. John Vermeer led us in worship for the last time on February 11 before moving to his new pastorate at the Doon URC, Doon, Iowa. His invaluable insights and wise guidance is and will be missed during the upcoming months.

John Van Dyke and Glenda Mathes of Christian Renewal were presented to Wheaton College and granted permission to report on and photograph Synod Wheaton 2018, of which we also approved.

A gracious offer by the Trinity Psalter Hymnal Committee, in particular from Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen and Rev. Chris Folkerts, to provide keyboardists for and to help select all music at Synod Wheaton 2018 was gratefully accepted. This will include Rev. Folkerts arranging scheduled devotion leaders throughout the week.

The following Overtures were examined and found to meet the Synodical Guidelines for placement in the Provisional Agenda.

- Overture from Classis Eastern US regarding an Appendix to the Church Order on Guidelines for Church Planting and Missions.
- Overture from Classis Ontario-East to Appoint a Statistician as a Functionary of Synod

March 2018

A decision was made to adopt the format followed by Classis Michigan at Synod Wyoming 2016 for the Opening Prayer Service. That is, to ask a number of the churches in the Classis to participate in sequential prayers. This format brings recognition to the facts that Synod hosting is rotated by Classis and not by Consistory, and that it is good to reflect at Synod the unity shared by sister churches within a Classis.

An invitation was presented to Rev. John Vermeer to, upon permission being granted from his Doon URC Consistory, provide the Opening Prayer Service greeting to the delegates and offer the opening mediation. Rev. Vermeer graciously accepted the invitation.

Elder Fred Colvin, Clerk of Council and Chairman of the Oak Glen Synod Planning Committee was appointed as Chairman Pro-Tem of Synod Wheaton 2018, with Elder Tim Beezhold as an alternate. Neither of these men are appointed Delegates to Synod.

The following Overtures were examined and found to meet the Synodical Guidelines for placement in the Provisional Agenda.

- Overture from Classis Eastern US to establish a Second Missions Coordinator Position.
- Overture from Classis Eastern US regarding a Nomination for the Position of Domestic Missions Coordinator.
- Overture from Classis Eastern US regarding Electronic Publication of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal
- Overture from Classis Southwestern Ontario regarding Article 47 of the Church Order
- Overture from Classis Southwest US regarding Article 55 of the Church Order

The Stated Clerk sought advice regarding a request to send out through his office a notification of an Overture to be presented to Synod Wheaton 2018 involving nominees for a Domestic Mission Coordinator. We directed the Stated Clerk to NOT send out such a communication through his Federation office of Stated Clerk as it was for a position that the Federation had not yet established. However, we did not discourage said notification going out by other appropriate means outside his office.

A Communication was received and reviewed from Rev. Jephthah Nobel. Rev. Nobel was informed that he could submit the Communication in the form of an Appeal through his Consistory. He decided to maintain the letter as a Communication. On that basis, it was approved for inclusion in the Provisional Agenda.

Respectfully submitted,

The Consistory of  
Oak Glen United Reformed Church  
Lansing, Illinois  
Fred A. Colvin, Clerk



## **Appendix 1**

### **Stated Clerk's Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

Esteemed Fathers and Brothers,

#### **1. The Work of the Clerk**

- a. Before writing this report, I read all the previous stated clerk's reports. One statement struck a sympathetic cord. Our second clerk, who served only part of one term, wrote in 2004,

My workload since assuming the clerical responsibilities has never been anything but heavy. Already in October, the synod 2004 committee of the Calgary church and I began work on preparing the previous synodical agendas and minutes for publication in bound volumes, as per article 35 of the Minutes of Synod 2001. This work was tedious and I quickly enlisted the assistance of the Calgary church's secretary, Carla DeBruyn, who proved invaluable for this assignment . . . Since this work presents a substantial distraction from the ministry, I would strongly recommend that the new stated clerk and alternate not be in full-time ministry. A semi-retired pastor, a retired pastor or an elder with spare time each would be fitting candidates for the task. It is also essential that the new clerk and his alternate be computer literate.

I can confirm that the work of the Stated Clerk is a large distraction from full time ministry. Providentially, the second major task of the clerk (preparation for synod) has been since my retirement from pastoring.

- b. I have answered numerous requests for information and referred numerous emails to the appropriate committees. As of the date of this report, I have saved over 2,250 emails dealing with my general duties and over 400 dealing with the preparations for this synod. (My mail program can give me an exact count in a second.) I average 4-5 emails each work day that require close attention and usually a reply. That does not include the ones I trash from advertisers and third world requests for money – people who glean the clerk's address from the website. (Regarding third world requests, a few show some knowledge or connection with the Reformed faith, where upon I seek advice from missionaries who may be familiar with the area from which the request came, and/or refer the email to CECCA or the Missions Committee and Coordinator.)
  - c. I received numerous requests for advice, not always related to my work as clerk. Generally, when I give advice, I make clear that I am speaking only as a minister, and not with my clerk's hat on (unless it is a matter directly relating to my duties as clerk).
  - d. In addition to correspondence, my two major tasks were the preparation of the Acts of Synod for hard copy publication, and the preparation of the agenda for the next synod.
- #### **2. Synod Wyoming 2016 Follow-up**
- a. After Synod Wyoming, I sent out 13 "thank you" letters to various committees and individuals as instructed by the chairman of that synod.
  - b. I informed the ICRC that Synod Wyoming ratified the proposed changes to their constitution given to us for ratification.

- c. I informed the churches of the need to vote before December 31, 2016 on ratification of the decision to enter Phase 2 with three denominations. A majority voted to ratify so, on January 2, 2017, I informed the churches that we had entered Phase 2 with the Calvinistic Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT), the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC), and the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA). The secretary of CECCA informed the three churches.
  - d. I updated the Regulations for Synodical Procedure with the 16 changes made by Synod Wyoming and posted the new edition to the website.
  - e. I updated the Church Order, adding the titles approved for each article, and posted it to the website.
  - f. I formatted for easy publication the pastoral advice regarding membership departures and posted it to the website, along with the pastoral advice approved by a previous synod (on doctrinal commitment) so that both are readily available under the synod tab, on the public side of the website.
  - g. I arranged for the publication of the Acts of Synod in hard copy – a rather laborious task because of the many liturgical forms and confessions that had to be reformatted to fit page size requirements – something not needed for the Agenda which was only published as a pdf. I learned a lot about editing for publication and trust, if given the opportunity, the next hard copy of the Acts will be completed in a timelier manner. According to established practice, the distribution of the printed Acts was the responsibility of the next convening consistory. They sent them to each classis at the address of the classis' next venue. This worked well in most cases. Although some waited a long time, the minutes of synod were available for download from the website at a very early date.
3. Ministerial News Service
- a. Synod 2016 authorized the creation of the ministerial news feed on the URCNA website. It became active in the Fall of 2016. Since then, consistories are responsible for posting their own news about ministers, candidates, and licentiates. I continue to remind consistories of this, and give them instruction, when they ask me to distribute their information, as previous clerks had done for them.
  - b. Regarding the lists of ministers, candidates, and licentiates that are found on the website, these lists are generated automatically by the information each church supplies when it updates its profile in the Admin section of the website. Since many churches do not update their profile regularly, I urged the webmaster to include in the 2016 directory a note on each church's page giving the date when the information was last updated. That has happened, and it is evident that many churches (at the time of publication) had not updated their information for two or three years and a few had not updated for four or five years.
4. Forwarding Notices to the Federation
- a. Although the position of Missions Coordinator was created before I became clerk, he had not yet taken over the full responsibility of handling all communications between missionaries and the churches since the previous

clerk had always handled that. With the Missions Coordinator's full cooperation, we made that transition and he now forwards to the churches all missionary news.

- b. One item that I forwarded at the request of a consistory, brought a wrist slapping from another consistory. It was a request for financial assistance for a seminary student. The consistory that chided me for sending the request to all the churches said that since it came from the office of the Stated Clerk, it appeared to have the endorsement of the federation, giving it an advantage over other causes. In hindsight, I agree, and when I was later asked to distribute a similar request, and after seeking the advice of the convening consistory, I deferred and suggested other means of distribution.
  - c. In the last year, I have only forwarded financial reports from our treasurers, announcements regarding ordering the Acts of Synod, synodical deadlines, the availability of the directory, ordering information for the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, and my change of address and contact information.
5. Fraternal Exchanges of Acts and Minutes
- a. Upon moving to Iowa, I was given six large boxes left behind by the previous clerk, several of which he had received from the clerk before him. In some of the boxes, I discovered copies of the Acts of Synod or General Assembly of the PCA, the OPC, and the RCUS, which they send us each year. They sit in boxes that collect dust in my garage. I plan to bring them to Wheaton in the hope that someone will have a good idea of what to do with them.
  - b. We are required to give a free copy of our Acts to all the churches with whom we have a relationship (about 20 foreign and domestic denominations) but the Regulations of Synodical Procedure do not specify "hard copy" (although that was the original intent and what we still do). I have suggested to the chairman of CERCU and the secretary of CECCA that in the future we give digital copies and ask for the same from our sister churches. The chairman and secretary readily agreed. I don't know if this needs synodical approval and/or a change in the Regulations.
6. Synodical Archive
- A few of the boxes I inherited contained federation archives. I would suggest that a willing church write an overture asking to be designated as the location for federation archives. (Or if the rules allow, perhaps a church could come prepared to volunteer at this synod.) At present that would not require more space than a four-drawer file cabinet. Neither I or the previous clerk have generated much in terms of hard files, so I don't see the need for the space growing rapidly, other than for a copy of each year's Acts and of each year's directory. If the material continues to get moved from one clerk's garage or basement to another, likely it will be lost. When synod takes up the matter of an official archive, it should specify what materials ought to be saved since most records are now electronic.
7. Venue for the Next Synod
- I have not received a letter from any of our churches requesting to host the next synod. There is an overture regarding synod rotation. Hopefully a church or churches will come to synod prepared to offer to host.

8. Review of the Regulations for Synodical Procedure
  - a. The Stated Clerk is required by the Regulations for Synodical Procedure to:
 

*“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.”*
  - b. I have no definite proposals but I present the following for consideration:
    - i. Synod should determine if it is desirable for the fraternal exchange of minutes/ Acts of our broadest assemblies to be done electronically, and if so, does that require a change in Regulation 4.5.4.e (regarding the duties of the Stated Clerk): “Prepare and distribute the Acts of Synod. At federation expense, one copy shall be sent to each federation with whom the United Reformed Churches are engaged in any ecumenical relations or contact. All other copies shall be purchased by those who order them.”
    - ii. What should be done with the past minutes and acts we have received from our sister federations and denominations? If we start receiving electronic versions, what should be done with them?
    - iii. If Overture 11 (regarding a statistician) and its purposed changes to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, are NOT adopted, the following two Regulations should be changed to reflect that the alphabetical registers of licentiates, candidates, and ministers, is generated automatically from data provided by each church when they edit and update their own profile using the Admin section of the website. Also 4.5.4.h should read “emeritus” rather than “emeritated.”  
 (Regarding the Stated Clerk) 4.5.4.h. Assist the webmaster with the content of the alphabetical registers of licentiates, candidates for the ministry, and ordained ministers of the United Reformed Churches, including all emeritated ministers and those who are deceased, as well as the archival record of those released, or deposed from the ministry in the United Reformed Churches.  
 (Regarding the Webmaster) 4.74.g. Maintain alphabetical registers of licentiates, candidates for the ministry, and ordained ministers of the United Reformed Churches, including all emeritus ministers and those who are deceased, as well as the archival record of those released, or deposed from the ministry in the United Reformed Churches. These registers shall be gleaned from the current information provided by the churches.
    - iv. Does synod want a permanent depository for synodical archives? If so, how should we go about getting one?
    - v. Where should we hold the next synod?

Respectfully submitted, your servant,  
 Ralph A. Pontier  
 URCNA Stated Clerk

***United Reformed Churches in North America***  
Robert D. Huisjen, US URCNA Treasurer  
8443 Farview Dr SE, Byron Center, Michigan, 49315

March 10, 2017

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 2016. 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 \$122,792 (compared to \$122,951 in 2015) and total expenses were \$105,406 (compared to \$114,805 in 2015) which resulted in income in excess of expenses in the amount of \$17,386 (compared to \$8,145 in 2015). As of the date of this report we have received \$1,904 in deposits subsequent to year end which were for 2016 askings but reported as income in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2017 since that is when they were received.

The Pastors and Elders who attended Synod 2016 approved a budget totaling \$198,407 (US Share of \$119,739) for the calendar year 2017. Askings were decreased to **\$30.09** per family from the previous amount of \$34.10 per family. For the upcoming calendar year, please continue to plan your Askings accordingly.

### **OBSERVATIONS**

1. There are currently 81 US churches of which 74 are organized churches and 7 are church plants.
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. 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.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Church Non-Participation</b>
2007	26%
2008	25%
2009	23%
2010	27%
2011	24%
2012	7%
2013	10%
2014	8%
2015	7%
2016	10%

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

<b>Year</b>	<b>Church Participation</b>
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
2016	6

## **ASKINGS**

URCNA “Askings” equals “Suggested Donation”. Beginning in 2017, the askings donation was adjusted to \$30.09 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 treasurer 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 2016 developed a budget for 2017 and 2018 in order to provide information on the ongoing activities.

The following pages contain the unaudited End-Of-Year Report for 2016. 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 2017, is currently **53.5** cents per mile, down from 54 cents per mile in 2016. 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 4th Qtr Ended December 31, 2016

	<u>Avg. Annual Budget - US</u>	<u>4th Qtr Actual</u>	<u>YTD Actual</u>
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/16 (General Fund)			\$62,329.90
INCOME			
Contributions / Askings		\$42,892.35	\$118,165.59
Contributions / Askings (2015)			\$4,525.01
Interest		<u>\$25.14</u>	<u>\$100.92</u>
Total Income		<u>\$42,917.49</u>	<u>\$122,791.52</u>
EXPENSES			
Accounting / Government Filing	\$25.00		\$20.00
Bank Fees	\$41.00		\$0.00
CECCA (1)	\$10,075.00		\$3,152.16
CERCU (2)	\$4,875.00	\$4,212.24	\$7,260.47
Clerk	\$2,600.00	\$650.00	\$3,033.33
Doctrinal Study Committee			
Dues			
NAPARC	\$325.00	\$650.00	\$650.00
ICRC	\$1,170.00		\$1,617.43
PRJC/MNA(dues) (3)	\$520.00	\$455.00	\$455.00 (5)
ICRC Travel			
Missions Coordinator	\$81,110.00	\$17,094.56	\$71,755.82
Mission Committee	\$5,850.00	(\$37.70)	\$4,181.04
PRCC	\$325.00		
Postage / Supplies	\$133.00	\$24.23	\$125.41
Acts of Synod (25 copies) plus shipping	\$81.00		
Joint Church Order Committee			
Song Book Committee	\$7,443.00		\$2,811.57
Liturgical Forms Committee	\$5,850.00		\$2,391.25
Membership Departure	\$1,950.00		
Emeritation/ Retirement Committee	\$3,250.00		
Synod (Functionaries to attend)	\$650.00		\$451.30 (4)
Legal (6)			
Treasurer - US	\$3,000.00	\$750.00	\$3,000.00
Treasurer - Joint Venture	\$1,950.00	\$506.71	\$1,819.52
Webmaster Honorarium	<u>\$2,925.00</u>	<u>\$731.25</u>	<u>\$2,681.25</u>
Total Expenses	<u>\$134,148.00</u>	<u>\$25,036.29</u>	<u>\$105,405.55</u>
TOTAL INCOME OVER EXPENSES		<u>\$17,881.20</u>	<u>\$17,385.97</u>
ADVANCE TO URCNA JOINT VENTURE ACCOUNT			<u>\$10,000.00</u> (9)
ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/16 (General Fund)			<u>\$69,715.87</u> (7)

	4th Qtr Actual	YTD Actual
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/16 (Hymnal Fund)		\$43,584.73
Contributions / Askings	\$147.00	\$4,932.50
Expenses		
Interest	\$25.58	\$102.74
<b>ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/16 (Hymnal Fund)</b>		<b>\$48,619.97 (8)</b>
<hr/>		
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/16 (Web Fund)		\$7,014.77
Contributions / Askings	\$0.00	\$600.00
Web Maintenance	\$789.72	\$809.21
Interest		
<b>ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/16 (Web Fund)</b>		<b>\$6,805.56</b>
<b>TOTAL CASH BALANCE - 12/31/16 (All Funds)</b>		<b>\$125,141.40</b>

#### 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 treasurers are paid fully by their respective countries and the JVA Treasurer and Web Master are paid jointly based on the 65/35 split.
7. \$15,444.03 of the general fund balance has been invested in a short-term cd
8. \$25,740.10 of the hymnal fund balance has been invested in a short-term cd
9. This is an advance to the URCNA Joint Venture account to facilitate more timely reimbursements of expenses

# *United Reformed Churches in North America*

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

March 23, 2018

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 2017. 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 \$108,103 (compared to \$122,792 in 2016) and total expenses were \$88,136 (compared to \$105,406 in 2016) which resulted in income in excess of expenses in the amount of \$19,967 (compared to \$17,386 in 2016). As of the date of this report we have received \$2,015 in deposits subsequent to year end which were for 2017 askings but reported as income in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2018 since that is when they were received.

The Pastors and Elders who attended Synod Wyoming 2016 approved a budget totaling \$198,407 (US Share of \$121,101) for the calendar year 2018. 2018 Askings were increased slightly to **\$30.43** per family from the 2017 amount of \$30.09 per family. For the upcoming calendar year, please continue to plan your Askings accordingly.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

1. There are currently 81 US churches of which 74 are organized churches and 7 are church plants.
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. 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.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Church Non-Participation</b>
2007	26%
2008	25%
2009	23%
2010	27%
2011	24%
2012	7%
2013	10%
2014	8%
2015	7%
2016	8%
2017	9%

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

<b>Year</b>	<b>Church Participation</b>
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
2016	6
2017	7

## **ASKINGS**

URCNA “Askings” equals “Suggested Donation”. Beginning in 2018, the askings donation was adjusted to \$30.43 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.” The new Psalter Hymnal is anticipated to be completed by the 2018 Synod.

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 2016 developed a budget for 2017 and 2018 in order to provide information on the ongoing activities.

The following pages contain the unaudited End-Of-Year Report for 2017. An audit should be completed for both years 2016 and 2017 prior to 2018 synod. 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 2018, has increased to **54.5** cents per mile, up from 53.5 cents per mile in 2017. 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 4th Qtr and Year Ended December 31, 2017

	Avg. Annual Budget - US	Avg. Annual Budget - US	4th Qtr Actual	12/31/17 Actual
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/17 (General Fund)				\$69,715.87
INCOME				
Contributions / Askings			\$37,317.33	\$105,576.75
Contributions / Askings (2016)				\$2,324.23
Interest			\$91.25	\$202.60
Total Income			\$37,408.58	\$108,103.58
EXPENSES	2016	2017		
Accounting / Government Filing	\$25.00	\$25.00		\$20.00
Bank Fees	\$41.00	\$26.00		
Appeals	\$0.00	\$1,950.00		\$1,765.26
CECCA (1)	\$10,075.00	\$4,875.00	\$2,294.67	\$3,699.37
CERCU (2)	\$4,875.00	\$6,500.00		\$280.03
Clerk	\$2,600.00	\$2,600.00	\$650.00	\$1,950.00
Doctrinal Study				
Committee Dues				
NAPARC	\$325.00	\$455.00		
ICRC	\$1,170.00	\$1,625.00		\$1,617.43
PRCC/MNA(dues) (3) (5)	\$520.00	\$663.00	\$520.00	\$608.05
ICRC Travel				
Missions Coordinator	\$81,110.00	\$70,457.50	\$16,536.25	\$59,384.20
Mission Committee	\$5,850.00	\$9,750.00	\$1,103.58	\$7,335.02
PRCC Liason	\$325.00	\$325.00		
Postage / Supplies	\$133.00	\$50.00	\$97.35	\$102.44
Acts of Synod plus shipping	\$81.00	\$162.50		(\$116.58)(8)
Directors and Liability Insurance		\$1,000.00		\$885.00
Song Book Committee	\$7,443.00	\$3,250.00		\$467.10
Liturgical Forms Committee	\$5,850.00	\$5,850.00		
Membership Departure	\$1,950.00	\$0.00		
Emeritation/ Retirement Committee	\$3,250.00	\$0.00		
Synod (Functionaries to attend) (4)	\$650.00	\$0.00		
Treasurer - US (6)	\$3,000.00	\$4,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$4,000.00
Treasurer - Joint Venture (6)	\$1,950.00	\$2,600.00	\$931.44	\$3,295.45
Webmaster Honorarium (6)	\$2,925.00	\$3,575.00	\$731.25	\$2,843.75
Total Expenses	\$134,148.00	\$119,739.00	\$23,864.54	\$88,136.52
TOTAL INCOME OVER EXPENSES			\$13,544.04	\$19,967.06
ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/17 (General Fund)				\$89,682.93(7)

	4th Qtr Actual	12/31/17 Actual
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/17 (Hymnal Fund)		\$48,619.97
Contributions / Askings	\$0.00	\$0.00
Expenses	\$40,000.00	\$40,000.00
Interest		\$34.14
<b>ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/17 (Hymnal Fund)</b>		<b><u>\$8,654.11</u></b>
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE - 1/1/17 (Web Fund)		\$6,805.56
Contributions / Askings	\$173.00	\$607.00
Web Maintenance	\$674.05	\$2,755.23
Interest		
<b>ENDING CASH BALANCE - 12/31/17 (Web Fund)</b>		<b><u>\$4,657.33</u></b>
<b>TOTAL CASH BALANCE - 12/31/17 (All Funds)</b>		<b><u>\$102,994.37</u></b>

#### 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 treasurers are paid fully by their respective countries and the JVA Treasurer and Web Master are paid jointly based on the 65/35 split.
7. \$15,459.26 of the general fund balance has been invested in a short-term cd
8. Amount reimbursed for Acts of Synod copies exceeding the cost; we were reimbursed for some previous year acts.



## UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA

Robert Huisjen, US URCNA Treasurer  
Synod Wyoming 2016

Financial Report through 09/30/16  
10/15/16

			Budget	YTD Actual	Variance to Budget favorable (unfavorable)
<b>BEGINNING CASH BALANCE – 1/1/16</b>			\$ 38,232.12	\$ 38,232.12	
<b>INCOME</b>					
Registration Fees	100		\$ 26,600.00	\$ 26,812.02	\$ 212.02
Projected # of paying attendees	266				
Mid-America Ref. Sem. Reception				\$ 1,600.00	
Outings				\$ 461.00	
Surplus Funds			\$ 17,423.00		
Total Income			\$ 44,023.00	\$ 28,873.02	
<b>EXPENSES</b>					
Meals	Direct	\$19,418	\$ 26,734.00	\$ 29,786.14	(\$3,052.14)
	Indirect	\$ 7,316			
Facilities			4,500.00	3,210.61	1,289.39
Technology			3,999.00	3,479.60	519.40
Office/Clerical			4,040.00	1,822.47	2,217.63
Finance			70.00	35.16	34.84
Lodging			4,680.00	7,812.70	(3,132.70)
MARS Reception				1,409.94	(1,409.94)
Activities				887.40	(887.40)
Transportation	Golf Carts			800.49	(800.49)
Total Expenses			\$ 44,023.00	\$ 49,244.41	(\$5,221.41)
TOTAL EXPENSES OVER INCOME			\$ (17,423.00)	(20,371.39)	<b>(\$2,948.39)</b>
<b>ENDING CASH BALANCE – 9/30/16</b>				<b>\$ 17,860.73</b>	
Projected Ending Balance per budget			<b>\$ 20,809.12</b>		

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

**2016 End of Year Report (not audited)**

May 3, 2017

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 2016 askings from 39 (2015 – 40) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 9 (2015 – 8) Canadian churches. Three classes (2015 – 3) provided the \$100 US for the web fund.

Overall, 2016 was a positive year with 90% of churches participating and remitting askings. The number of churches contributing to the Psalter Hymnal fund increased slightly from 2015.

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. In 2016, the URCNA's 2015 financial statements were reviewed. If you would like to obtain a copy of the reviewed financial statements, please contact the Canadian treasurer and a copy will be forwarded to you. The 2016 financial statements have been sent to the accountant. At the time of this report the draft financial statements have not been completed.

I have also attached a report for the joint venture activities from January to December 2016. 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 2016, 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.

The askings for 2017 have been set at \$41.45 per family (decreased from \$45.25 per family set in 2016). Statements were emailed at the beginning of January 2017 to clerks/treasurers to show what has been budgeted to be received from their church.

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](mailto: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](mailto:CdnURCNA@gmail.com)

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

**2016 Year End Report (not audited)**

**General Fund**

	Jan - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Askings	93,345.25	5,656.25	99,001.50
Interest	92.11	-	92.11
 Total Income	<u>93,437.36</u>	<u>5,656.25</u>	<u>99,093.61</u>
Expenses			
Joint Venture Advances			
Bank charges	5.51	3.93	9.44
Committee expenses			
CECCA (note 1)	1,736.10	-	1,736.10
CERCU (note 2)	-	3,154.11	3,154.11
Liturgical forms	1,747.04	-	1,747.04
Missions	3,088.74	(28.59)	3,060.15
PRCC	167.47	-	167.47
Songbook	2,079.97	-	2,079.97
Dues			
ICRC	1,226.49	-	1,226.49
MNA	-	345.02	345.02
NAPARC	-	492.89	492.89
Missions coordinator	38,040.99	12,096.33	50,137.32
Stipends (note 3)	4,787.76	1,431.61	6,219.37
Supplies	21.83	-	21.83
Synod	314.73	-	314.73
Government filing fee	-	20.00	20.00
Postage	211.64	13.24	224.88
Professional fees	2,286.68	-	2,286.68
Treasurer	3,293.40	1,097.80	4,391.20
 Total Expenses	<u>59,008.35</u>	<u>18,626.34</u>	<u>77,634.69</u>
 Net Total	<u>34,429.01</u>	<u>(12,970.09)</u>	<u>21,458.92</u>

**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, 2016)

Bank (note 4)	63,934.12
Accounts receivable (note 5)	2,412.98
Prepays (note 6)	2,918.87
Accounts payable	2,384.59
General fund balance	66,881.38

**NOTES:**

- (4) The bank balance is provided for information purposes. During the year, the GIC in the amount of \$11,000 came due and was not reinvested
- (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 (payment is made quarterly).
- (6) Represents reimbursements for committee expenses for meetings to be held in 2017.

**Hymnal Fund**

	Jan - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Collections (note 2)	3,225.11	2,227.63	5,452.74
Interest	242.81	-	242.81
Total Income	<u>3,467.92</u>	<u>2,227.63</u>	<u>5,695.55</u>
Expenses			
Total Expenses	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Net Total	<u>3,467.92</u>	<u>2,227.63</u>	<u>5,695.55</u>
Balance Sheet			
Bank (note 1)			42,869.04
Psalter fund balance			42,869.04

**NOTES:**

- (1) During the year, the GIC in the amount of \$29,000 came due and was not reinvested.
- (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 - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Classis	200.00	100.00	300.00
Total Income	<u>200.00</u>	<u>100.00</u>	<u>300.00</u>
Expenses	14.77	598.83	613.60
Total Expenses	<u>14.77</u>	<u>598.83</u>	<u>613.60</u>
Net Total	<u>185.23</u>	<u>(498.83)</u>	<u>(313.60)</u>
Balance Sheet			
Bank			2,526.06
Accounts receivable			100.00
Web fund balance			2,626.06

**NOTES:**

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

**2016 Year End Report (not audited) – in USD**

**General Fund**

	Jan - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD Total	YTD Budget
<b>Income</b>				
URCNA - Canada	39,840.19	13,524.68	53,364.87	70,537.25
URCNA - US	73,988.87	25,117.24	99,106.11	130,997.75
Interest	11.13	1.99	13.12	-
Sundry - presentations	741.49	1,132.00	1,873.49	-
<b>Total Income</b>	<u>114,581.68</u>	<u>39,775.91</u>	<u>154,357.59</u>	<u>201,535.00</u>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Bank charges	22.34	10.35	32.69	25.00
Committee expenses				
CECCA (note 1)	3,746.03	-	3,746.03	15,500.00
CERCU (note 2)	-	6,085.17	6,085.17	7,500.00
Liturgical forms	3,678.82	395.20	4,074.02	9,000.00
Membership departure	-	-	-	3,000.00
Missions	9,577.18	-	9,577.18	9,000.00
Retirement	-	-	-	5,000.00
Songbook	4,326.89	-	4,326.89	11,450.00
Dues (note 3)				
ICRC	2,488.36	-	2,488.36	1,800.00
MNA	-	700.00	700.00	800.00
NAPARC	-	1,000.00	1,000.00	500.00
Missions coordinator				
Office supplies/telephone	1,552.94	597.19	2,150.13	6,000.00
Salary and benefits	70,687.45	23,647.80	94,335.25	98,785.00
Travel and mileage	7,674.83	3,220.70	10,895.53	20,000.00
PRCC	339.76	-	339.76	500.00
Stipends (note 4)				
Clerk	4,000.00	1,000.00	5,000.00	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	49.15	-	49.15	50.00
Synod	694.30	-	694.30	1,000.00
Acts of Synod (note 4)	-	-	-	125.00
Website	29.98	1,214.95	1,244.93	-
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u>114,581.68</u>	<u>39,775.91</u>	<u>154,357.59</u>	<u>201,535.00</u>
<b>Net Total</b>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

Balance Sheet (as at December 31, 2016)

Bank (note 5)	1,349.63
Accounts receivable (note 6)	139.48
Prepays (note 7)	2,205.56
Accounts payable (note 8)	3,694.67
General fund balance	-

NOTES:

- (1) CECCA – Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
- (2) CERCUC – Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
- (3) Represents yearly amount paid for dues; budgeted amounts were estimated at Synod 2014
- (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. Synod 2016 approved an additional payment of \$1,000 to cover the transition of the stated clerk.
- (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 reimbursement for committee expenses for meetings to be held in 2017
- (8) 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



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

**2017 End of Year Report (not audited)**

January 31, 2018

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 2017 askings from 40 (2016 – 39) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 9 (2016 – 9) Canadian churches. Three classes (2016 – 3) provided the \$100 for the web fund.

Overall, 2017 was a positive year with 100% of churches participating and remitting askings. The number of churches contributing to the Psalter Hymnal fund was consistent with 2016. Significant expenses were incurred to maintain the website in 2017 which has significantly decreased the website funds.

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. In 2017, the URCNA's 2016 financial statements were reviewed. Attached is the review engagement report issued from Deloitte. If you would like to obtain a complete copy of the reviewed financial statements, please contact the Canadian treasurer and a copy will be forwarded to you. The 2017 financial statements have been sent to the accountant. At the time of this report the draft financial statements have not been completed. Should they arrive before the Synod reporting deadline, the review engagement report will be attached.

I have also attached a report for the joint venture activities from January to December 2017. 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 2017, 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.

Askings:

The Canadian board of directors has decided that for 2018, the asking amount will be set so that 80% of the budget expenses are collected. This is to account for the fact that 100% of the askings have been collected by the Canadian churches while only 82% of the budgeted expenses

are spent. This practice will be reviewed at the end of 2018 when the asking amount for 2019 is established. Should the actual expenses in 2018 exceed the anticipated 80% spending expected, then the difference will be covered by the accumulated surplus.

Consequently, the askings for 2018 have been set at \$32.00 per family (decreased from \$41.45 per family set in 2017). Statements will be emailed at the beginning of February 2018 to clerks/treasurers to show what has been budgeted to be received from their church.

Psalter Hymnal:

As the Trinity Psalter Hymnal is now available for purchase, funds will no longer be accepted for the Psalter Hymnal fund for collections occurring on or after January 1, 2018. Please advise your bookkeepers / diaconate of this as soon as possible.

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](mailto: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

Home: 905-386-0492  
E-Mail: [CdnURCNA@gmail.com](mailto:CdnURCNA@gmail.com)

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

**2017 Fourth Quarter Report (not audited)**

**General Fund**

	Jan - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD TOTAL	Yrly Budget
<b>Income</b>				
Askings	83,042.55	6,562.95	89,605.50	87,542.40
Acts of Synod (note 1)	2,304.56	-	2,304.56	-
Donations and other	2,000.00	4.69	2,004.69	-
<b>Total Income</b>	<u>87,347.11</u>	<u>6,567.64</u>	<u>93,914.75</u>	<u>87,542.40</u>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Joint Venture Advances				
Acts of Synod (note 2)	164.67	-	164.67	120.00
Bank charges	10.34	3.47	13.81	20.40
Committee expenses				
Appeals	1,218.09	-	1,218.09	1,400.00
CECCA (note 3)	2,558.53	316.34	2,874.87	3,500.00
CERCU (note 4)	298.95	2,265.82	2,564.77	4,650.00
Liturgical forms	-	-	-	4,190.00
Missions	6,350.29	-	6,350.29	6,980.00
PRCC	60.97	-	60.97	240.00
Songbook	323.47	-	323.47	2,330.00
Dues				
ICRC	1,120.06	-	1,120.06	1,170.00
MNA	344.97	-	344.97	562.00
NAPARC	-	426.53	426.53	330.00
Missions coordinator	31,942.22	8,409.39	40,351.61	47,685.00
Stipends (note 5)	5,217.09	1,543.01	6,760.10	6,870.00
Supplies	21.83	-	21.83	25.00
Acts of Synod (note 1)	2,298.57	-	2,298.57	-
Bank charges	-	45.00	45.00	-
D&O insurance	-	703.00	703.00	1,100.00
Government filing fee	-	20.00	20.00	30.00
Postage	129.76	4.41	134.17	50.00
Professional fees	2,359.44	-	2,359.44	2,300.00
Treasurer	2,994.62	950.00	3,944.62	3,990.00
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u>57,413.87</u>	<u>14,686.97</u>	<u>72,100.84</u>	<u>87,542.40</u>
<b>Net Total</b>	<u>29,933.24</u>	<u>(8,119.33)</u>	<u>21,813.91</u>	<u>-</u>

Balance Sheet	2017
Bank	85,569.56
Accounts receivable (note 6)	4,911.96
Prepays (note 7)	2,985.84
Accounts payable	4,264.40
General fund balance	89,202.96

NOTES:

- (1) Represents the amounts collected for the printing and mailing of the Acts of Synod from the churches, and the corresponding cost
- (2) Represents the Canadian portion for the “extra” Acts of Synod that are printed as Federation copies
- (3) CECCA – Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
- (4) CERCU – Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
- (5) 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
- (6) 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 (payment is made quarterly).
- (7) Represents committee expenses pertaining to 2018 (paid in 2017)

**Hymnal Fund**

	Jan - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Collections	7,768.55	2,290.50	10,059.05
Interest	-	-	-
Total Income	<u>7,768.55</u>	<u>2,290.50</u>	<u>10,059.05</u>
Expenses			
Total Expenses	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>
Net Total	<u>7,768.55</u>	<u>2,290.50</u>	<u>10,059.05</u>
Balance Sheet			2017
Bank			51,986.19
Accounts receivable			941.90
Psalter fund balance			52,928.09

**Web Fund**

	Jan - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD TOTAL
Income			
Classis	200.00	100.00	300.00
Total Income	<u>200.00</u>	<u>100.00</u>	<u>300.00</u>
Expenses	1,441.20	442.31	1,883.51
Total Expenses	<u>1,441.20</u>	<u>442.31</u>	<u>1,883.51</u>
Net Total	<u>(1,241.20)</u>	<u>(342.31)</u>	<u>(1,583.51)</u>
Balance Sheet		<u>2017</u>	<u>2016</u>
Bank		942.55	2,526.06
Accounts receivable		100.00	100.00
Web fund balance		1,042.55	2,626.06

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

**2017 Fourth Quarter Report (not audited) – in USD**

**General Fund**

	Jan - Sep	Oct - Dec	YTD TOTAL	Yrly Budget
<b>Income</b>				
URCNA - Canada	40,160.88	10,735.83	50,896.71	61,769.07
URCNA - US	74,584.34	19,937.93	94,522.27	114,713.93
Interest	5.43	0.37	5.80	-
Sundry - presentations	223.94	3,704.02	3,927.96	-
<b>Total Income</b>	<u>114,974.59</u>	<u>34,378.15</u>	<u>149,352.74</u>	<u>176,483.00</u>
<b>Expenses</b>				
Bank charges	28.70	8.50	37.20	40.00
Committee expenses				
Appeals	2,715.80	-	2,715.80	3,000.00
CECCA (note 1)	5,691.33	691.09	6,382.42	7,500.00
CERCU (note 2)	664.16	4,998.62	5,662.78	10,000.00
Liturgical forms	-	-	-	9,000.00
Missions	13,880.12	-	13,880.12	15,000.00
Songbook	718.62	-	718.62	5,000.00
Dues				
ICRC	2,488.36	-	2,488.36	2,500.00
MNA	800.00	-	800.00	1,200.00
NAPARC	-	1,000.00	1,000.00	700.00
Missions coordinator				
Office supplies/telephone	1,449.32	1,041.96	2,491.28	7,500.00
Salary and benefits	61,685.60	19,994.85	81,680.45	79,182.00
Travel and mileage	9,456.78	1,988.53	11,445.31	20,000.00
PRCC	135.46	-	135.46	500.00
Stipends (note 3)				
Clerk	3,000.00	1,000.00	4,000.00	4,000.00
Treasurer	4,261.69	1,492.60	5,754.29	5,561.00
Webmaster	4,375.00	1,125.00	5,500.00	5,500.00
Supplies	51.17	-	51.17	50.00
Synod	-	-	-	-
Acts of Synod (note 4)	370.66	-	370.66	250.00
Website	3,201.82	1,037.00	4,238.82	-
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u>114,974.59</u>	<u>34,378.15</u>	<u>149,352.74</u>	<u>176,483.00</u>
<b>Net Total</b>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>

Balance Sheet	2017
Bank (note 5)	3,244.57
Accounts receivable (note 6)	9,502.37
Accounts payable (note 7)	2,746.94
Advance from URCNA – US (note 8)	10,000.00
General fund balance	-

NOTES:

- (1) CECCA – Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
- (2) CERCUC – Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
- (3) 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
- (4) Represents the cost the “extra” Acts of Synod that are printed as Federation copies
- (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
- (8) URCNA – US has advanced money to the JVA to ensure that expenses can be paid in a more timely manner

## **Overture 1**

### **Add New Material on Appeals to Church Order as an Appendix**

#### **I. Background**

This overture arises out of what we believe was a mistaken ruling by the chairman of Synod Wyoming 2016 with regard to Overture 17 – Creating a Study Committee on Appeals. The Synodical Advisory Committee recommended creating such a committee and giving it the following mandate:

“Develop and recommend a clear set of guidelines for adjudicating appeals that can be added to our Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix B, Guidelines for Appeals.” (Concept Minutes Article 69.2.b.)

A motion was made and supported to amend the mandate by adding to the end the phrase: *“and as an appendix to our Church Order.”* When the chairman was questioned about the propriety of giving a committee the mandate to change the Church Order, he said that the amendment was not out of order. We believe that decision to be in error.

Synod has historically held that only the churches may change the Church Order. This was evidenced on the next day of synod when the synod adopted the following ground in encouraging churches to submit overtures to amend the Church Order:

“Overtures in regard to Church Order should arise from consistories (Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix A.)” (Concept Minutes, Article 121.4.a.)

While we believe that the principle of only allowing churches to change the Church Order is important and needs to be upheld, we do not want to delay unnecessarily applying the work of the Study Committee which is scheduled to report to Synod 2018. Therefore, we submit this overture.

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod 2018 to amend the Church Order by adding an Appendix 7 and by adding the words “(See Appendix 7)” to the end of articles 29 and 31. The content of this appendix will be the same as that which the Synod approves to be included in the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix B, Guidelines for Appeals.

#### *Grounds:*

1. Churches, not committees, should change the Church Order.
2. A mistaken ruling at a synod should not be the basis of changing our historical practice or of setting a precedent for the future.

Classis Central U.S.

Rev. Talman Wagenmaker, Stated Clerk



## Overture 2

### Adopt “Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony”

#### I. Background

Over the past decades, we have witnessed Western culture’s progressive abandonment of the Biblical definition of marriage. The movement to normalize conduct which the Bible condemns began to manifest itself in various judicial, legislative and administrative actions in both Canada and the United States. Initially, secularists sought approval in various state legislatures to provide homosexual unions all the incidents of marriage, but without giving it the name. Clear thinking Christians saw this as an initial 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 (Acts of Synod London, 2010, Articles 128, 132, p.82).

While legal changes regarding marriage were already occurring in Canada, a climactic legal decision 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, Opinion No. 14-556, June 26, 2015*). The Court changed the historic definition of 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. Undoubtedly, the present threat to religious liberty posed by the *Obergefell* ruling in the United States now extends to churches, individual Christians, Christian organizations, seminaries, and Christian schools as the biblical, confessional, and liturgical position of the United Reformed Churches in North America is at odds with this Supreme Court decision.

Scripture, the Reformed confessions, our liturgical forms, and church order are not silent on the issue of marriage. Together they clearly testify to the consensus of two millennia of Christian teaching that “Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous covenantal union between one man and one woman” (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*). We stand in unity with our Presbyterian brothers’ confessional standard which states: “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time” (*Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 24*). The “holy marriage” to which our Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 refers is this God-ordained union of one man and one woman.

Given the contested nature of marriage in our culture, it is fitting for our churches to clearly affirm the Scriptural teaching on the nature of marriage at this time.

The church speaks most powerfully when she speaks timelessly, bearing witness to the eternal and unchanging words of Scripture as well as to a continuity of faith and practice that transcends the cultural winds. This affirmation will clearly demonstrate that our beliefs and practice are grounded in two thousand years of the church’s Scriptural teaching, as well as almost five hundred years of liturgical practice in the Reformed tradition. It will encourage our church officers and members to stand fast in this teaching, preserve the unity of the faith with the saints through the ages, and not be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of

doctrine.” It will furthermore be a testimony to a watching world that is increasingly unmoored from God’s Law.

Finally, this affirmation shall be a reminder that with the Apostles, “We must obey God rather than man” (*Acts 5:29*). While we may face persecution for holding to Scriptural truth, we gladly count ourselves among those Christians who have borne witness under the cross. It may even require us to disobey the civil magistrate should they seek to compel us to disobey the Word of God. We pray that we may count these trials a joy, and persevere with the martyrs who have gone before us, even unto the extreme of offering “our backs to stripes, our tongues to knives, our mouths to gags, and our whole bodies to the fire, because we know that whoever will follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself” (*Belgic Confession, Letter to King Philip II*).

## II. Overture

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod 2018 as follows:

A. To adopt the following “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony”:

1. The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself at the very beginning of history (*Genesis 2:18; Solemnization of Marriage: Form I*).
2. Since husbands and wives are united by the Lord’s hand, nothing should separate them in this life (*Genesis 2:18-24; Solemnization of Marriage: Form I*).
3. Since the Lord forbids immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband (*1 Cor. 7:2; Solemnization of Marriage: Form I*).
4. The first purpose of marriage is that husband and wife shall live together in sincere love and holiness, helping each other faithfully in all things that belong to this life and to the life to come (*Genesis 2:18; Solemnization of Marriage: Form I*).
5. The second purpose of marriage is procreation, that by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased (*Genesis 1:22; Solemnization of Marriage: Form I*).
6. The third purpose of marriage is that by marriage the kingdom of God is to be advanced. This purpose calls for loving devotion to each other, and a common responsibility for the nurture of children in true knowledge and fear of the Lord, which the Lord may give them as his heritage and as parties to his covenant (*Eph. 5:22-6:4; Solemnization of Marriage: Form I*).
7. Marriage is a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness to man, an institution of the highest significance to the human race, and a symbol of the union of Christ and his Church (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form I*). Our Lord Jesus declared that the one-flesh union of one man and one woman in marriage is rooted in creation and reflected in the mystery of the gospel (*Genesis 1:22; Ephesians 5:22–33*);
8. Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous, covenantal union between one man and one woman (*Genesis 1:22; Ephesians 5:22–33; Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*).
9. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry in the Lord (*1 Cor. 7:39; Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*).

10. Christian marriages shall be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, under the regulation of the Consistory, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*).
11. URCNA Ministers shall not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*). Even as all citizens are to honor governing authorities, such 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. As members of His precious Church, we must remain faithful to Christ and His Word even if illegitimately commanded by secular powers to disobey Him and His Word (*1 Peter 2:17; Belgic Confession Article 36*).
12. Any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexuality, incest, 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; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, 109*).
13. The good news of the gospel is that all forms of sexual immorality are sins from which Scripture mercifully calls men and women to repent; and from which, by God's grace, they can repent, be forgiven, and be renewed to a new life of obedience to Christ by the power of the Spirit of God (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*).

*Grounds:*

1. It is timely for the URCNA affirm its teaching on the nature of marriage due to the great upheaval we are witnessing in the nature, morality, and legal understanding of marriage, as our culture and legal structures becomes increasingly unmoored from God's law and opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It is needful to exhort officers and members of the URCNA that in times of cultural and legal opposition we must heed the Apostolic command: "We must obey God rather than man" (*Acts 5:29*), and be willing to peaceably disobey the civil magistrate, suffering all consequences, when man's law conflicts with God's law (*Belgic Confession Art. 36*).
3. It is necessary to clearly establish before the civil magistrate that ministers in United Reformed Churches are constrained to not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God, both by their ordination vows and over five hundred years of consistent faith and practice.
4. It is necessary for the URCNA to coalesce through this Affirmation the biblical truths on sexuality and marriage found in our Catechism, our Church Order, and liturgical forms in order to more effectively address the current cultural challenges to the nature of marriage itself.
5. The Church speaks most powerfully to a world in turmoil when she speaks in a timeless fashion. An affirmation of our churches' faith and practice as reflected in Scripture, the Reformed confessions, historic liturgical forms, and church order most powerfully reflects both our continuity with the past and the enduring nature of our witness.
6. Although some professing Christians today deny the clarity of Scripture's teaching on marriage, this affirmation reflects our commitment to maintain the unity of the faith and read God's Word in common with the saints through the ages.
7. The teaching of God's timeless and infallible Word is wholly authoritative to address the errors of our age and of any age.

- B. To encourage the churches of the federation to send the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to governing authorities as each church deems appropriate.

*Grounds:*

1. The church exercises the keys of the kingdom by witnessing the Gospel Truth to the world, calling all men everywhere to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. 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; Jeremiah 1:9-10*).
  2. There are varying degrees of involvement by different executive, judicial, legislative, parliamentary, and administrative bodies in both Canada and the United States regarding the matters addressed in the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony.”
  3. Affirming our historic teaching in the universal language of our Scriptural tradition best preserves the freedom of local Consistories to address their civil magistrate and cultural context in an appropriate fashion. We acknowledge the need for this affirmation has been precipitated by particular events in the United States, namely, the new legal regime brought about by the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). However, as a church that spans multiple jurisdictions in North America, our universal testimony can serve as witness to any magistrate in any jurisdiction.
  4. The local churches can best assess the most effective means of communicating the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to the most relevant governing authorities in their respective jurisdictions.
- C. To direct the Stated Clerk to send the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) for the member churches’ consideration and edification.

*Grounds:*

1. The URCNA is a member of NAPARC.
2. 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*).
3. Sending the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to NAPARC advances the purpose of sharing our insights on these issues which we face in common with NAPARC churches.

Classis Central U.S.

Rev. Talman Wagenmaker, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 3**

### **Amend Church Order Article 64 Regarding Membership Departure**

#### **I. Background**

A Membership Departure Study Committee report was presented to Synod Wyoming 2016. In its consideration of the report, Synod Wyoming adopted the following recommendation:

*That Synod encourage the churches to employ these four categories, (i.e. transfer, release, exclusion, erasure), in submitting overtures to amend the Church Order with regard to membership departure.*

*Grounds:*

- a. Overtures in regard to Church Order should arise from consistories (Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix A).*
- b. These categories provide a common vocabulary for the churches to use in such overtures.*
- c. Codifying the Pastoral Advice by appropriate changes to the Church Order will clarify the matter and lead to a more consistent dealing with membership departures among the churches.*

*Adopted.*

*[Acts of Synod, Article 121].*

This overture seeks to amend the Church Order with regard to member departures, employing the categories of transfer, release, and erasure, which categories are absent in our current Church Order. Since the category of “exclusion” is already properly codified in Church Order Article 59, this overture does not seek any amendment utilizing that category.

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod 2018 to make the following amendments to Church Order Article 64:

Current wording:

##### Article 64:

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 (categories highlighted for ease of identification and are not intended to be highlighted in the text of the church order):

##### 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.

(2) Members seeking to join a church not in ecclesiastical fellowship with our federation shall submit a written request to the consistory. The consistory may **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.

(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 the member's spiritual interests, and the member cannot be dissuaded, on being informed that the member has joined such a church, the consistory may **erase** the member's name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(4) When a member informs the consistory of the member's intent to withdraw, resign, or terminate membership in a congregation of the United Reformed Churches, the Consistory must seek to dissuade the member from this spiritually destructive course of action. If despite those efforts the member persists in such action, the consistory may **erase** the member's name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

(5) When a member unites with a church of another denomination without requesting a certificate of membership, the consistory may **erase** the member's 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** the member's 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 and the member cannot be persuaded to return, the consistory may **erase** the member's 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. In the case of erasure, the consistory should make clear that erasure is a form of discipline without full process due to the actions of the member. The consistory should use discretion in their erasure announcements 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:*

1. Synod Wyoming 2016 encouraged churches to consider changes to the Church Order regarding membership departures [*Acts of Synod Wyoming 2016, Article 121*].
2. Article 64 addresses the subject of member departures and thus codification of new procedures addressing the departure of members properly belongs in Article 64.
3. These proposed changes codify the practice of "transfer" and "release" of membership under circumstances consistent with the Pastoral Advice received at Synod Wyoming 2016 [*Acts of Synod Wyoming 2016, Article 121*].
4. The proposed changes preserve continuity with our historical use of the term "exclusion" as a *completed* disciplinary process for *non-communicant members only*, as currently properly codified in Church Order Article 59. The new category of "erasure" clearly differentiates

this procedure as an abbreviated process which can apply to both communicant and non-communicant members. Also, these proposed uses of “erasure” would align our practice with those of our sister federations (OPC and RCUS) under similar circumstances addressed in the proposed amendment.

5. These proposed changes provide for erasure for members who:
  - 1) affiliate with another church without asking for a statement of membership, or
  - 2) join a church which the consistory judges will not advance the member’s spiritual interest.

The Membership Departure Study Committee was broadly directed to consider all such manners of leaving the church [*Acts of Synod Visalia 2014, Article 61*], but these particular situations were not addressed in the Study Committee’s Majority Report. Synod Wyoming 2016 encouraged the churches to consider changes to the Church Order to address such situations [*Acts of Synod Wyoming 2016, Article 121*].

Classis Central U.S.

Rev. Talman Wagenmaker, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 4**

### **Classical Rotation for Hosting Synods**

#### **I. Background**

Synod Escondido 2001 adopted a policy of “holding synodical meetings in each of the classes in turn” (Acts 2001, Article 35.A.3.) The grounds for that overture express the benefits of having the first three synods rotate locations, and there was a desire to continue those benefits in the future. This policy was later codified in the Regulations for Synodical Procedure 1.4.

At the time the policy was adopted, there were only 6 classes and synod rotated as follows:

2001	Southwest U.S.
2004	Western Canada
2007	Central U.S.
2010	Southern Ontario
2012	Eastern U.S.

At Synod 2007, permission was given for the formation of Classis Pacific Northwest. Although these churches had formerly been a part of Classis Southwest U.S., they were now a new classis, so they entered the rotation. They subsequently hosted synod in 2014, properly taking a turn in the rotation before returning to any of the classes that had previously hosted.

At Synod 2012, two new classes were formed—Classis Ontario-East, Southwestern Ontario. Again, although these churches had previously been part of a classis in the federation (Southern Ontario), these are now two new classes, and should be put in the rotation, before returning to any of the classes that had previously hosted. However, that would mean that following Synod 2018, the next two synods would both be held in Ontario, Canada. That seems to go against the intention of the originally adopted policy. Therefore, we present this overture.

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Central U.S. overtures Synod 2018 to adopt the following classical rotation for hosting synod, beginning with the next Synod:

Ontario-East  
Southwest U.S.  
Western Canada  
Central U.S.  
Southwestern Ontario  
Eastern U.S.  
Pacific Northwest  
Michigan

#### *Grounds:*

1. The proposed rotation preserves much of the original rotation begun in 2001.
2. The proposed rotation avoids holding two consecutive synods in the same province.

Classis Central U.S.

Rev. Talman Wagenmaker, Stated Clerk



## **Overture 5**

### **Affirm URCNA Teaching on Marriage**

#### **I. Background**

In recent years there has been a tremendous upheaval in our cultural and legal understanding of marriage. Legally, the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) reflected the climax of this transformation, establishing a new law of the land for our churches in the United States. As a result, the biblical, confessional, and liturgical position of the United Reformed Churches in North America has become a minority viewpoint.

The confessional foundation of our church -- both the Ecumenical Creeds and the Reformed Confessions -- are silent on the nature of marriage, due primarily to the universal consensus on the matter at the time of their drafting. However, our liturgical heritage and church order are not silent. They clearly teach the consensus of two millennia of Christian teaching that "Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous covenantal union between one man and one woman" (*Church Order of the URCNA, Article 48*).

Given the contested nature of marriage in our culture, the relative silence of our confessions, as well as the newly established minority status of the URCNA's position, it is fitting for our churches to clearly reaffirm our teaching on the nature of marriage at this time.

The church speaks most powerfully when she speaks timelessly, bearing witness to the eternal and unchanging words of Scripture as well as to a continuity of faith and practice that transcends the cultural winds. This reaffirmation will clearly demonstrate that our beliefs and practice are grounded in two thousand years of the church's scriptural teaching, as well as almost five hundred years of liturgical practice in the Reformed tradition. It will encourage our church officers and members to stand fast in this teaching, preserve the unity of the faith with the saints through the ages, and not be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine." It will furthermore be a testimony to a watching world that is increasingly unmoored from God's Law.

Finally, this reaffirmation shall be a reminder that with the Apostles, "We must obey God rather than man" (Acts 5:29). While we do not pursue minority status in our culture, we do embrace it, and gladly count ourselves among those Christians who have borne witness under the cross. We recognize that holding a minority position on marriage within our culture may subject us to many trials, including ridicule and persecution. It may even require us to disobey the civil magistrate should they seek to compel us to disobey the word of God. We pray that we may count these trials a joy, and persevere with the martyrs who have gone before us, even unto the extreme of offering "our backs to stripes, our tongues to knives, our mouths to gags, and our whole bodies to the fire, because we know that whoever will follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself" (*Belgic Confession, Letter to King Philip II*).

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Eastern U.S. overtures Synod to affirm the following as a faithful summary of URCNA teaching on marriage:

"The United Reformed Churches in North America affirm the following regarding the nature of marriage:

1. The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself at the very beginning of history. (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
2. Since husbands and wives are united by the Lord's hand (Genesis 2:18 - 24), nothing should separate them in this life. (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
3. Since the Lord forbids immorality, *each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband* (1 Cor. 7:2). (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
4. The first purpose of marriage is that husband and wife shall live together in sincere love and holiness, helping each other faithfully in all things that belong to this life and to the life to come. (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
5. The second purpose of marriage is procreation, that by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased. (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
6. The third purpose of marriage, particularly within the church, is that 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 nurture of children in true knowledge and fear of the Lord, which the Lord may give them as his heritage and as parties to his covenant. (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
7. Marriage is a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness to man, an institution of the highest significance to the human race, and a symbol of the union of Christ and his Church. (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
8. Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous, covenantal union between one man and one woman. (*Church Order of the URCNA, Sixth Edition, Article 48*)
9. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry in the Lord. (*Church Order of the URCNA, Sixth Edition, Article 48*)
10. Christian marriages shall be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, under the regulation of the Consistory, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. (*Church Order of the URCNA, Sixth Edition, Article 48*)
11. URCNA Ministers shall not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God. (*Church Order of the URCNA, Sixth Edition, Article 48*)”

*Grounds:*

1. It is timely for the URCNA reaffirm its teaching on the nature of marriage due to the great upheaval we are witnessing in the nature, morality, and legal understanding of marriage, as our culture and legal structures becomes increasingly unmoored from God's law and opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It is needful to exhort officers and members of the URCNA that in times of cultural and legal opposition we must heed the Apostolic command: “We must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29), and be willing to peaceably disobey the civil magistrate, suffering all consequences, when man's law conflicts with God's law.
3. It is necessary to clearly establish before the civil magistrate that ministers in United Reformed Churches are constrained to not solemnize marriages that conflict with the word of God, both by their ordination vows and over five hundred years of consistent faith and practice.

4. It is necessary for the URCNA to reaffirm and make explicit its teaching on the nature of marriage due to the relative silence of our Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions on this matter.
5. The Church speaks most powerfully to a world in turmoil when she speaks in a timeless fashion. A reaffirmation of our churches faith and practice as reflected in its historic liturgical forms and church order most powerfully reflects both our continuity with the past and the enduring nature of our witness.
6. It is appropriate for the URCNA to confess a teaching of marriage that is not only faithful to the Scriptures but also faithful to the faith and practice of the Reformed tradition.
7. Our liturgical forms reflect our continuity with two thousand years of faithful interpretation of Scripture. While our Three Forms of Unity are silent on the nature of marriage, our liturgical forms and church order are abundantly clear summaries of God's word. Many professing Christians today deny the clarity of Scripture's teaching on marriage, this affirmation reflects our commitment to maintain the unity of the faith and read God's word in common with the saints through the ages.
8. The teaching of God's word as summarized in our traditional forms of solemnization and church order is wholly sufficient to address the errors of our age.
9. Reaffirming our historic teaching in the universal language of our tradition best preserves the freedom of local Consistories to address their civil magistrate and cultural context in an appropriate fashion. We acknowledge the need for this affirmation has been precipitated by particular events in the United States, namely, the new legal regime brought about by the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). However, as a church that spans multiple jurisdictions in North America and supports missionary efforts around the world, it is important that we affirm our understanding of the nature of marriage in the most catholic and universal manner available to us.

Classis Eastern U.S.

Rev. Zachary Wyse, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 6**

### **Adopt Appendix to the Church Order: Guidelines for Church Planting and Missions**

#### **I. Background**

Wonderful work is being done to bring order to URC missions. We have established church planting committees, published a church planting manual, appointed a missions coordinator, and so forth. Yet, these advances are not yet reflected in our church order, a document of great importance to our identity and unity.

#### **II. Overture**

That Synod adopt the following as an Appendix to the URCNA Church Order:

#### **Guidelines for Church Planting and Missions<sup>1</sup>**

1. On the primacy of the Church in missions
  - 1.1 Because the Church is the focus of Christ's redeeming work, the spiritual and numerical growth of the Church should be the ultimate goal of all missions.
  - 1.2 The ordinary missionary task of making disciples, when it occurs beyond the field of an organized church, is the planting of new, Reformed churches.
  - 1.3 Therefore, planting and supporting Reformed churches should be prioritized.
  - 1.4 All extraordinary missionary endeavors, whether foreign or domestic, should promote, whether directly or indirectly, the support of Reformed churches or the planting of new ones.
2. On the oversight of a church plant
  - 2.1 Organized churches are ultimately responsible for planting churches, in both initiating and overseeing these mission works (CO, Foundational Principles, 5).
  - 2.2 Missions Committees, whether classical or synodical, may facilitate, informally explore, and encourage church planting, and Consistories should consult them, but they neither initiate nor oversee formal mission works.
  - 2.3 Since Christ uses His means of grace to build His Church, a Consistory should call a minister to this missionary task, who serves as a member of Consistory and under its oversight.
  - 2.4 The church plant relates to the overseeing church as a branch depends on a vine.<sup>2</sup> When congregants become members of the branch, they become members of the vine and, hence, are under the oversight and care of its officers.
  - 2.5 The work of elders and deacons is invaluable to a mission work. When a church plant is in close proximity to the overseeing church, which is ideal, officers from the vine should

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on church planting and missions, see *How to Plant a Reformed Church*, the church planting manual of the URCNA.

<sup>2</sup> See Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *Church Order Commentary*, 3rd ed, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1954), 267-68.

be actively involved in the church plant's ministry, especially in overseeing and serving at its worship services.

- 2.6 When a church plant lies distant from the overseeing church, the Consistory should seek to ordain qualified men who are members within the mission work. These men become officers of the overseeing church.
- 2.7 When members in the branch become officers, they become officers alongside those in the vine and, hence, are given all the rights and responsibilities of those in the vine that share the same office. They should exercise their rights circumspectly when dealing with internal matters of the planting church (1 Cor. 10:23), since they are specifically tasked with serving the branch and the branch does not support the vine.

### 3. On a church plant's organization

- 3.1 An overseeing Consistory should regularly evaluate the progress of a church plant and its readiness to organize.
- 3.2 When a church plant is ready to organize, the overseeing Consistory should supervise that process, with the concurring advice of classis (CO 22).
- 3.3 The overseeing Consistory should invite its members in the church plant to direct attention to men who are suitable for office, present nominations to them for their election, and call the worship service where those men would be ordained, making the branch into a vine.
- 3.4 Members of the former church plant are, then, to be transferred from the rolls of the planting church to the newly-organized church, provided that such a request has been made (CO 64).

### 4. On the involvement of classis

- 4.1 Since our churches have agreed to support each other's missionaries (CO 47) and since the advice of classis is needed before a church plant may organize (CO 22), a Consistory should involve classis at the very beginning of a mission work, seeking its counsel, advice, and wisdom.
- 4.2 While classis is our primary sphere for cooperation in missions, this should not prevent us from assisting mission works outside our classis when resources permit.

#### *Grounds:*

1. We desire to be a missions-minded federation that takes the Great Commission seriously; yet, our current Church Order says very little about church planting. Our official documents should promote a missions-minded identity.
2. The Church Order is used to train men for special office. Without a significant discussion of church planting, these men may not appreciate the fact that Christ also calls the local church to plant churches, which responsibility is especially given to her officers.
3. Newly-ordained officers may be unaware that synod adopted a church planting manual in the past. This appendix highlights the existence of this manual and directs officers to it for more information. Far from supplanting the church planting manual, these guidelines highlight its existence and importance, in order that it is not forgotten.
4. The Church Order is taught in new members classes and Sunday School classes. A clear statement about church planting will encourage our members to be missions-minded.

5. People outside our federation that are learning more about us would read our church order and wrongly conclude that we are not missions-minded, since there is very little discussion of missions within it.
6. This motion establishes guidelines, which, by definition, do not subvert the authority of the Consistory that oversees a church plant. Guidelines establish certain practices as being advisable and help protect our churches and church plants from unnecessary harm.
7. Church officers may be unaware of the sometimes-delicate role of serving as an officer in the branch while also participating in the governance of the vine.
8. At present, the methods that church plants and church planters are employing are being questioned and critiqued informally. Putting practices into writing would encourage us to discuss and debate them publicly.
9. This will help bring unity to our church planting and provide practical advice to the overseeing Consistory.

Classis Eastern U.S.

Rev. Zachary Wyse, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 7**

### **Establish a Second Missions Coordinator Position**

#### **I. Background**

The last few years have seen a welcomed increase in the tasks of establishing and organizing local URCNA church plants in North America and beyond, as well as greater federalational coordination with respect to missions. Synod London 2010 created an interim Missions Committee as a way to promote missions coordination and communication within URCNA. At Synod Nyack 2012, the interim Missions Committee became an official standing committee of URCNA. Synod Visalia 2014 appointed Rev. Richard Bout to serve as the first URCNA Missions Coordinator whose work would be overseen by the Missions Committee as well as help complement the work of the Committee. Synod Wyoming 2016 saw the fruit of much of work of the federation's Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator. This current overture for Synod 2018 continues that present trajectory by acknowledging the need for a Missions Coordinator whose work is officially focused on domestic missions (United States and Canada). *Rev. Richard Bout, our current Missions Coordinator, as well as our Missions Committee, strongly support the creation of two positions for Domestic and Foreign Missions Coordinators, and Rev. Bout would welcome the opportunity to serve as Foreign Missions Coordinator.*

#### **II. Overture**

That Synod 2018:

1. Create two new full-time positions of Domestic Missions Coordinator (DMC) and Foreign Missions Coordinator (FMC), which replace and therefore eliminate the single position of Synodical Missions Coordinator;
2. Name the current Missions Coordinator as the Foreign Missions Coordinator (FMC);
3. Establish the necessary mechanisms to fund the position of DMC, covering the entire financial package of the DMC through federation askings, under God's gracious provision. (*Acts of Synod 2012, Art. 85, 3.f*)

#### *Job descriptions*

The work of the DMC would be focused on church plants and mission fields (current and future) solely in the United States and Canada, while the work of the FMC would be focused on church plants and mission fields (current and future) solely beyond the United States and Canada. The federation's Missions Committee would oversee the work of both the DMC and the FMC.

The following job descriptions would be added at appropriate place(s) in the current *Policies for the Synodical Missions Committee and Missions Coordinator*.

The Domestic Missions Coordinator will:

1. *maintain* vital contact with domestic missionaries.
2. *visit* missionaries periodically for the encouragement and exhortation of the missionary, and the preaching/teaching/counseling of the church plant, and in order to assist the church planting church (i.e. the calling church) and missionaries, as requested by either party.

3. *maintain* vital contact with current or prospective mother churches, joint venture committees, and classis missions/church planting committees for current needs and financial status of mission works through in person visits and other forms of communication.
4. *advise* missionaries, consistories, joint venture committees, and classical missions/church planting committees, as requested.
5. *keep* news of current and future church plants at the forefront of the URCNA through newsletters, websites, social media, and other forms of communication and promotion.
6. *encourage congregations* to support financially foreign and domestic missionaries.
7. *remind congregations* of the priority of domestic URCNA church plants—in terms of manpower, financial allocations, oversight, and time— over against para-church organizations.
8. *begin* to develop, along with the FMC a more organized approach to missions for the URCNA, similar to the OPC, and using their resources wherever possible.
9. *cooperate and work with the FMC whenever feasible in the promotion of URCNA missions* .
10. *develop and direct* a program for on-going church planter development and training, for all of our church-planters in the federation.
11. *be overseen* by his calling Consistory with respect to his doctrine and life, as is true with all ordained ministers and elders in the URCNA.

The Foreign Missions Coordinator will:

1. *maintain* vital contact with foreign missionaries.
2. *visit* missionaries periodically for the encouragement and exhortation of the missionary, and the preaching/teaching/counseling of the church plant, and in order to assist the church planting church (i.e. the calling church) and missionaries, as requested by either party.
3. *maintain* vital contact with current or prospective mother churches, joint venture committees, and classis missions/church planting committees for current needs and financial status of mission works through in person visits and other forms of communication.
4. *advise* missionaries, consistories, joint venture committees, and classical missions/church planting committees, as requested.
5. *keep* news of current and future church plants at the forefront of the URCNA through the publication of *the Trumpet*, bulletin prayer requests, management and updating of [urcnamissions.com](http://urcnamissions.com), social media, and other forms of communication and promotion.
6. *encourage congregations* to support financially foreign and domestic missionaries.
7. *remind congregations* of the priority of foreign URCNA missionaries—in terms of manpower, financial allocations, oversight, and time— over against para-church organizations.
8. *begin to develop*, together with the DMC, a more organized approach to missions for the URCNA, similar to the OPC, and using their resources wherever possible.
9. *develop and direct*, together with the DMC, a program for missionary development and training.
10. *cooperate and work with the DMC whenever feasible in the promotion of URCNA missions*,
11. *be overseen* by his calling Consistory with respect to his doctrine and life, as is true with all ordained ministers and elders in the URCNA.

*Nomination Process*



The current Missions Coordinator will be named to the position of FMC at Synod 2018.

The DMC (and henceforth both positions) will be filled according to the following process:

1. The DMC and FMC will endeavor to make future vacancies known to the churches at least six months prior to the upcoming Synod.
2. When an opening for DMC or FMC is made known to Synod, Synod shall entertain nominations for DMC or FMC either from the floor of Synod OR by Classical Overture.
3. For nominees to be valid, they must be a Minister of the Word who has written proof of prior consistory approval for taking the position. Classical Overture shall constitute such proof.
4. Nominees may provide background information in writing to demonstrate their qualifications and shall be made available for interview by Synod, to be conducted in advisory committee or on the floor of Synod.
5. Synod shall elect the DMC / FMC from the pool of valid nominees.
6. The DMC and FMC shall be eligible for reelection by each synod without term limit restrictions (*Acts of Synod 2012*, Art. 85, 3.d.iv)

*Grounds:*

1. Rev. Richard Bout, our current Missions Coordinator, as well as our Missions Committee, strongly support the creation of two positions for Domestic and Foreign Missions Coordinators, and Rev. Bout would welcome the opportunity to serve as Foreign Missions Coordinator.
2. Our Classical representative on the committee has informed us that there is an overwhelming amount of work for the federation's Missions Committee to accomplish, both in the domestic and foreign fields. The committee is composed of mostly ministers and one elder who have full-time work in other vocations. Thus, there is only so much the Missions Committee can do in faithfulness to its mandate, even with the full-time help of Rev. Rich Bout. A DMC will help divide the labor and allow the Missions Committee to do its work well.
3. Unless there is additional full-time help, the work of the Missions Committee will continue to remain limited in its scope and effectiveness in key areas. We have been informed, again through official channels, that the Missions Committee workload of the last four years has been disproportionately focused upon the foreign field. This is simply an indication of the immensity of the work that foreign missions represent. A DMC would help re-calibrate the work of the committee by giving adequate attention to our domestic missions, in a way that cannot be presently done.
4. To divide the work between domestic and foreign missions is neither forced nor unprecedented. Evidence of this is the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's approach to missions. They have two officers (usually ministers) whose sole work is coordinating home (or, domestic) missions, and two officers (usually ministers) whose sole work is coordinating foreign missions. We can learn much from one of our closest sister denominations, especially in this regard.
5. Although there may be much continuity and similarity between the work of domestic and foreign missions, there are, nevertheless, significant differences and discontinuities between the two in many areas (the kinds of worldviews new converts and unbelievers have, the nature and means of oversight, local officer training and leadership development, core group dynamics, cultural differences, access to faithful Reformed materials [print or otherwise], fund raising, church planter training, to mention only a few). Having a DMC relieves Rev.

Rich Bout of coordinating domestic missions while allowing him to focus on URCNA church plants and mission fields abroad. This fits well with his many faithful years as missionary in the foreign field.

Classis Eastern U.S  
Rev. Zachary Wyse, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 8**

### **Nomination of Rev. Paul T. Murphy to Serve as Domestic Missions Coordinator**

#### **I. Background**

Rev. Murphy helped oversee the development of what today is the URCNA. Since the URCNA's inception, Rev. Murphy has faithfully served Christ and His Church as a missions-minded minister for the promotion of the Gospel, within North America and abroad. He has years of practical domestic church planting experience in one of the largest cities in North America and would be well-suited to the task of Domestic Missions Coordinator.

#### **II. Overture**

That Synod 2018 nominate Rev. Paul Murphy for the position of Domestic Missions Coordinator, should Synod 2018 approve the position, with the following understanding:

1. That Pastor Murphy's life and doctrine would be overseen by the church of which he is a member, while his work as the DMC would be overseen by the federational Missions Committee (akin to the structure of oversight for our current Missions Coordinator).
2. That Rev. Murphy would be loaned in full to the federation for the promotion of missions within the URCNA. His financial package would be covered in its entirety, under God's gracious provision, through federational askings.
3. That Rev. Murphy will be available for interview by Synod 2018.

#### *Grounds:*

1. Rev. Murphy has served the churches of the URCNA faithfully and fruitfully. He was a minister for 13 years at Dutton United Reformed Church. He has currently served as a church planter and home missionary at Messiah's Reformed Fellowship in New York City for 15 years. He is a well-known veteran in the URCNA and has a track record of relevant, fruitful, and consistent service in his zealous promotion of mission as the preeminent task and identity of the Church.
2. Rev. Murphy planted a church in New York City, one of the harshest and most unforgiving mission fields in North America. Furthermore, the church he currently pastors has planted another church in the metropolitan area. As such, he is endowed with an intimate knowledge of the challenges of domestic missions and well suited to encourage and help other domestic church plants and planters, as well as offer assistance to their overseeing Consistories.
3. As a member of the URCNA Missions Committee, Rev. Murphy has good knowledge of the difficulty of the Committee's work, and has worked well with all the Committee members, including the Missions Coordinator, Rev. Rich Bout. He shares a unity of vision and outlook with the Committee.

Classis Eastern U.S

Rev. Zachary Wyse, Stated Clerk

### **Addendum to Overture 8**

A brief questionnaire that (re-)introduces Rev. Murphy to Classis and the federation.

*1. In brief, please tell us your testimony, your past ministerial experience, and family life.*

Raised in the Roman church I was converted at the age of 29. From the outset I was zealous for evangelism and pursued that in the church many different ways. I went on to study at Westminster (Phil.), receiving my M.Div. in 1989 and an S.P.M.C. from Calvin Seminary the same year. Married in 1989, I moved to attend Calvin in Grand Rapids, MI where I eventually was called by the Dutton CRC to pastor. I served there for 13+ years until called to plant a church at Ground Zero, New York City, after 9/11. Messiah's Reformed Fellowship began worship in February 2003 just 750 yards from Ground Zero. We celebrate 15 years of ministry in NYC this year having organized in 2012. We have grown to approximately 140 persons. We also started a Christian school for five years (no longer open), and planted a daughter church in Jersey City, NJ four years ago (with about 40-50 persons).

I am married to Julie of whom I am unworthy and we have five children ages 27, 25, 25, 21, 19. Julie and I became empty nesters this year and continue to live in Brooklyn, NY.

*2. How do you see your potential role as the DMC serving as an encouragement to church planters in the U.S. and Canada in their respective fields?*

We should see church planting as the natural extension of our missions efforts domestically. It is the main means of growing the Church. I would want to lend my experience in ministry and in church planting to the efforts of my fellow church planters and to their overseeing Consistories. I think I have a lot to give both in experience and in vision for the future.

*3. What would you see as your primary roles and priorities as Missions Coordinator for the URCNA? How do you envision the DMC position running practically and why?*

Besides the specific tasks enumerated in the overture, I believe the work of church planting in the URCNA has only just begun. There are more churches to be planted which means that the existing churches need to be encouraged, equipped, and educated in the task. Additionally there is the work of coordinating churches and gaining cooperation in the task so that we are all on the same page as a federation. We need to cease our congregational approach to church planting and work together.

*4. Do you believe that you would be able to have enough work in this role to fill a full-time work schedule?*

Yes, and more than enough if the churches of the federation catch the vision of North America as a post-Christian nation/mission field that is "white for harvest."

*5. Are you qualified for this position? How would you describe your strengths and weaknesses and how will they affect your work as the DMC?*

I believe my varied experience as a church planter, teacher, and churchman qualify me for this task.

My strengths are my vision and love for the work and for the future of the URCNA as well as my work ethic and experience.

My weaknesses are my failures, shortcomings, and mistakes in my past experience as a church planter. Of course, this is something new and unexplored for us (as a federation) and for me (if I were to be called to this position), which frankly frightens and challenges me. In addition I have

the tendency to do it all myself rather than delegating. This has contributed to me overworking in the past, which led to burnout.

Together I see these affecting my work for the positive in that it will keep me humble and dependent on the Lord and His people as this task develops.

*6. What is your vision for the church's approach to mission work?*

I want to see the URCNA be used to gather in the lost in our local communities. I want to see us be as effective in local evangelism as we have been historically in foreign missions. I want us to cease distinguishing between established and missions churches, as every church ought to be a missionary church. I want us to cease being congregationalist in our approach to missions (domestic and foreign) and work together to coordinate and cooperate in the work of missions. I want all URCNA people to see our Christian identity and calling as Church to be on mission with God, engaged in His mission to save the world. I want to promote and encourage a passion for the lost among all our people in all our churches.

*7. What in your view are the greatest challenges facing contemporary Reformed church planters and ministers in general?*

Motivating God's people and URCNA Councils to be engaged in local mission efforts. We have become ingrown in too many ways. We need a renewed vision and effort to reach the lost in our local communities.

*8. In your estimation, what is relationship between the DMC and local URCNA sending churches?*

Cheerleader, trainer, assistant, and visionary. But only the Holy Spirit can make fire happen. So we proceed prayerfully and dependently upon Him.

## **Overture 9**

### **Electronic Publication of the Trinity Psalter-Hymnal**

#### **I. Background:**

Digital publication is essential to secure the maximum impact of the new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (TPH).

We give thanks that the Lord has provided the URCNA with a new TPH to share with our brothers and sisters in the OPC and believers around the world. We also rejoice in the faithfulness of all those who have labored in its production. The Lord has truly endowed with his Spirit craftsmen to adorn his temple with praise. Praise God.

As the Psalter Hymnal Committee is surely aware, media technology has changed drastically since Synod 1997's appointment of a committee with the mandate "to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal." Digital media presents manifold opportunities to ensure that we reap the benefits of the committee's labor, and that the TPH has the maximum impact on worship in our churches and homes. "Publication" today usually assumes electronic publication, and many churches have inquired of the committee when or whether the TPH may be available as a website, mobile app, or other electronic publication.

This overture asks Synod to explicitly overture the Psalter Hymnal Committee to produce an electronic version of the TPH, and to provide a sufficient budget to produce a range of high-quality digital resources. Ideally, this production would continue to be a shared effort with the OPC.

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Eastern U.S. overtures Synod 2018 to expand the mandate of the Psalter Hymnal Committee as follows, with a budget appropriate for this work:

1. To produce a state of the art digital version of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal for web publication, modeled on current best practices in the industry, including as much as the following functionality as practically feasible:
  - a. File download for use in worship bulletin (by fee, if necessary);
  - b. Viewing lyrics alone;
  - c. Viewing full sheet music;
  - d. Searching lyric texts and musical information;
  - e. Searching by biblical topic;
  - f. Playing audio of accompaniment, including for multiple stanzas.
2. To produce a state of the art mobile application (for iOS / Android / et al) emulating current best practices in the industry (cf., "The Book of Psalms for Worship" mobile app), including as much of the following functionality as practically feasible:
  - a. Viewing lyrics alone;
  - b. Viewing full sheet music;
  - c. Searching lyric text and musical information;
  - d. Searching by biblical topic;
  - e. Playing audio of accompaniment, including for multiple stanzas.
3. To secure the necessary legal permissions for said digital uses.

4. To secure the necessary expertise via committee membership or consultation to complete this project.
5. To explore and follow industry best practices in developing a funding model for the development, maintenance, and legal permissions required for this digital resource, including exploring the potential of a pay wall / subscriber service for a website and/or sales of a mobile application. Revenue shall provide for the maintenance, upgrades and updates necessary to ensure continued access and delivery of digital resources.
6. This overture directs the budget request for the Psalter Hymnal Committee to be increased sufficiently to provide for the initial development of said digital resources, in the amount of \$20,000 over and above other operating budget requested by the committee. Budgeted funds may not all be necessary, if OPC agrees to share development costs with URCNA. These funds are for both the additional labor of the committee and the procurement of industry best practice web developers to produce a state of the art digital resource.

*Grounds:*

1. Digital publication of the TPH enables the church to reap the maximum harvest from the labor already invested in the production of this songbook.
2. Digital publication of the TPH will enrich family worship by providing for portable accessibility and musical accompaniment in the home.
3. Digital publication will expand the reach of the TPH beyond the URCNA and OPC, to the many worshipping communities that no longer make use of printed materials in worship.
4. Digital publication will facilitate worship in church plant and missions environments.
5. Digital publication will support our missionary efforts home and abroad as advertising that will increase the visibility and accessibility of our churches and our biblical pattern of worship to an increasingly online culture.
6. Revenues from publication of digital resources, like revenues from print publication, may offset the ongoing cost of maintaining to current market standards digital resources.
7. Preliminary research indicates that \$20,000 would be an appropriate estimate.
8. The Psalter Hymnal Committee should have a clear mandate from the churches of Synod to pursue this important work.

Done in Classis Eastern U.S.

Rev. Zachary Wyse, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 10**

### **Adopt “Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony”**

#### **I. Background**

Over the past decades, we have witnessed Western culture’s progressive abandonment of the Biblical definition of marriage. The movement to normalize conduct which the Bible condemns began to manifest itself in various judicial, legislative and administrative actions in both Canada and the United States. Initially, secularists sought approval in various state legislatures to provide homosexual unions all the incidents of marriage, but without giving it the name. Clear thinking Christians saw this as an initial 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. (Acts of Synod London, 2010, Articles 128, 132, p.82).

While legal changes regarding marriage were already occurring in Canada, a climactic legal decision 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, Opinion No. 14-556, June 26, 2015*). The Court changed the historic definition of 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. Undoubtedly, the present threat to religious liberty posed by the *Obergefell* ruling in the United States now extends to churches, individual Christians, Christian organizations, seminaries, and Christian schools as the biblical, confessional, and liturgical position of the United Reformed Churches in North America is at odds with this Supreme Court decision.

Scripture, the Reformed confessions, our liturgical forms, and church order are not silent on the issue of marriage. Together they clearly testify to the consensus of two millennia of Christian teaching that “Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous covenantal union between one man and one woman” (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*). We stand in unity with our Presbyterian brothers’ confessional standard which states: “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman: neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time.” (*Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 24.*) The “holy marriage” to which our Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108 refers is this God-ordained union of one man and one woman.

Given the contested nature of marriage in our culture, it is fitting for our churches to clearly affirm our Scriptural teaching on the nature of marriage at this time.

The church speaks most powerfully when she speaks timelessly, bearing witness to the eternal and unchanging words of Scripture as well as to a continuity of faith and practice that transcends the cultural winds. This affirmation will clearly demonstrate that our beliefs and practice are grounded in two thousand years of the church’s scriptural teaching, as well as almost five hundred years of liturgical practice in the Reformed tradition. It will encourage our church officers and members to stand fast in this teaching, preserve the unity of the faith with the saints through the ages, and not be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of



doctrine.” It will furthermore be a testimony to a watching world that is increasingly unmoored from God’s Law.

Finally, this affirmation shall be a reminder that with the Apostles, “We must obey God rather than man” (*Acts 5:29*). While we may face persecution for holding to Scriptural truth, we gladly count ourselves among those Christians who have borne witness under the cross. It may even require us to disobey the civil magistrate should they seek to compel us to disobey the word of God. We pray that we may count these trials a joy, and persevere with the martyrs who have gone before us, even unto the extreme of offering “our backs to stripes, our tongues to knives, our mouths to gags, and our whole bodies to the fire, because we know that whoever will follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself” (*Belgic Confession, Letter to King Philip II*).

## II. Overture

Classis Michigan overture Synod 2018 as follows:

### A. To adopt the following “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony”:

1. The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself at the very beginning of history. (*Genesis 2:18; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
2. Since husbands and wives are united by the Lord’s hand, nothing should separate them in this life. (*Genesis 2:18-24; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
3. Since the Lord forbids immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (*1 Cor. 7:2; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
4. The first purpose of marriage is that husband and wife shall live together in sincere love and holiness, helping each other faithfully in all things that belong to this life and to the life to come. (*Genesis 2:18; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
5. The second purpose of marriage is procreation, that by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased. (*Genesis 1:22; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
6. The third purpose of marriage is that by marriage the kingdom of God is to be advanced. This purpose calls for loving devotion to each other, and a common responsibility for the nurture of children in true knowledge and fear of the Lord, which the Lord may give them as his heritage and as parties to his covenant. (*Eph. 5:22-6:4; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*)
7. Marriage is a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness to man, an institution of the highest significance to the human race, and a symbol of the union of Christ and his Church. (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*). Our Lord Jesus declared that the one-flesh union of one man and one woman in marriage is rooted in creation and reflected in the mystery of the gospel (*Genesis 1:22; Ephesians 5:22–33*);
8. Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous, covenantal union between one man and one woman. (*Genesis 1:22; Ephesians 5:22–33; Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*)
9. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry in the Lord. (*1 Cor. 7:39; Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*)

10. Christian marriages shall be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, under the regulation of the Consistory, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*)
11. URCNA Ministers shall not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God. (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*). Even as all citizens are to honor governing authorities, such 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. As members of His precious Church, we must remain faithful to Christ and His Word even if illegitimately commanded by secular powers to disobey Him and His Word. (*1 Peter 2:17; Belgic Confession Article 36*);
12. Any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexuality, incest, 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; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, 109*);
13. The good news of the gospel is that all forms of sexual immorality are sins from which Scripture mercifully calls men and women to repent; and from which, by God's grace, they can repent, be forgiven, and be renewed to a new life of obedience to Christ by the power of the Spirit of God (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*);

*Grounds:*

1. It is timely for the URCNA affirm its teaching on the nature of marriage due to the great upheaval we are witnessing in the nature, morality, and legal understanding of marriage, as our culture and legal structures becomes increasingly unmoored from God's law and opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It is needful to exhort officers and members of the URCNA that in times of cultural and legal opposition we must heed the Apostolic command: "We must obey God rather than man" (*Acts 5:29*), and be willing to peaceably disobey the civil magistrate, suffering all consequences, when man's law conflicts with God's law. (*Belgic Confession Art. 36*)
3. It is necessary to clearly establish before the civil magistrate that ministers in United Reformed Churches are constrained to not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God, both by their ordination vows and over five hundred years of consistent faith and practice.
4. It is necessary for the URCNA to coalesce through this Affirmation the biblical truths on sexuality and marriage found in our Catechism, our Church Order, and liturgical forms in order to more effectively address the current cultural challenges to the nature of marriage itself.
5. The Church speaks most powerfully to a world in turmoil when she speaks in a timeless fashion. An affirmation of our churches' faith and practice as reflected in Scripture, the Reformed confessions, historic liturgical forms, and church order most powerfully reflects both our continuity with the past and the enduring nature of our witness.
6. Although some professing Christians today deny the clarity of Scripture's teaching on marriage, this affirmation reflects our commitment to maintain the unity of the faith and read God's Word in common with the saints through the ages.
7. The teaching of God's timeless and infallible Word is wholly authoritative to address the errors of our age and of any age.

- B. Encourage the churches of the federation to send the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to governing authorities as each church deems appropriate.

*Grounds:*

1. The church exercises the keys of the kingdom by witnessing the Gospel Truth to the world, calling all men everywhere to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. 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; Jeremiah 1:9-10*).
  2. There are varying degrees of involvement by different executive, judicial, legislative, parliamentary, and administrative bodies in both Canada and the United States regarding the matters addressed in the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony”.
  3. Affirming our historic teaching in the universal language of our Scriptural tradition best preserves the freedom of local Consistories to address their civil magistrate and cultural context in an appropriate fashion. We acknowledge the need for this affirmation has been precipitated by particular events in the United States, namely, the new legal regime brought about by the Supreme Court ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). However, as a church that spans multiple jurisdictions in North America, our universal testimony can serve as witness to any magistrate in any jurisdiction.
  4. The local churches can best assess the most effective means of communicating the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to the most relevant governing authorities in their respective jurisdictions.
- C. Direct the Stated Clerk to send the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) for the member churches’ consideration and edification.

*Grounds:*

1. The URCNA is a member of NAPARC.
2. 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, I.*)
3. Sending the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to NAPARC advances the purpose of sharing our insights on these issues which we face in common with NAPARC churches.

Classis Michigan

Rev. Gregg Lubbers, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 11**

### **Appoint a Statistician as a Functionary of Synod**

#### **I. Background**

This overture seeks to address the need in our churches for accurate and timely statistics about the churches in our federation. The publication of the 2015 Directory of the URCNA has been delayed by issues with the collection of accurate information. As a result, the most recent statistics available to the churches are for the year 2013 as of the time of the writing of this overture. This overture proposes the appointment of an official statistician who would be tasked with collecting information from our churches and presenting this information in a useful way in an annual directory and in reports to synod.

#### *The Value of Accurate Information*

The work of our churches is aided by the availability of accurate and current information. Correct contact information helps us communicate together with greater ease and fewer delays. Correct statistical information helps our treasurers with their calculations of askings, our mission works with their requests for support, and our representatives with their presentation of the URCNA to other assemblies or interested groups.

#### *The Value of a Directory*

The 2014 Directory was the 14<sup>th</sup> Directory issued by the URCNA. In 2004, Synod took over responsibility for this directory from Reformed Believers United who had previously been responsible for publishing a directory. Our churches have made a point of producing the directory to provide an annual sketch of our federation that tells the story of what is happening in our midst as we have grown and changed over the years. This directory also provides vacant churches and churches considering a call to a missionary or second pastor with a listing of all the ministers who are currently serving in our federation. The directory is also a valuable tool for our ecumenical efforts as it allows us to share our church information with interested groups to promote cooperation and unity.

#### *The Challenges: Data Collection*

The work of collecting accurate and timely reports from each church has been challenging for our webmaster and stated clerk. In 2007 the Stated Clerk wrote:

“Over the past three years I have also spent hundreds of hours collecting, compiling, nagging, editing, and producing the publisher ready copy of the annual URCNA directory. The lack of quality and consistency in the data that is given to me has been a major frustration. There are indications that this work may become easier as we move closer to establishing a new URCNA web-site” (Report of the Stated Clerk, Acts of Synod 2007, p. 65).

The website is not so new anymore a decade later but the rest of the Stated Clerk's comments could be a fair characterization of the process involved in producing the soon-to-be-published 2015 Directory. The methods of data collection that the website promised have not resulted in the hoped for easing of time and editing requirements.

Back in 2004, the Stated Clerk wrote:

“In December, 2003 I began work on the 2004 directory of the URCNA with Mr. Wayne Martin of Reformed Believers United. I electronically mailed forms to each of the churches and was happy to receive most of them back the same way. I think this represents a major improvement to the way things were done previously since it is so cost, time and paper efficient” (Report of the Stated Clerk, Acts of Synod 2004, p. 46).

But in 2016, the Webmaster wrote:

“each church of the United Reformed Churches in North America is requested to print and complete the following survey using the statistics and other information as of December 31, 2015... Completed surveys are to be mailed no later than April 15, 2016” (Email to the Churches from Webmaster, March 1, 2016).

The challenge of collecting, compiling, nagging, editing, and producing the information for web presentation and a printable annual directory is significant. The use of online tools has not changed the fact that a considerable amount of labour is needed to collect, verify, and prepare the data for publication.

#### *The Challenges: Functionaries and Their Areas of Focus*

The heart of this overture has to do with the gifts and focus areas of each individual who occupies a role. Our webmaster should focus on our website. Our stated clerk should focus on the duties of administering the temporalities of our federation. Our treasurers should focus on their financial responsibilities. Our missions coordinator should focus on his work of facilitating our work of missions.

The lack of accurate data is affecting all of these roles by having outdated contact information and outdated membership numbers. A statistician would focus on this work for 3-4 months of each year and that singular focus on getting the right data at the right time would make everyone else's job easier.

At present, the work of preparing and posting an annual directory with the current information provided by the churches rests with the Webmaster with assistance from the Stated Clerk. While it formerly was included in the work of the Stated Clerk, in 2010, the website-related work of the Stated Clerk was delegated to a newly-appointed Webmaster. It was at this time that the work of preparing the directory was delegated to the Webmaster who was to “maintain/produce the various files required to publish directories as directed by Synod” (Website Committee Report, Acts of Synod 2010, p. 664).

So it was that in 2012, the Web Oversight Committee wrote:

“Since Synod London in 2010, the Committee has expended its effort in transitioning to the new Webmaster and updating portions of the back-end code dealing with church statistics, records, and preparation of the live and static Directories. Before these important updates, collecting and maintaining church information was very labour intensive and depended on the Webmaster juggling numerous files and collating information from multiple sources into the online databases and finished directory (with help from other Committee members and the overseeing Consistory). After the update, much of this process has been placed under the direct control of the churches. In addition to reducing the likelihood of transcription errors and increasing the overall quality of the

directory, this has freed time for more productive tasks” (Web Oversight Committee Report, Acts of Synod 2010, p. 490).

Even with online updates to the tools that are being used, our current approach is onerous for the Webmaster and it seems that this work is outside of the scope of what a 'webmaster' is ordinarily involved in when it comes to gifts and day to day responsibilities. The collection of statistics (and the enjoyment of the process) is something that will appeal to certain men with a propensity for that type of work. The work of a statistician is not generally related to the technical skills implied in the job title of "webmaster." A webmaster tends to be more comfortable with the "nuts and bolts" which underlie websites and with the customer service/support role involved in providing assistance to our users and churches.

Arguably, the money we spend on a webmaster should be for the webmaster's work on the website not on some separate side project that is consuming his time and energy and doesn't use the talents that he has. Synod 2016 approved additional funding for the Webmaster due to the extra work associated with publishing the 2015 Archive Directory (Acts of Synod 2016, Article 18). The appointment of a statistician would bring about an adjustment of the Webmaster's honorarium as his workload would change.

### *The Example of Others*

The OPC and the CanRC have established a systematic means of collecting and presenting the information from the churches in a useful and timely way. The OPC make use of an official Statistician while the CanRC have outsourced the work to a publishing and printing company.

#### *1) The OPC Statistician*

The OPC Statistician's responsibilities are to collect and compile statistical reports each year and to present the findings with explanation and analysis at their annual General Assemblies. As he explained:

“The work of the statistician is defined in our General Assembly’s Standing Rules. The statistician is elected annually by the Assembly to a 1-year term. Most of the statistician’s work occurs in the first quarter of the calendar year when I send the report form to clerks of session and receive their replies. I have always made it a practice to collect only the information that I have been directed by the GA to collect. Thus, for example, I do not ask for pastors’ salaries, church budgets, evening worship attendance, etc. The data collection and processing continues into April, as I follow up with churches that have not sent me their report. Well over 95% of my correspondence occurs via e-mail (ex. [http://www.opc.org/GA/COS\\_letter\\_2015.pdf](http://www.opc.org/GA/COS_letter_2015.pdf)) . In the 1980’s it was all paper and telephone, but the church was much smaller then. The local church and mission work statistics are ‘processed’ using an Excel spreadsheet.

“Meanwhile, presbytery clerks are providing me their reports, which I compile into one report to the GA. As you might imagine, checking these reports for consistency and completeness is a significant part of the job. My summary report to the GA is brief. It and the two reports above are published each year in the Minutes of the General Assembly and its Yearbook. Most years, I attend the GA and present my report with a few remarks.” (Email from OPC Statistician, August 23, 2016)

## *2) The Canadian Reformed Churches & Premier Printing*

The Canadian and American Reformed Churches & the Free Reformed Churches of Australia work with a printing company in Manitoba, Premier Printing, to prepare and distribute an annual yearbook. Dr. James Visscher serves as the editor of this project. The church clerks receive a form to fill out and those forms are sent to Premier, whose staff then compile and prepare the materials for printing.

The work of the staff of the printing company on this task is paid for through the proceeds that the printing company makes from the sale of the books and the only involvement of the federation is to have its editor review the materials and to write a 'Year in Review' feature.

Consequently, the Canadian Reformed Committee for the Official Website maintains their website content using the information provided in the annual yearbook and updates which are sent in by the churches.

### *The Proposed Role: URCNA Statistician*

In adopting this overture, Synod would be acting to appoint an official statistician who would be tasked with collecting information from our churches and presenting this information in a useful way in an annual directory and in reports to synod. The statistician would take charge of a process of data collection that has gone through various iterations in the past years. The statistician would consult with the Stated Clerk and collaborate with the Webmaster as necessary on data collection and presentation issues. The Statistician would decide if it is feasible to maintain a 'live' directory that changes as soon as new information is entered or if it is a better use of our resources to maintain a directory that is periodically updated and annual printed or made available for printing.

The statistician's honorarium would be determined by Synod. The proposed regulations permit the role of statistician to be occupied by a man or woman who is a member of a URCNA congregation. The statistician's role is analogous to the treasurer's role in this respect and there is no reason why both men and women can't be considered for this role as well. The technical gifts associated with this role are not specific to the work of elders or ministers nor is it a role that carries any intrinsic authority. With respect to term limits, this proposal would see no term limits applied to this position. This is our current practice for the Webmaster and it makes sense to allow for continuity in the role of statistician as well. As seen in the OPC, there is great benefit to the 'institutional memory' of a statistician and this proposal leaves the length of service open if Synod chooses to reappoint the statistician to numerous terms.

## II. Overture

Classis Ontario East overtures Synod 2018 to appoint a Statistician as a functionary of Synod and adopt the proposed additions and deletions to the Section 4 of the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

### *Grounds:*

1. The appointment of a Statistician will bring clarity and improvements to the work of collecting information from the churches and making use of that information in reports to Synod and in the annual directory.
2. The production of an Archive Directory has been a time-consuming challenge for our Stated

- Clerk and Webmaster ever since the URCNA decided to publish its own directory instead of allowing another group to do so on our behalf.
3. Nearly a decade since these words were written, it is still true that “the present mechanism for updating the data in the directory is cumbersome and plagued by inaccuracies. Some churches are slow in returning the annual request for current information. The Stated Clerk reports that he regularly encounters year-to-year inconsistencies in the reports made by some churches which require him to seek clarification and/or make corrections before they can be entered in the database.” (Report of the Website Committee, Acts of Synod 2007, p. 380)
  4. The work of preparing the archive directory and register of ministers seems to be outside of the scope of what a 'webmaster' is ordinarily involved in when it comes to gifts and day to day responsibilities. The money we spend on a webmaster should be for the webmaster's work on the website.
  5. The time and talents of the Web Oversight Committee should be used to make the website better and not focused on databases, contact info, printing documents, and statistical updates for Synod.
  6. The appointment of a Statistician will allow the Webmaster and the Web Oversight Committee to focus on the work of maintaining and improving the website.
  7. The appointment of a Statistician would put a specific price tag on the task of preparing the directory and preparing a report of stats to each synod.
  8. We would benefit from having a report to every Synod as it pertains to membership statistics, church statistics, and trends in membership in our federation.
  9. The appointment of a Statistician will signal the value that Synod sees in maintaining accurate records. It will also signal the value that Synod sees in receiving accurate information from the churches by designating a specific functionary to look after this task.

### **Proposed Additions and Changes to the Regulations of Synodical Procedure:**

#### **4. Officers and Functionaries of Synod**

##### **4.8 (NEW) The Statistician**

- 4.8.1 **Qualifications:** The Statistician shall belong to a member congregation of the United Reformed Churches. They shall be proficient in data collection, data management and able to produce reports and the annual directory.
- 4.8.2 **Term:** Synod shall elect a Statistician to serve from that synod until the conclusion of the next synod. Synod shall stipulate the Statistician's honorarium in the currency of the Statistician's respective country.
- 4.8.3 **Supervision:** The Statistician shall work under the supervision of consistory of the church convening the next synod, and is ultimately accountable to synod for the performance of their duties.
- 4.8.4 **General Responsibilities:**
  - a) Collect and compile statistical reports of the churches for the calendar year



ending December 31.

- b) Review the information submitted by the churches to ensure its accuracy.
- c) Prepare an annual directory for digital download which shall consist of a listing of synodical and classical functionaries, synodical and classical standing committees, churches by province/state, classical statistics, directory of ministers, directory of licensed exhorters, and profiles of each church in the federation.
- d) Prepare and present a report to Synod with an explanation and analysis of the statistical reports for a meaningful understanding of them by Synod.

#### 4.7. (UPDATE)      **The Webmaster**

##### 4.7.4.      **General Responsibilities:**

- ~~b. Assist and encourage member churches in maintaining accurate and timely profiles and statistics on the website~~
- ~~g. Maintain alphabetical registers of licentiates, candidates for the ministry, and ordained ministers of the United Reformed Churches, including all emerited ministers and those who are deceased, as well as the archival record of those released, or deposed from the ministry in the United Reformed Churches. These registers shall be gleaned from the current information provided by the churches.~~
- ~~h. Prepare and post an online publication of the annual directory with the current information provided by the churches~~

#### 4.5. (UPDATE)      **The Stated Clerk**

##### 4.5.4.      **General Responsibilities:**

- ~~h. Assist the webmaster with the content of the alphabetical registers of licentiates, candidates for the ministry, and ordained ministers of the United Reformed Churches, including all emerited ministers and those who are deceased, as well as the archival record of those released, or deposed from the ministry in the United Reformed Churches.~~

Classis Ontario East

Rev. Joel Dykstra, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 12**

### **Adopt “Marriage Affirmation and Gospel Testimony”**

#### **I. Background**

Over the past decades, we have witnessed Western culture’s progressive abandonment of the Biblical definition of marriage. The movement to normalize conduct which the Bible condemns began to manifest itself in various judicial, legislative, and administrative actions in both Canada and the United States. Initially, secularists sought approval in various state legislatures to provide for homosexual unions all the incidents of marriage, but without giving it the name of “marriage.” Clear thinking Christians saw this as an initial step toward the ultimate goal of re-defining marriage itself to include same-sex relationships.

In 2010, the URCNA saw the danger which 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 its policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” which forbade homosexuals from serving openly in the United States military (Acts of Synod London, 2010, Articles 128, 132, p.82).

While legal changes regarding marriage were already occurring in Canada, a climactic legal decision 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, Opinion No. 14-556, June 26, 2015*). With this decision the Supreme Court changed the historic definition of 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. Undoubtedly, the present threat to religious liberty posed by the *Obergefell* ruling in the United States now extends to churches, individual Christians, Christian organizations, seminaries, and Christian schools as the biblical, confessional, and liturgical position of the United Reformed Churches in North America is at odds with this Supreme Court decision.

Holy Scripture, the Reformed confessions, our liturgical forms, and our church order are not silent on the issue of marriage. Together they clearly testify to the consensus of two millennia of Christian teaching that “Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous covenantal union between one man and one woman” (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*). We stand in unity with our Presbyterian brothers’ confessional standard which states: “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time” (*Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 24*). The “holy marriage” to which our Heidelberg Catechism in Q&A 108 refers is this God-ordained union of one man and one woman mentioned above.

Given the contested nature of marriage in our culture then, it is fitting at this time for our churches to clearly affirm our beliefs as to what Holy Scripture teaches on the nature of marriage.

The church speaks most powerfully when she speaks timelessly, bearing witness to the eternal and unchanging words of Scripture as well as to a continuity of faith and practice that transcends the cultural winds. This affirmation will clearly demonstrate that our beliefs and practice are grounded in two thousand years of the church’s Scriptural teaching, as well as almost five hundred years of liturgical practice in the Reformed tradition. It will encourage our church officers and

members to stand fast in this teaching and to preserve the unity of the faith with the saints through the ages so that we will not be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14). Furthermore, this will be a testimony to a watching world which is increasingly unmoored from God’s Holy Law.

Finally, this affirmation shall be a reminder that with the Apostles, “We must obey God rather than man” (*Acts 5:29*). While we may face persecution for holding to Scriptural truth, we gladly count ourselves among those Christians who have borne witness under the cross. It may even require us to disobey the civil magistrate should they seek to compel us to disobey the word of God. We pray that we may count these trials a joy, and persevere with the martyrs who have gone before us, even unto the extreme of offering “our backs to stripes, our tongues to knives, our mouths to gags, and our whole bodies to the fire, because we know that whoever will follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself” (*Belgic Confession, Letter to King Philip II*).

## II. Overture

Classis Pacific Northwest therefore, overtures Synod 2018 as follows:

### A. To adopt the following “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony:

1. The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God Himself at the very beginning of history (*Genesis 2:18; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*).
2. Since husbands and wives are united by the Lord’s hand, nothing should separate them in this life (*Genesis 2:18-24; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*).
3. Since the Lord forbids immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband (*1 Corinthians 7:2; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*).
4. The first purpose of marriage is that husband and wife shall live together in sincere love and holiness, helping each other faithfully in all things that belong to this life and to the life to come (*Genesis 2:18; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*).
5. The second purpose of marriage is procreation that by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased (*Genesis 1:22; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*).
6. The third purpose of marriage is that by marriage the kingdom of God is to be advanced. This purpose calls for loving devotion to each other by the husband and the wife, and a common responsibility by them for the nurture in true knowledge and fear of the Lord of any children which the Lord may give them as his heritage and as parties with them to his covenant (*Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*).
7. Marriage is a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness to man, an institution of the highest significance to the human race, and a symbol of the union of Christ and his Church (*Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1*). Our Lord Jesus declared that the one-flesh union of one man and one woman in marriage is rooted in creation and reflected in the mystery of the gospel (*Genesis 1:22; Ephesians 5:22–33*).
8. Scripture teaches that marriage is designed to be a lifelong, monogamous, covenantal union between one man and one woman (*Genesis 1:22; Ephesians 5:22–33; Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*).
9. Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry in the Lord (*1 Corinthians 7:39; Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*).

10. Christian marriages shall be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, under the regulation of the Consistory, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*).
11. URCNA ministers shall not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God (*Church Order of the URCNA, Seventh Edition, Article 48*). Even as all citizens are to honor governing authorities, yet such 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. As members of His precious Church, we must remain faithful to Christ and His Word even if illegitimately commanded by secular powers to disobey Him and His Word (*1 Peter 2:17; Belgic Confession Article 36*).
12. Any form of sexual immorality such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexuality, incest, or any attempt to change one's sex, or in any way disagree 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; Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 108, 109*).
13. The good news of the gospel is that all forms of sexual immorality are sins of which Scripture mercifully calls men and women to repent; and from which, by God's grace, they can repent, be forgiven, and be renewed to a new life of obedience to Christ by the power of the Spirit of God (*1 Corinthians 6:9-11*).

*Grounds:*

1. It is timely for the URCNA to affirm its teaching on the nature of marriage due to the great upheaval we are witnessing in the nature, morality, and legal understanding of marriage, as our culture and legal structures becomes increasingly unmoored from God's law and opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It is needful to exhort officers and members of the URCNA that in times of cultural and legal opposition we must heed the Apostolic command: "We must obey God rather than man" (*Acts 5:29*), and be willing to peaceably disobey the civil magistrate, suffering all consequences, when man's law conflicts with God's law (*Belgic Confession Art. 36*).
3. It is necessary to clearly establish before the civil magistrate that ministers in our United Reformed Churches are constrained to not solemnize marriages that conflict with the Word of God, both by their ordination vows and over five hundred years of consistent faith and practice.
4. It is necessary for the URCNA to coalesce, through this Affirmation, the biblical truths on sexuality and marriage found in our Catechism, our Church Order, and our liturgical forms in order to more effectively address the current cultural challenges to the nature of marriage itself.
5. The Church speaks most powerfully to a world in turmoil when she speaks in a timeless fashion. An affirmation of our churches' faith and practice as reflected in Scripture, the Reformed confessions, the historic liturgical forms, and our church order most powerfully reflects both our continuity with the past and the enduring nature of our witness.
6. Although some professing Christians today deny the clarity of Scripture's teaching on marriage, this affirmation reflects our commitment to maintain the unity of the faith and to read God's Word in common with the saints through the ages.
7. The teaching of God's timeless and infallible Word is wholly authoritative to address the errors of our age and of any age.

- B. Encourage the churches of the federation to send the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to governing authorities as each church deems appropriate.

*Grounds:*

1. The church exercises the keys of the kingdom by witnessing Gospel Truth to the world, calling all men everywhere to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. This witness includes the use of spiritual means to exhort and rebuke our rulers when they contravene God’s moral law which binds them (*Jeremiah 1:9-10; Heidelberg Catechism Q. 83 and 84; URCNA Church Order Articles 2 and 47; Synod 2010 Letter of Concern*).
  2. There are varying degrees of involvement by different executive, judicial, legislative, parliamentary, and administrative bodies in both Canada’s and the United States’ governmental systems regarding the matters addressed in the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony.”
  3. Affirming our historic teaching in the universal language of our Scriptural tradition best preserves the freedom of local Consistories to address their civil magistrate and cultural context in an appropriate fashion. We acknowledge that the need for this affirmation has been precipitated by particular events in the United States, namely, the new legal regime brought about by the Supreme Court ruling of *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015. However, as a church that spans multiple jurisdictions in North America, our universal testimony can serve as witness to any magistrate in any jurisdiction.
  4. Each local church can best assess the most effective means of communicating the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to the most relevant governing authorities in their respective jurisdictions.
- C. Direct the Stated Clerk of the Federation to send the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) for the member churches’ consideration and edification.

*Grounds:*

1. The URCNA is a member of NAPARC.
2. 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.*).
3. Sending the “Marriage Affirmation & Gospel Testimony” to NAPARC advances the purpose of sharing our insights on these issues which we face in common with NAPARC churches.

Classis Pacific Northwest  
Rev. Adrian Dieleman, Stated Clerk

## **Overture 13**

### **Amend Church Order Article 47**

#### **I. Background**

The URCNA has made great efforts, in its short history, to spread the Gospel both at home and abroad for the glory of God. These efforts have at times met with established churches, and at other times they have served the broader kingdom through Gospel proclamation, education of potential gospel ministers, and faithfulness in the call God has given us to work in as we trust God to bring the result He has determined.

Through the efforts we have made the churches of the URCNA have grown as a body in both things to avoid, things to ensure, and things to be cautious of. There is a growing wisdom in the federation in the work of missions as we learn through study or trial and error practical pointers for missions and evangelism.

At this point however, the work of starting or concluding mission works (either at home or abroad) remains exclusively with local consistories. One church can begin or conclude a mission work, without being encouraged by our Church Order to benefit from the wisdom of those around them. This can cause churches to repeat errors that other churches have already learned from, and can stunt our growth in missions through failing to learn from one another.

Further to this particular overture, we have struggled as a federation in recognizing the place of the non-ordained in mission. We rightly emphasize that the church's missionary task, when carried out beyond the field of an organized church, is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to that task (Art. 47). However, in emphasizing only the work of the minister in this area, our church order fails to emphasize the great calling which every Christian has in advancing God's kingdom through life and witness.

#### **II. Overture**

Classis Southwestern Ontario overtures Synod 2018 to replace the current Art. 47 of the Church Order with the following expanded article:

##### *Article 47 – The Mission of the Church*

The church's missionary task to make disciples of all nations is to be fulfilled by the entire body of believers (Mt. 28:18-20). When the church's missionary task is performed beyond the field of an organized church it should be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor, who are called, supported and supervised by their Consistories.

The churches should assist each other in support of their missionaries. This support should be in areas of prayer, finances, and resources. Among the resources of the church are the members themselves. Non-ordained Christians (missionary helpers) are encouraged to labor in volunteer or paid positions alongside ministers for the propagation of the Gospel Kingdom, and can receive support from the church to serve in this role. All such workers should be sent to the field under the direction of a local Consistory and with the approval and oversight of the missionary or church planter overseeing the work.

The church's missionary task is to be advanced diligently, faithfully, and responsibly. To help in this, a foreign or domestic missionary should not be sent or withdrawn from the field without receiving the concurring advice of Classis.

*Grounds:*

1. Practical: This expanded Art. 47 would serve the churches in providing necessary detail in how the churches of the federation are to carry out the Great Commission. Beginning or concluding a missionary effort, whether in a foreign or domestic context, is a significant responsibility and the excitement or difficulty of this should not undermine the care with which it must be exercised.
2. Historical: Past synods in our tradition and history have greatly expanded their church order articles on missions. Furthermore, the new Art. 47 would bring our current church order in line with our own history, as recent URCNA synods have adopted a number of policies relating to missions.
3. Theological: Our church order should reflect this truth that we have been redeemed by a missionary God who has called his people to be a missionary Church, sent to make disciples of all nations – a task that is entrusted to all church members and assemblies, and is to be carried out in numerous ways.
4. Biblical: Scripture regularly teaches the role of every Christian, by their lips and lives, to be witnesses for the Lord (Matt 5:14-16; Luke 24:47-50; John 20:21; Acts 1:8, 2:39, 8:4; Php 2:13-15; Col 4:5; 1 Peter 2:9, 3:15). The Bible teaches us that Jesus came, “To seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Jesus later called the Spirit filled church to that same mission, giving them the command that repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be preached in His Name to all nations. The Christian church must bring the Gospel to all men at home and abroad in order that the Lord's chosen people among the nations may come to repentance and faith, and be brought into the fellowship of the church where they may grow as disciples of Christ.
5. Confessional: Heidelberg Q/As 32 & 86 emphasize the office of believer in his/her role in the mission of God and his Church (see also Canons of Dort, First Head, Art. 2-3). Currently our church order lacks any reference to the office of believer in the mission.
6. Sending a man to the foreign field requires significant thought and consideration, and will often commit the federation to ministry in an area of the world for a considerable period of time. Due to this it is wise to have extra steps requiring a sending church to get advice and wisdom from a broader body of believers.

Classis Southwestern Ontario  
Rev. James Sinke, Stated Clerk

## Overture 14

### Amend Church Order Article 55

#### I. Background

While reviewing the Church Order it was determined that Article 55 could use a stylistic refinement that does not alter its meaning.

#### II. Overture

Classis Southwest US overtures Synod 2018 to revise Article 55 of the Church Order of the United Reformed Churches in North America as follows (additions underlined and deletions ~~struck through~~):

##### **Article 55 – The Discipline of a Member**

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, so that his excommunication may take place with the full knowledge of the church. The interval between the steps shall be left to the discretion of the Consistory.

##### *Grounds:*

1. The proposed changes result in a simpler sentence that communicates the same thing as the more complex sentence it seeks to modify.
2. Simplicity in communication is desirable so long as it is not simplistic.

Classis Southwest U.S.

Rev. Dr. Quentin B. Falkena, Stated Clerk



## **Overture 15**

### **Amend CO Articles 55 & 64 to Conform to 2016 Pastoral Advice**

#### **I. Background**

Synod Wyoming 2016 adopted pastoral advice regarding membership departures. It also encouraged the churches to use that pastoral advice to recommend appropriate changes to the Church Order to codify that advice. From the *Minutes of Synod Wyoming*, Art. 121.4:

4. *That Synod encourage the churches to employ these four categories (i.e. transfer, release, exclusion, erasure), in submitting overtures to amend the Church Order with regard to membership departure.*
- Grounds:*
- a. *Overtures in regard to Church Order should arise from consistories (Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix A).*
  - b. *These categories provide a common vocabulary for the churches to use in such overtures.*
  - c. *Codifying the Pastoral Advice by appropriate changes to the Church Order will clarify the matter and lead to a more consistent dealing with membership departures among the churches.*

*Adopted*

The pastoral advice adopted by Synod Wyoming 2016 is as follows:

#### **1. Membership Transfer**

A consistory may transfer a person's membership only to churches with whom the URCNA has established Ecclesiastical Fellowship<sup>3</sup> or with whom we share membership in NAPARC.<sup>4</sup> 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, it 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.<sup>5</sup>

The consistory should request the elders of the receiving church to provide confirmation that the person has been received into their membership by use of the synodically approved Certificate of Membership.<sup>6</sup> The consistory should not consider the

---

<sup>3</sup> Acts of Synod London 2010, Art. 68.1, pp. 31, 213-215

<sup>4</sup> 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>.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Acts of Synod 1997, Article LB.3, synodically approved Certificate of Membership, p.53.

member transferred until it has received the requested confirmation. Once confirmed, the consistory should inform the congregation that the member has been transferred to another church, giving the name of the church.

## 2. Membership Release

A consistory may release a person's membership to churches that 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 should allow time for the consistory to carefully consider it. The consistory should then act in the way it is 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, it 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 these 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.

## 3. Membership Exclusion

Consistories may exclude from membership those who persist in separating from the church by way of resignation, recognizing them to be outside the communion of the saints.

A member seeking resignation is taking premeditated and deliberate action. It is a grievous sin to forsake Christ's church by 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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; or 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 to recognize 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 needs not advance in the discipline process while warning 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. The consistory needs not seek advice if classis has previously advised it 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 him or her and urging 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.

#### 4. Membership Erasure

Consistories may erase the membership of those with whom they have had no contact for at least two years, thus rendering consistories 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 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 its efforts to contact and give pastoral care to the member. The consistory should inform the congregation of this action and the reasons for it.

---

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:42, 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12; Hebrews 10:24-25, 13:7; 1 Peter 5:1-5

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 22:22; Matthew 16:19, 18:18

## II. Overture

Classis Western Canada overtures Synod 2018 to revise the Church Order in keeping with the recommendations of the majority report of the Committee on Membership Departures. Specifically, we overture that Articles 55 and 64 be amended with the addition of new material. Except for the addition of five words in the last sentence of Article 64 (“with concurring advice of classis”), the additional material here proposed is the same as that suggested by the majority report of the Committee on Membership Departures. The changes are as follows with new material in italics:

### Article 55 – The Discipline of a Member

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 should 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 – Departure of Members

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, with concurring advice from*

*classis, erase the membership of those with whom they have not been able to communicate for at least two years.*

*Grounds:*

1. These proposed changes codify in the Church Order the language used, and the procedures described, in the pastoral advice on Membership Departures adopted by Synod Wyoming 2016 without unnecessarily repeating all the wording of that advice. The Church Order should remain as brief as possible, setting forth broad principles and not attempt to describe how to act under every conceivable contingency. The consistory is called to employ wisdom in the application of Church Order principles to ever varying situations. The adopted pastoral advice will also assist the consistories in so doing.
2. The exclusion of a communicant member who persists in forsaking the church should be dealt with under Article 55 which deals with the discipline of communicant members. It should be noted that this expands the Church Order use of the word “exclude” which previously referred only to the discipline of a non-communicant member, but now is also used regarding the discipline of a communicant member. In both instances, exclusion is an act of discipline.
3. The transfer, release, or erasure of a member should be dealt with in Article 64 which concerns the departure of members where no official act of discipline is involved.

Classis Western Canada,  
Rev. James Roosma, Stated Clerk

## Appeal 1

### Appeal of Peter Kok

I, Peter Kok, appeal the practice of Covenant URC consistory of Clovis to admit non-Reformed people to communion at the Lord's Table.

#### **Background:**

Approximately eighteen months ago, I met with the pastor to discuss the practice of admitting to communion those who had not professed the Reformed faith. It began with a Baptist family who were admitted to communion, though they had not yet professed the Reformed faith. I outlined my position, and felt reassured that my concerns were going to be addressed in a manner agreeable to both Consistory and myself. Unfortunately, the result was a letter from the Consistory, in which my position was condemned as being unreformed and unbiblical and I was urged to forsake it. While I am not responsible for the decisions of Consistory, this caused me great sorrow and anguish. At one of the discussions I had with the pastor, he told me that Consistory could not agree with my request, as it would bind the conscience of Consistory. I withheld myself from communion for a time, and was eventually commanded to appear before consistory to give account. Also present were Rev. Dieleman and Brother Leyendekker from Trinity URC in Visalia. I was basically told that I must participate in communion, and that I was to acquiesce to the decision of Consistory to continue its practice of admission while the matter was under appeal. I ask you brothers, does this not then bind my conscience by forcing me to participate in something which I believe with every fiber of my being is wrong and contrary to Reformed doctrine and polity?

#### Appeal:

I appeal the ongoing practice of Covenant URC consistory of Clovis to admit to Communion those who have not yet professed the Reformed faith in either a church of our federation or another church which is a member of NAPARC.

#### Grounds:

1)The decision of consistory to continue its practice violates C.O article 45, which reads as follows: 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. This was common Reformed practice until recently. Why did it change and what was the purpose of its changing? The result of this change has led to

allowing virtually anyone who confesses Christ to participate in communion regardless of their Church affiliation or doctrine.

2) The ongoing practice of this Consistory is in violation of B.C. article 29. We acknowledge and confess both in baptism and profession of faith that the doctrine taught in this Christian Church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation. It only stands to reason then, that we do not accept as true Churches those who have a doctrine contrary to the Reformed faith. This does not necessarily mean that they are false, but rather that they are erring in certain areas of doctrine. So I ask, how can those hear the pure preaching of the gospel if their doctrinal views are opposed to the Reformed faith? How can the administration of the sacraments be purely administered by those and to those whose understanding of the sacraments differs to what we believe and confess? And what of church discipline? Those who are members of the Reformed Church are subject to the discipline and admonition of the Church should they become delinquent in doctrine or conduct of life. Should not the same standards apply to those outside the Reformed Church? Or do we have a double standard? Or is discipline no longer a living part of the Church? For discipline is actively applied to those who through baptism or public profession of faith are members of the local church and is passively applied to those who are not. The standard remains the same in either case and must be applied without prejudice to all.

3) This continuing practice is in violation of C.O. 43 which reads: " Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life, and their public profession of faith shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcement to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby baptized members are accepted into full communion in the congregation and shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper." Members of the local Church are to be catechized, interviewed and then make public profession of their faith. They are then admitted to full communion which grants participation in the sacraments. Should not the same standard be applied to all whether members or not? What do we show our children? That they must publicly profess their faith, and others get a pass? Of what benefit then is public profession of faith? Participation in the sacraments has always been a privilege of membership, not the means to it. Sacramental participation should be something which is to be desired and a striving to attain, not something which is freely given to anyone who wishes to participate.

4) The practice of sacramental participation by those who have not publicly professed the Reformed faith violates what is implied in the forms for public profession of faith. After all the instruction, and the interview by consistory, the individual answers the questions asked, and only then is admitted to full communion with the people of God. Does this not imply a public profession is needed prior to participation? Or are there other ways of public profession? For example, is it sufficient to recite the creeds, or an acknowledgement to consistory pre- admission that one confesses Christ? Who then shall be denied? Even the Roman Catholic confesses Christ despite the flawed theology surrounding the confession. Are we to admit them as well? Or do we say flawed theology is acceptable up to a point? If so, what point? Is flawed theology not flawed theology in every case? Also, the vows taken in the public profession state that should I become delinquent that I will willingly subject myself to the discipline of the Church, the first step being

withheld from participation. Should not all persons, whether members , guests or continual visitors be subject to the same standards?

5) This continuing practice violates 1 Timothy 4:16 "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" What does this say to us but that doctrine matters. In conjunction with this text, Paul also exhorts Timothy in Timothy 6:20 to guard what has been entrusted to his care. Should we not do the same? Church history is full of examples as to what happens when you compromise doctrine and don't stand firm.

Conclusion:

Brothers, I implore you, please discontinue this practice. It is my fear that by continuing on this slippery slope, we will lose our identity as a Reformed Church and become what we don't wish to become: a liberal, man-serving church. We must, for the sake of our children, stand firm on what has been historical practices of the Reformed Churches throughout the generations. Should we not keep the bride of Christ as pure as snow? We cannot judge the heart of a man, so we must judge based on doctrine and affiliation. We cannot blur the line between the visible and the invisible. One Church---two manifestations. One Church--one doctrine. Let the things of God remain with God. Let us not be wiser than God. In glory, all who are elect will celebrate the great feast of the Lamb. On this side however, we must hold fast to that which has been entrusted to us by those who have gone before.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you as you deliberate.

In Christ,

Peter Kok



## **Classis Response to Appeal 1**

Classis Pacific Northwest of the URCNA met on October 17 and decided the following:

Classis does not sustain the appeal of Mr. Kok by finding all grounds to be invalid.

Ground 1 of the appeal is found to be invalid on the grounds that Classis concludes that the Consistory rightly understands how Church Order Article 45 makes a distinction between members and visitors and has applied that distinction appropriately.

Ground 2 of the appeal is found to be invalid on the grounds that Classis concludes that Consistory has rightly understood that Belgic Confession Article 29 applies to the privileges and responsibilities of members distinct from visitors.

Ground 3 of the appeal is found to be invalid on the grounds that Classis concludes that Consistory has rightly understood that Church Order Article 43 applies to members distinct from visitors.

Ground 4 of the appeal is found to be invalid on the grounds that Classis concludes that the Consistory has properly understood and applied our liturgical forms for members along with distinct application to visitors.

Ground 5 of the appeal is found to be invalid on the grounds that Classis concludes that the Consistory has properly interpreted 1 Timothy 4:16 for members distinct from visitors.

Classis directs Mr. Kok to the note from Synod Wyoming 2016 "that there are two practices current within the federation with regard to admitting visitors to the Lord's Table: 1) Admitting only those who have publicly professed the Reformed Faith; 2) Admitting non-Reformed professing visitors" (Acts of Synod 2016, Art. 111.E).

M/S that Classis adopt this report.

**ADOPTED**

Classis does appreciate that you took the time and effort to put this into the correct format. If you wish to appeal to Synod, please feel free to contact me to help you with format and so on.

Yours in Christ  
Adrian Dieleman  
Clerk, Classis Pacific Northwest of the URCNA

## Consistory Response to Appeal 1

July 16, 2017

Peter Kok

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

Dear Brother Pete,

We are writing in response to your second complaint regarding our communion practice of admitting non-Reformed Christians to the Lord's Table. The first complaint was answered by us in a letter sent to the October 20, 2015 Classis meeting held in Twin Falls, ID. We believe that for all practical purposes that the original complaint was comprehensively answered by that letter. Thus, we wish to include it again with this renewed effort. However, a few observations are in order regarding this second complaint.

Before we begin it should be stated that this is not an attack on persons but on ideas that persons adopt. II Corinthians 10:3-5 reminds us that our targets are not to be persons (flesh and blood) but "speculations" which is the arena of thought. So, though "iron sharpens iron" let us be reminded that it is not persons who are to be dismantled but "systems of thought" by demonstrating their incompatibility with either logic or revelation by way of direct reference to Scripture or acceptable confessions.

The Heart of the Debate  
Persistent Straw Man and Non Sequitur Arguments  
Appeals to Reformed Tradition  
A Final Plea

The Heart of the Debate

In order to get straight to the heart of the matter, we wish to expose to view the single point of departure between us. Here it is: does the true church consist of only confessional Reformed churches or is the true church broader than that. By true church we mean the visible professing Christian church which is reasonably characterized by the three marks. Thus, our answer is two-fold. First, the true visible church is identifiably broader than the Reformed Church. Second, to deny this results in a form of Reformed sectarianism. Your position is as stated: Citing the Belgic Confession Article #29 you conclude, "It only stands to reason then, that we do not accept as true Churches those who have a doctrine contrary to the Reformed faith. This does not necessarily mean that they are false, but rather that they are erring...". So here, at the vital nerve of the whole controversy is this blatant contradiction, "we do not accept as...true...they are not necessarily... false". It is our consistory's Biblical and historic affirmation that the true visible, catholic church may profess many errors and yet be a true church. The Roman Catholic Church conversely professes many truths and yet is a false church. This is nothing novel or new. It is typical

Reformed ecclesiology. It is because of this we are willing to admit to the Lord's Table non-Reformed Christians who have "biblical church membership", as our church order requires. The very Article #29 of the Belgic Confession under consideration affirms this by saying on the one hand we must be "diligent to discern" the true church and on the other that the difference is "easily known". Your argument seeks to keep you from painting the Reformed church into the sectarian corner of being the only true church (whose members can be exclusively admitted to the Table) but does so at the expense of denying the law of non-contradiction. The entire argument rests upon this incoherent formulation of how non-Reformed churches can at one and the same time be both not true and not false. That's not sound logically or confessionally. The Heidelberg Catechism is also crystal clear. The Lord's Table distinguishes between believers and unbelievers not Reformed Christian versus everyone else. And this is how the keys to the kingdom regarding the sacraments are to be exercised, to differentiate between the repentant believer and the unrepentant unbeliever. It's plain as the noonday sun in questions 81-85. We sincerely draw your attention to this incoherent foundation with the hopes that you might proceed logically and in terms of our confessional categories of true, false and sect. (Belgic #29). There is no "not true and yet not false but erring" category.

#### Persistent Straw Man and Non Sequitur Arguments

Brother Pete, in critiquing our practice, you persist in creating false dilemmas as if not accepting the Van Dellen/Monsma (or "Reformed only") paradigm results in "allowing virtually anyone who confesses Christ to participate in communion regardless of their Church affiliation or doctrine". Or that we are hopelessly given to a "double standard" where some "must publicly profess their faith, and others get a pass" and that the sacrament is "freely given to anyone who wishes to participate". And "even the Roman Catholic confesses Christ despite the flawed theology surrounding the confession. Are we to admit them as well?" And "church history is full of examples as to what happens when you compromise doctrine and don't stand firm...by continuing on this slippery slope we will lose our identity as a Reformed church and become what we don't wish to become". As stated in our prior letter to Classis, we require (last page of our weekly bulletin) an interview with an elder that requires profession of the Gospel and church membership according to our church articles. You have created a false dilemma by insisting that either we follow the "Reformed only" paradigm or we "virtually allow anyone" to the Table. That is not true. It is a "straw man argument". If such a thing actually existed in our church's belief and practice we would agree with your objection. But it doesn't. It does not follow that if a man rejects the "Reformed only" model he therein removes all fences from the Lord's Table. That's a non sequitur argument.

This is not a subtle point. It is plain and simple speech. And though we have written with big bold letters for all to understand, a position that is not ours continues to be attacked as if it was our belief and practice. You are obliged to fairly/accurately reproduce the position of those with whom you differ. That obligation is unfulfilled when you employ fallacious and prejudicial arguments.

#### Appeals to Reformed Tradition

The Reformed tradition is good, insofar that it has rightly tied itself to the Word of God.

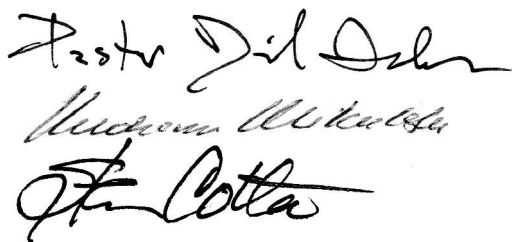
Does that mean it is beyond refinement or correction? We recognize that your view has enjoyed a significant place in the tradition. We are not persuaded that it is the only view and we are strongly persuaded that it is not the best view. You have stated that our position has placed us on a slippery slope and is a compromise of sound doctrine. That is over inflated in our judgment. We would wish that you might detect the dangers inherent in your position. First, Paul's rebuke and call for self-examination was for excluding the qualified from the Table and therein disrupting proper unity not for failing to exclude the unqualified. Second, we see the danger of blinding oneself to what God is doing outside the Reformed faith in the visible catholic church arising out of a kind of Reformed sectarianism. Our position honors the very teaching of the historic Reformed tradition; that the true visible church is wider than the Reformed label. And thus we require that they belong to His visible church. The "Reformed only" position, by default, refuses to practically acknowledge this. So we are faced here with traditions in tension: the traditional thread of admitting only Reformed Christians to the Table and the traditional fabric of the true visible church as loomed larger than the sector of strict Reformed confessionalism. Our question is this: are we offering a correction to a thread drawn from the fabric of an otherwise sound tradition or are we headed toward the overthrow of the whole tradition itself? We think we have adjusted the thermostat. You brother seem to think we have lit the building on fire. We hope our responses both before and now make evident the nature of the alarm that has been raised.

#### A Final Plea

Lastly, we plead that you edit out of your complaint material for which Pastor Inks has asked your forgiveness. We are speaking about the statements to the effect that your position was not Reformed and the heart burn you suffered. We have learned that only offense can be gained by these kinds of assessments. Both sides of the aisle need to avoid these kinds of personal distractions to the issue at hand. So please let regurgitation of old offenses fall off from the discussion as well as accusations of departures from Reformed orthodoxy which is odious to us both. As Proverbs 17:9 says, "He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends". To cover it buries it, to repeat it keeps it alive.

Again, as stated, as our brother in Christ, we hope our candid comments serve to challenge your thinking toward greater coherency and confessional faithfulness and not rattle the sincere faith itself which resides within you as a fellow Reformed believer.

Yours truly in Truth,  
Your Consistory,

The block contains three handwritten signatures in cursive script. The first signature is the largest and most prominent, followed by two smaller signatures below it. The signatures are written in black ink on a white background.

**Communication 1**  
**Rev. Jephthah Nobel to Synod Wheaton 2018**

This communication contains the names of individuals, as well as complaints against a consistory, a classis, and a synod. In order to protect the parties involved, the Convening Consistory has decided not to publish it in the public agenda but rather to provide it privately to all delegates.

## **CECCA Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

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;
  - d. significant factors in the two federations’ history, theology, ecclesiology and stands on ethical issues;
  - e. church order and polity;
  - f. liturgy and liturgical forms;
  - g. preaching, sacraments and discipline;
  - h. theological education for ministers;
  - i. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies.
  - j. Exchange of denominational Church Directories (Yearbooks);
  - k. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the Confessional Standards;
  - l. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order;
  - m. Exchange of the most recently denominationally published editions of Psalters/Hymnals;
  - n. 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:

1. Occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option);
2. 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);

3. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity;
4. Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another;
5. Joint action in areas of common responsibility;
6. 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 Wyoming, CECCA has met six times by way of conference calls. It plans to have a face-to-face meeting at Synod Wheaton. This report will

1. focus on churches with which we are in Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase II)
2. focus on churches with which we are in Ecumenical Contact (Phase I);
3. focus on churches with which we are corresponding with a view to entering into Ecumenical Contact (phase one).
4. report on a visit made to the Fellowship of Reformed Churches (CLIR: Confraternidad Latinoamericana de Iglesias Reformadas).
5. report on the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).
6. 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 and one preaching place; South island – 6 congregations and one preaching place (total of 20 churches). They currently have 17 ministers and three vicars. They also have five retired ministers who still serve as they are able. They have 3,274 members, as of February 2017. 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](http://www.rcnz.org.nz). Last year, CECCA delegated brother Dr. Cornel Venema to represent the URCNA at the thirtieth synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand held September 9-17, 2017 in Palmerston North. 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**. For more details, see

### **The United Reformed Churches in Congo (URCC)**

The URCC is a federation of churches comprised of 189 churches, organized in ten regional synods, which are subdivided into 43 classes. In addition there are 43 preaching stations with a view to church planting. The URC has 34 ordained pastors, 395 elders and 262 deacons. The total membership of the churches remains at approximately 14,000. The churches operate one Theological Seminary and nine Biblical Training Centers.

We received an invitation to attend the upcoming synod of the URCC scheduled to meet July 22-27, 2018 in Lubumbashi. CECCA plans to send a fraternal delegate who is able to speak French to this synod.

### **The Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA)**

The GKSA came into existence in 1859 and grew from the original five churches to 389 churches in 2017. The churches are spread right across the Republic of South Africa and also in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Zambia. These churches are currently being served by 276 ministers, in approximately 15 languages. The GKSA established its own Theological School, founded in 1869 in Burgersdorp and since 1905 is located in Potchefstroom. The Theological School Potchefstroom (TSP) is staffed with 15 professors and three administrative officials, connected to the Faculty of Theology of the North West University (NWU), and has its own library.

CECCA delegated Rev. Dick Moes to represent the URCNA at the Fourth General Synod of the GKSA held in Potchefstroom January 9-18, 2018. 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**.

### **The Calvinist Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT)**

The GGRC-NTT is a federation of churches comprised of 15 congregations spread out in different islands of Indonesia, including Timor, Sabu, Rote and Java. The GGRC was established as a federation in 1950. 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. The GGRC has known the URCNA since 2001 and would love to receive their help in the training of church leaders.

No visit was made during this reporting period.

### **The Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC)**



The FCC is a federation of churches made up of six presbyteries, representing **forty-two** 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

Brother Jason Tuinstra made a visit to the General Assembly of the FCC in May, 2017. A copy of the address given at this synod can be found in **Appendix 5**. A report of the visit made can be found in **Appendix 6**.

## **II. Churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Contact**

### **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.

At their latest synod in Meppel, 2017, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands decided to open all the offices of the church (minister, elder, deacon) to women. The report that served at synod can be read here: <file:///Users/dickmoes/Downloads/23-D-1-Report-M-F-Serving-together-ENGLISH-VERSION.pdf>. The explanation of its decision synod sent to the churches can be read here: <file:///Users/dickmoes/Downloads/23-MVEA-170704-Letter-to-the-Churches-concerning-the-decisions-of-Synod-MF-and-office.pdf>. Synod decided to allow for implementation of its decision immediately. In the light of this decision, CECCA sent a letter to the BBK of the GKv (Deputies Foreign Churches). This letter can be found in **Appendix 7**

In accordance with our letter, **CECCA proposes** to discontinue its Ecclesiastical Contact relationship with the GKv.

### **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. Recently, a third congregation was started in Pardaugavas.

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 the congregations.

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 will make a concerted attempt to make a visit to the ERCLAT before our next synod so that we can move from a Phase I relationship to a Phase II relationship. In the meantime:

**CECCA proposes** that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the ERCLAT.

### **The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales (EPCEW)**

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW) is a federation that was established in 1996 with then 5 churches. Currently there are 17 churches; 12 churches in England, three in Wales, one in Sweden (Tranås) and one in Germany (Berlin). There is a mission church in Manchester, as well as plans to develop a church plant in Sunderland and in Oxford. In Hexham, a Mission to the World missionary has been appointed, and in Barry (South Wales) a World Witness (ARP) missionary has been appointed as the minister in the church. A missionary from the PCA joined the church in Tranås, Sweden at the end of 2017.

The total (communicant and baptized) membership of the EPCEW is about 800 (2017 figure), a growth of about 3% from the previous year, and the denomination, though still very small, has been growing at about 10% a year over its history.

CECCA delegated Rev. Rick Miller to attend an assembly and elder's conference of the EPCEW held on March 5, 2018. A copy of the address given at this synod can be found in **Appendix 8**. A report of the visit made can be found in **Appendix 9**.

Since we have been in fraternal relations for four years and there are no outstanding issues:

**CECCA proposes** that the URCNA enter in Ecclesiastical Fellowship (Phase II) with the EPCEW.

### **The Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI-NTT)**

The GGRI-NTT in the province of East Nusa Tenggara is a federation consisting of 19 established churches that are located on Sumba, Savu and Timor. It is organized in 4 classes and has a membership of 8000 people. The federation maintains a Theological College in Waingapu, the capital of East Sumba. There are 20 students on Campus at the moment. Two of them are married. There are five students doing practicum in the churches at the moment; two of them are starting a mission post in Bali; three of them are in Sumba. There are four full-time lecturers and nine part-time lecturers. Since the College does not have its own campus yet, they are presently renting a building.

Since we have only been an Ecclesiastical Contact relationship for two years,

**CECCA proposes** that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the GGRI-NTT.

### **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 700 members. It holds to the Westminster Standards and the Westminster Form of Presbyterian Church Government.

Since we have only been in an Ecclesiastical Contact relationship for two years,

**CECCA proposes** that the URCNA remain into Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the PCEA.

## **III. Churches with whom we are corresponding with a view to Ecumenical Contact**

### **Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (AEPC)**

In the fall of 2017, CECCA was approached by the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church with a request to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the URCNA. Since we had met a delegate of the AEPC at the ICRC in Jordan (July 2017), we followed the necessary steps to see if such a relationship would be possible. For a brief history and description of this church federation, see:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa\\_Evangelical\\_Presbyterian\\_Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa_Evangelical_Presbyterian_Church). For the

Constitution of the AEPC see:

<http://www.christianstudylibrary.org/files/pub/Constitution%20of%20the%20African%20Evangelical%20Presbyterian%20church.pdf>. The AEPC is a member of the ICRC and was present at the latest ICRC in Jordan, Ontario in July, 2017.

**CECCA proposes** that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the AEPC.

## **IV. Fellowship of Reformed Churches (CLIR: Confraternidad Latinoamericana de Iglesias Reformadas)**

The Confraternidad Latinoamericana de Iglesias Reformadas (CLIR) was founded in 1994 to provide a forum for fellowship and joint ministry among Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Central and South America. Rev. Bill Green has worked as

Executive Secretary for the CLIR since 1997. Since its inception, the CLIR has grown to include some 12 denominations in many countries of Latin America. As a fellowship, the CLIR seeks to provide ways in which church leaders may become familiar with other Reformed believers and situations, in order to mutually address the challenge of evangelizing this region of the world. During these past years it has been proven that by working together we can accomplish more. These are some of the activities the CLIR is presently involved in: Leadership conferences – Many conferences have been jointly sponsored by the CLIR and local churches. Hundreds of church leaders have received training in various important aspects of ministry, such as elder training, liturgy, Reformed theology, and orientation to Roman Catholic spirituality.

**Publications** – Through the theological journal *Reforma Siglo 21* a thousand pastors and leaders are receiving a practical, contemporary resource for their ministry. This cutting edge publication engages everyday issues which church leaders face. At the same time it offers an historical and confessional focus for churches buffeted by the desire for the new and sensational. Publications have risen from 300 to 5000 copies.

**Missions** – One of the CLIR's goals is to stimulate church growth, new church planting and foreign missions. As reformed churches throughout Latin America are becoming more aware of the conditions in each region, there is a growing sense of the need to join efforts to reach those areas which as yet have no Reformed witness. The CLIR's general meetings, which bring leaders from all over the continent, have been one of the principal means by which a growing camaraderie has arisen (from the CLIR website at <http://www.reformedmissions.org/clir.html>)

CECCA delegated brother Doug Field to represent the URCNA at the General Assembly of CLIR held from October 30-November 2, 2017. A copy of the address to the General Assembly can be found in **Appendix 10**. A report of the visit made can be found in **Appendix 11**.

## **V. 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), Wales, United Kingdom (2013) and Jordan, Ontario (2017).

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

A Press Release of the 2017 Conference can be found in **Appendix: 12**

## **VI. Financial Requests**

It is quite normal that when a federation engages in ecumenical relations, that from time to time the federation receives requests for financial aid. Many other federations have committees for contact with churches abroad that also have a diaconal arm, which enables them to evaluate the financial requests and respond responsibly. CECCA does not have such a diaconal arm to deal with the requests for financial aid it receives.

Recently, we received a financial request from the United Reformed Churches in the Congo to help them with the building of a school that has been budgeted for \$175,000.00 (American). While we have approached private individuals to help with the cost of airline tickets for fraternal delegates from our poorer churches with whom we have ecclesiastical contact and fellowship, a request for this amount does not allow us to take this course of action.

In Question and Answer 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism, we confess in answer to the question about the meaning of the communion of saints that “***First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. 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.***” CECCA understands its mandate to facilitate the URCNA to function internationally according to Question and Answer 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism, just like individually churches function according to this Question and Answer of locally and federatively.

In the light of the request received from the ***United Reformed Churches in the Congo***, **CECCA requests** the advice of Synod Wheaton on how it can facilitate the URCNA to function internationally according to Question and Answer 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism, just like individually churches function according to this Question and Answer of locally and federatively.

## **VII. Recommendations**

CECCA recommends to Synod Wheaton that:

1. the URCNA discontinue its Ecclesiastical Contact relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv);

2. the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (Phase I) Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT);
3. the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase II) with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW);
4. the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI-NTT);
5. the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase I) with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA);
6. the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (Phase I) with the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (AEPC);
7. Synod advise CECCA on how to respond to the request for financial aid it received from the United Reformed Churches in the Congo;
8. Synod reappoint Rev. Dick Moes as member-at-large of CECCA;
9. Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following member of CECCA to answer Synod's questions regarding this report: Rev Dick Moes (now emeritus pastor and not a delegate to Synod).

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Ancel Merwin, member  
 Rev. Ray Sikkema, member  
 Rev. Rick Miller, member  
 Rev. Michel Persaud, member  
 Br. Gerald Swets, member  
 Br. Ryan Glomsrud, member  
 Br. Doug L. Field, member  
 Rev. Jason Tuinstra, chairman  
 Rev. Dick Moes, secretary.

### **Appendix 1**

#### **Fraternal Greetings from the United Reformed Churches in North America to the General Synod the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, September, 2017**

Dear moderator and delegates to the 2017 Synod of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand,

I count it a privilege, and one of the great delights of my ministry, to be present at this Synod, and to extend to you the fraternal greetings of the United Reformed Churches in

North America. I could not have imagined, as a young boy living in New Zealand in the late 1950's and early 1960's when my father served as a pastor first in Dunedin and then in Bucklands Beach, that I would have the opportunity by God's grace to participate in this assembly of the RCNZ. I rejoice at the way the Lord has blessed the RCNZ, and am deeply grateful for the unity in the faith that we enjoy together. I am reminded of the apostle Paul's words to the Philippians: "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:3-4). [On a personal note, if my father had not been called home to be with the Lord two years ago, he would have rejoiced to hear that I was commissioned by the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) to be the URCNA fraternal delegate to your Synod. Though my family left New Zealand in 1963, I can assure you that the well-being and continued testimony of the RCNZ to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ always remained uppermost in my father's thoughts and prayers.]

Allow me to begin my remarks with some information regarding the URCNA, and the history of our relationship with the RCNZ. The URCNA is a federation of churches that was formed in 1995-1996 out of a desire to maintain the historic testimony of the churches to the Reformed faith, as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, and to order its life by a Church Order that conforms to biblical and Reformed principles for the government, worship and ministry of the churches. While our history as a distinct federation of churches is relatively brief, we share with you a long and rich history that reaches back to the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth-century. We cherish our rich inheritances in the Reformed faith, and pray that, as we seek to hold fast to what we have received, the Lord will open doors of opportunity for ministering the gospel and making disciples from among all the nations. According to the 2013 Directory of the URCNA (a new Directory is forthcoming soon), the URCNA consists of 118 churches in eight classes, with a combined membership of 23,915 souls. In addition to these established churches, a number of churches are being planted throughout North America, and URCNA ministers serve in a variety of ministries in North America, Latin America, Europe, and several other countries.

The URCNA's relationship with the RCNZ is a natural continuation of the historic ties that existed for many years between the CRCNA and the RCNZ. In that respect, even though our formal relationship is relatively new, it represents a longer history of mutual consultation and cooperation. Just as the CRCNA provided ministers to serve the newly-formed RCNZ in the 1950's, so the URCNA has been privileged to have several of its ministers serve in the RCNZ in recent decades. I believe the first fraternal delegate of the RCNZ was Rev. Jim Klazinga, who attended Synod Calgary of the URCNA in 2004 and expressed the desire of the RCNZ to establish a "sister-church" relationship with the URCNA. In response to this invitation, Synod Calgary adopted a motion to enter into a "Step 1" (Ecumenical Contact) relationship with the RCNZ. This decision to enter into ecumenical contact with the RCNZ was reaffirmed at the 2007 Synod, and then changed to a "Phase 2" (Ecumenical Fellowship) relationship with the RCNZ at the 2010 Synod. It should be noted that these decisions of the URCNA synods were taken upon the conviction that our two denominations share a "oneness" despite geographical boundaries. According the guidelines of CECCA, our ecumenical

fellowship comes to expression in several ways: occasional pulpit fellowship, intercommunion, exercise of mutual concern and admonition, agreement to respect each federation's discipline, joint action in areas of common responsibility, and agreement to inform each other of changes in polity, doctrine or practice.

Consistent with the guidelines of CECCA, I wish to inform you of the following developments in the URCNA, including recent actions of Synod 2016, which met in Wyoming, Michigan:

- Synod Wyoming adopted a motion to enter into a Phase 2 (Ecumenical Fellowship) relationship with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA). This decision was taken after the GKSA confirmed by a substantial majority their practice of prohibiting women from service in the teaching and ruling offices of the church.
- Synod Wyoming adopted a number of recommendations from its Liturgical Forms Committee. These recommendations included: (1) the adopting of modern language revisions of the ecumenical creeds and Reformed Confessions; and (2) the approval of a recommendation to publish the liturgical forms as a “stand-alone book.” The second of these recommendations was made in order to permit the new Trinity Psalter Hymnal to serve both the URCNA and the OPC, without the need to publish two editions for these denominations.
- Synod Wyoming made a series of decisions with regard to organic union with the Canadian Reformed Churches: (1) a declaration was adopted that the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO) “is in need of further revision in order to comply more fully with our Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government”; (2) a recommendation not to accede to an overture from Classis Pacific Northwest (which asked that Synod direct CERCU to “discontinue” efforts toward organic unity between the two federations) was adopted without dissent; (3) encouraged classes and consistories to continue to “engage the issue of eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA”; and (4) took note that CERCU “does not intend to recommend moving a Phase 3a relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches for at least the next six years.”
- In 2010, the URCNA's Synod agreed to work with the OPC in preparing a new Psalter Hymnal (Trinity Psalter Hymnal) for use in the two denominations. Synod Wyoming approved a motion (without dissent!) to publish the proposed Trinity Psalter Hymnal, with the Psalms previously approved by Synod 2014 and the hymns approved by Synod 2016, and with the inclusion of the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the OPC. In the words of the joint committee: “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!” (Agenda, 171). Concurrent meetings of the OPC General Assembly and the URCNA Synod are scheduled to take place in 2018 in Wheaton, IL, to celebrate in a joint session the publication of the new TPH.
- Synod Wyoming acceded to an overture from Classis Southwestern Ontario to create a study committee “on the appeals process to develop and recommend to the next synod of the URCNA a set of clear, consistent guidelines for submitting



and adjudicating appeals that can be added to our Regulations for Synodical Procedure.”

In addition to these actions of Synod Wyoming, I would also like to note a further development in the recent history of the URCNA that is of special importance. At Synod Visalia in 2014, a decision was made to appoint Rev. Richard Bout as “Missions Coordinator” for the URCNA, and to oversee his work through a Synodical Missions Committee. At Synod Wyoming in 2016, Rev. Bout reported on his work, and in addition twenty-one missionaries reported on their ministries in North America, Costa Rica, India, Latin America, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Italy, and Romania. The appointment of a Missions Coordinator, the reports of the URCNA missionaries, and the increased work of various classes in the oversight of new church plants, represents a significant step forward for the URCNA. While the federation remains keenly aware of the dangers of boardism, or the loss of direct oversight and accountability between the local churches and the missionaries whom the church sends to the field, it is also aware of the challenges the churches face in evangelism and missions, especially in view of the growing secularization in the modern world (particularly in Western Europe and related countries). With the appointment of a Synodical Missions Committee, as well as the increase in classical church planting efforts, the URCNA is seeking increasingly to be faithful to the Great Commission that Christ gave to the church.

As I reflect upon these developments and synodical decisions of the URCNA, I believe it would be appropriate for me to encourage you at this synod and among your churches to do the following, as an expression of our unity and common calling. First, pray for the ongoing process of seeking unity between our federation and the CaRC’s. Though this process has proven to be difficult, with further steps needing to be taken (D.V.) for greater unity to be achieved, it remains an important test of our desire to seek unity with those of like confession and practice. In our present post-modern and post-Christian world, we need to identify more concrete ways of expressing our unity as churches of Jesus Christ. Second, pray for the work of the URCNA in evangelism and missions, that the Lord would prosper our efforts and use us to reach many with the gospel. And third, rejoice with us and with the OPC that we have found a way, through the joint publication and use of a new Trinity Psalter Hymnal, to express concretely our unity in the faith.

I close my greetings to you with two words—one of thanks, and one of encouragement. First, I want to thank you for the hospitality shown to my wife and myself during our time among you. It is a great joy to experience in a tangible way the welcome and love of God’s people in this beautiful country. And second, I remind you of the words of Christ’s letter to the church in Philadelphia: *“I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied by name”* (Rev. 3:8). With these words, Christ promises an “open door” of opportunity to witness to the gospel of salvation in his name to a church that kept his Word. The message of Christ’s letter to this church is clear in its implications for the church today. Christ assures his people that faithfulness to the Scriptural gospel in all its integrity is the way forward in witness and evangelism. No message could be more relevant to any church tempted to lose faith in the

gospel Word and its power to save. May Christ grant to your churches continued faithfulness to his Word and an open door of opportunity to witness to his name!

Respectfully submitted,  
Cornelis P. Venema  
Fraternal Delegate

## **Appendix 2**

### **Report of the Visit to the Thirtieth Synod of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, September, 2017**

The thirtieth synod of the RCNZ opened during an afternoon session on Saturday, September 9, 2017, in the sanctuary of the Reformed Church in Palmerston North. Prior to the convening of synod, many of the delegates and members of local churches participated in a Thanksgiving Conference for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. This conference was arranged by the session of the Reformed Church in Hastings on behalf of the Synod, and consisted of four addresses on different themes (three were presented by myself, one was presented by Rev. Leo De Vos, pastor of the Reformed Church in Hukanui).

During the opening session on Saturday afternoon, the Synod approved the credentials of delegates from 20 churches (each church ordinarily sends a minister and an elder), and of fraternal delegates from 8 denominations (Canadian and American Reformed Churches, Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, Free Reformed Churches of Australia, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [liberated], Reformed Churches of South Africa, and the United Reformed Churches of North America). After the delegates signified their agreement with the four confessional standards (Three Forms of Unity, and The Westminster Confession of Faith), the moderator was elected: Rev. David Waldron as moderator, Rev. John Haverland as vice-moderator, elder Pieter van der Wel as stated clerk, and elder John van Dyk as second clerk.

My overall impression of the Synod's proceedings was positive. Since the RCNZ is a small denomination, the materials on the agenda were all addressed in plenary session without being given to advisory committees. Though this resulted in a considerable amount of editing of recommendations by the body, the moderator wisely and patiently guided the synodical deliberations, which were conducted in a good spirit. I was impressed with the evident desire to honor the Scriptures and the Reformed confessions in the decisions that were made. The Synod often paused for prayers of thanksgiving and supplication to God for the leading of His Word and Spirit. The singing of the synodical delegates from the RCNZ's new song book, *Sing to the Lord*, was a highlight. Though there were differences of opinion expressed in the debates, the body as a whole displayed a keen desire to remain faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to minister effectively in the New Zealand context. What I observed confirmed the URCNA's decision to enjoy full "ecclesiastical fellowship" with the RCNZ. The close ties between our two federations is consistent with the historic relationship that the CRCNA formerly cultivated with the RCNZ from the early years of its formation. A

number of URCNA ministers have served, or continue to serve, congregations of the RCNZ (e.g., Peter Kloosterman, Leo De Vos, Aaron Warner). If my count is correct, at present six ministers and one vicar (their term for students who are serving a one year “vicariate” in preparation for the ministry) in the RCNZ are graduates of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Another vicar is a graduate of Westminster Seminary in California and was formerly a member of a URC in Canada.

Among the issues and items on the agenda of Synod, I would especially call your attention to the following:

- A considerable amount of Synod’s time was spent on matters pertaining to the training of men for the ministry. The two synodical deputies who oversee the training of students for the ministry reported that there are presently two students at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and three students at the Reformed Theological College in Melbourne (formerly in Geelong), Australia. It was noted that, with these students and others who have recently entered the ministry, the concern about a shortage of ministers in the RCNZ is not as great as it was in the recent past. The Synod also spent a great deal of time considering a new “Memorandum of Understanding” with the RTC. The lengthy debate regarding this Memorandum reflected the concerns of some in the RCNZ that the training of students at the RTC remain fully Reformed in character and suitable to the instruction of those who aspire to the ministry of the Word in confessionally Reformed churches. Some concern was expressed that the RTC does not presently have a full-time instructor in Reformed theology. Since the RCNZ has two students presently at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, the Synod also decided to send the two synodical deputies to visit Mid-America during the upcoming inter-synodical period (three years).
- The Synod considered the report and recommendations of its Overseas Mission Board (OMG, chaired by Peter Kloosterman). Among the items of correspondence before the Synod was a letter from the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia, which invited the OMB to consider the possibility of a joint mission work in Vanuata, including the provision of a missionary for a vacant congregation in Port Vila. The OMB reported to Synod that Rev. Alan Douma and his wife have left the mission field in Papua New Guinea, due to stress and the heavy workload on the field. At the recommendation of the OMB, the Synod decided not to recommence financial support for the work of MERF on behalf of the RCNZ. Though the Synod acknowledged the “significant contribution” MERF is making in the Middle East, this decision was based in part upon its sorrowful acknowledgement that “reconciliation has not yet occurred between MERF and parties in the RCNZ.”
- The Synod decided to approve an overture, asking that a synodical committee be appointed to “review the current examination system for candidates for ministry and propose ways in which our system can be approved.” The decision was made to seek a more clear and uniform procedure among the presbyteries in the examination of candidates.

- The Synod heard a report from two delegates of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN, liberated), who gave an account of the RCN's recent decision to open all of the ecclesiastical offices to women. In their addresses to Synod, the delegates of the RCN tried to defend this decision and demonstrate that it was not taken upon the basis of a new hermeneutic or approach to the interpretation of Scripture. The Synod was not persuaded by this defense, and adopted the recommendations of its Interchurch Relations Committee: (1) to express its "deep concern that the RCN has not abandoned its current hermeneutical direction"; (2) to "suspend" the RCNZ's "sister-church" relationship with the RCN; and (3) to "terminate" the sister-church relationship with the RCN at its next synod (2020), "unless there is repentance."
- In addition to the Synod's decisions regarding the RCN, a number of recommendations of the Interchurch Relations Committee were adopted. Among these recommendations, the following are of special importance to the URCNA: (1) to continue membership in the ICRC; (2) to continue the RCNZ's "sister-church" relationship with the URCNA; (3) to send a delegate to the next URCNA synod; (4) to continue the relationship of "ecumenical fellowship" with the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRA); (5) to instruct the IRC to take up discussion with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA) "to change our sister-church relationship" to a relationship of "ecumenical fellowship"; (6) to express its "continued concern" to the GKSA regarding its decision to allow women to be ordained as deacons; and (7) to express its thankfulness that the GKSA decided in January, 2016, not to open the offices of elder and minister to women. To understand these decisions, it is important to note that the RCNZ has three levels of relationship with other federations: ecumenical contact, ecumenical fellowship, and sister-church relationships. The second level of contact, "ecumenical fellowship," was originally established in order to retain, while downgrading, the RCNZ's relationship with the CRCA, after it decided to open the office of deacon to women. Since the GKSA allows women to serve as deacons, the RCNZ is contemplating a similar downgrade to its ecumenical relationship with the GKSA.
- The Synod chose not to accede to an overture from the South Presbytery, which asked the Synod to appoint a study committee "to examine confessional church membership." The prevailing opinion among the delegates was that the overture's grounds offered an unfair caricature of what is meant by confessional church membership. It was also noted in the debate that the URCNA recently adopted a series of "pastoral guidelines" for the assessment of those who profess their faith and are admitted into church membership.
- The Synod closed with an extended discussion of the challenges and opportunities the RCNZ faces in the area of church planting. The sentiment was expressed that the RCNZ has a unique opportunity, as well as the resources, to proclaim the

gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to a nation that is largely secular and hostile to the claims of Christ's kingdom.

Before concluding my report, I want to inform CECCA that I had an interesting discussion with the fraternal delegates from the CRA. In the course of our discussion, the subject of the URCNA's contact with them was raised. I told them that I was not a member of CECCA, and so do not know whether CECCA has an interest in taking up contact with them. The subject came up in part due to Synod Wyoming's decision to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship with the GKSA. The fraternal delegates from the CRA represented their position on the matter of women deacons as very similar to that of the GKSA. They also noted that they are members of ICRC and would have an interest in contact with the URCNA. I am not making a particular recommendation to CECCA in this matter, but thought it might be useful to include a comment on this conversation as a part of my report.

I hope that my description of some of the actions of the RCNZ Synod will be useful to you as a committee, as you continue to oversee the URCNA's ecumenical fellowship with the RCNZ. I am grateful that our federation has this relationship with the RCNZ, and am persuaded that it is a meaningful one for us as well as for them. I wish to thank the committee again for allowing me the privilege to serve as the fraternal delegate of the URCNA to the RCNZ Synod. Indeed, if it is not too bold on my part to say so, I would certainly be pleased and willing to serve in this capacity again at a future synodical meeting of the RCNZ (D.V.). For a variety of reasons within God's good providence, I have a special affection for the RCNZ, as well as many contacts with its ministers and churches.

Respectfully submitted,  
Cornelis P. Venema

### **Appendix 3**

#### **Address to the Fourth General Synod of the GKSA, January 9-19, 2018**

Mr. Chairman, Fathers and Brothers,

We just celebrated the joyful good news of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. As Jesus, he is the one who saves humanity from the destruction of sin when it is joined to him by faith alone. As Christ, he is the one who saves creation from the brokenness of sickness and death and transforms it into a new heaven and earth that is glorified together with himself. As Lord, he saves the history of this world from the power of the devil, bringing it into the coming kingdom of heaven. With the celebration of that joyful good news we once again have hope and courage to continue the journey of faith in 2018.

At our latest synod in Wyoming, Michigan, the United Reformed Churches in North America officially entered into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Reformed Churches in South Africa. This decision was later officially ratified by our churches. It was with great

thankfulness that our churches took note of your decision regarding women in the teaching offices of the church by your latest Synod. It was that decision that led to our decision to extend to you the brotherly hand of full ecclesiastical fellowship. I stand before you this morning as someone who is immensely thankful for this ecumenical milestone that our two federations have reached by the grace of God. And I look forward to our federations helping each other in being members of the body of Christ here on this earth: his eyes, ears and mouth; his hands and his feet.

Being members of the body of Christ who continue his anointed presence is not without its challenges. Probably the greatest challenge being that heart of the gospel—*Solus Christus* (Christ alone)—meets a lot of resistance in today's culture. Knowledge is considered to be a subjective opinion. All truth is relative and contextual. Every community has its own perspective. Accordingly, there is no place for the exclusivity of the Lord Jesus Christ. In addition to the challenge *Solus Christus* there is the ongoing challenge of *Sola Scriptura*. This too meets a lot of resistance especially by elevating today's culture as the final arbiter of what Bible has to say to us. In doing so, however, we degrade the Bible to a book from the distant past and promote our own time as the most important factor in determining what God's will is for today.

But even in the face of these and other challenges, there continues to be the need for the anointed presence of the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth through the members of his body. It is our prayer that the Spirit of the risen Lord would continue to enable both our federations to look at those around us as the Lord Jesus would look at them; listen and speak to them as he would listen and speak to them; give what he would give and go where he would go.

We are a young federation that is just over 20 years old. Our membership is around 25,000 spread out over 125 congregations, including a number of church plants that have not yet been organized as independent congregations. We are engaged in mission activity in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, India, Italy, Mexico, Philippines and Romania. Our latest Synod adopted a Missions Manual that contains helpful guidelines to assist consistories, missionaries and church planters in the day-to-day activities of foreign mission. Together with the OPC we have produced the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* with the Ecumenical Creeds, the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards in the back. The target shipping date is April 30 of this year. Because of the profound ecumenical and historical significance of the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal*, our Synod and the OPC General Assembly will have combined meetings this year in Wheaton, Illinois in June of this year.

Brothers, I have had a look at your agenda. May the Lord grant you the wisdom of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ as you discuss it and make decisions concerning matters on it.

On behalf of the URCNA, I bring you our warmest greetings in Him.

Dick Moes  
Fraternal Delegate

## **Appendix 4**

### **Report of the Visit to the Fourth General Synod of the GKSA January 9-19, 2018**

Travelling from Vancouver to South Africa to attend a synod of the GKSA is something of a great trek. But once the great trek has brought you to your destination, it is all worth the effort and fatigue. You have the opportunity to renew old acquaintances and make new ones while you enjoy a generous hospitality during your whole stay. It was encouraging to watch the GKSA synod deal with the issues on their agenda in a thorough and brotherly manner. In addition to appeals and overtures, synod dealt with matters pertaining to the Administrative Bureau, Bible translation and distribution, diaconal affairs, ecumenicity and government, retirement care, historical affairs, youth and education, church polity, doctrinal affairs, liturgical affairs, media and publications, the theological school and training, evangelization, social affairs and church growth. The whole agenda can be found at <https://www.gksa.org.za/synod2018.htm>. Allow me to list some of the decisions that were taken.

### **Communication Policy**

Before 2009, the black and coloured GKSA churches met in their own classes and synods. Since 2009, white, black and coloured meet together in classes, regional synods and general synods. In order to enhance unity at these ecclesiastical meetings, the issue of the main language to be spoken has come up a number of times. Synod decided on a multilingual policy where each delegate can speak his in his own language with an interpreter beside him. The remarkable thing was that after this decision was taken, a lot of Afrikaners did their best to speak in English. The communication policy will continue to be an evolving issue with most delegates doing their best to speak in English.

### **Church Growth Ministries and Equipping of Elders**

Many of the black and coloured churches do not have ministers. Accordingly, the elders need to be equipped to lead the services in a responsible manner. A decision was taken that elders can conduct service in one of the following two ways: (1) by delivering a sermon that is developed under guidance of a called minister; (2) where there is not a called minister available to guide these elders, the classes should make sure that the most appropriate person is appointed as a consultant to assist and guide elders.

### **A Different Way of Meeting as Synod**

The GKSA General Synods usually meet for two weeks. This cost the churches at least \$100,000.00 (AM). In order to cut costs, a decision was taken to look into a different way of meeting together as synod. It could very well be that the next GKSA synod will meet in two phases: (1) a videoconference phase and (2) a face-to-face phase of a number of days.

### **Good Stewardship of God's Creation**

A decision was taken to have the deputies in charge of promoting good stewardship of God's creation to encourage the publication of good articles about this matter in the church magazines. The deputies are also to encourage ministers to preach on this matter and to encourage congregations to live up to their calling in this regard. Moreover, the deputies are to produce practical plans (working documents) that will help members of the congregation take care of creation.

### **The Addition of 136 Hymns**

The GKSA was formed in 1859 because the large Reformed church they were part of forced them to sing hymns in addition to singing the psalms. In 1936, the GKSA poet Totius authored 50 songs that put various passages of Scripture to music and rhyme. The GKSA approved these 50 songs. The GKSA synods of 2012 and 2015 each added about 30 hymns for the hymnbook of the large Reformed church they once used to be a member of. This synod decided to add another 136 hymns taken from this hymnbook.

### **South African Council of Churches**

The GKSA decided to become a member of the South African Council of Churches again because it realizes that its ecumenical calling not only pertains to how church communities can become visibly one, but also involves the prophetic witness for the truth against the lie.

### **Upholding of the 2016 Decision to not Allow Women in the Teaching Offices**

In 2016, the GKSA held an extra-ordinary synod to bring the matter of women in the teaching offices in the church to a close. That synod decided not to allow women in the teaching offices of the church. Quite a few appeals were submitted to the 2018 synod against this decision. Some appeals were declared to be inadmissible; others were turned down on internal argumentation. I hope and pray that this matter will not be put to rest. On a practical level, however, there are some churches that have ordained women into the teaching offices. These churches will need to rescind their decisions in this regard or face not having their credentials accepted at major assemblies. May the Lord grant the GKSA faithfulness in this regard.

### **English Psalter Hymnal**

A number of GKSA churches have begun English language ministries. These ministries include many people from different social and racial groups, the vast majority of which do not speak English as a home language. In the light of this, these churches are interested in adopting an English Psalter Hymnal to recommend and use in the GKSA. I participated in an informal discussion during the GKSA Synod which was intended to find out about the different psalters that are currently being used by churches in the



GKSA as well as to learn more about the psalter which is used by the churches fraternal delegates represented.

Humbly submitted,  
Dick Moes  
Fraternal Delegate

**Appendix 5**  
**Fraternal Address to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland**  
**(Continuing)**

Moderator, fathers and brethren,

I am humbled to once again be able to address this esteemed assembly of brothers and co-laborers in the gospel of Jesus Christ. I stand before you on behalf of the United Reformed Churches of North America. And I join with you in celebrating the like precious faith that binds us together with a glorious hope in our triumphant Savior, Jesus Christ.

Last summer 220 delegates from our 120 congregations assembled in Wyoming, Michigan for a weeklong synod. Like you, we had a number of pressing matters before the assembly. One such item was the result of your initial contact with the URCNA in 2010. After unanimously voting to enter into “Ecumenical Contact” with you in 2012 and attending your General Assemblies in 2013 and 2014, the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad joyfully proposed to Synod 2016 that we move to the second and final step of “Ecumenical Fellowship.”

I’m glad to report to you that Synod 2016 once again unanimously voted to enter into this second step of “Ecumenical Fellowship” recognizing that you are a denomination with whom we have genuine fellowship around our shared dedication to God’s Word and an earnest commitment to our Reformed Confessions. With this second step, we are committed to provide and receive any concern or admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity. We agree to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern that you may exercise. And we will seek to work with you in areas of common responsibility. Therefore, we cordially invite you, especially given your recent contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, to a historic, combined General Assembly of the OPC and Synod of the URCNA in 2018 on the campus of Wheaton College, in Chicago, IL. We hope you will prayerfully consider this and join with us to further deepen the fraternal bond between us. One of the ways that we can strengthen the bond of our fellowship, even now, is through encouragement.

When the Apostle Paul returned to Antioch following his first missionary journey, the elders of the church assembled the believers so that they could hear locally all that God was doing internationally. This was for them to see that the God who gave them life was

still very much alive and at work by His Word and Spirit. Among the many reasons to have ecumenical fellowship, I believe encouragement is one of the greatest.

Kevin DeYoung once said, “The one indispensable requirement for producing godly, mature Christians, is godly, mature Christians.” That quote came to mind as I read about the multitude of ways in which you are training and equipping one another in the truth of God’s Word. From your excellent magazines for young and old, to the Bible memory awards for your young children, to your conferences, you stand as a humbling example of what committed discipleship and covenantal training looks like. Where so many have surrendered the truth, you remain steadfast in teaching, equipping and pointing to the hope of the nations. Be faithful. Remain steadfast. Continue to faithfully use the tools of this generation - your Twitter account, your website, your Facebook page - to bring the ancient Word to address man’s ancient need, in this contemporary culture.

No doubt, since the first time I addressed you, there has been substantial cultural decay. In your report on Public Questions, Religion & Morals, you wonder if, in this 500th anniversary year of the Reformation, where the rally cry was *Post Tenebras Lux*, if we don’t rather see *Post Lux Tenebras*? Perhaps. But when hasn’t the church been the front-line militant force in a dark world? Might I remind you “in 1717, in Scotland, in the land of John Knox,” that it was Knox who once said, “A man with God is always in the majority.” It was in an environment where governments were corrupt, where men were sold into slavery, where wives endured at the hands of unbelieving husbands that Peter taught, “It’s right here, where it’s most dark, that you shine most bright!” Paul reports to the Philippians that Christ had him bound so that Roman guards could be set free. In the darkness of his cell he was steadfast, he shined, and, not only were men were saved, nations were transformed.

Brothers, we go with a message of hope to a people who are fighting a battle that they cannot win, against a God who cannot lose. Facing this task, yet unfinished, the URCNA not only stands by you, we go with you, holding out the same hope, in the same Christ, proclaiming the same good news.

If I can be so bold as to quote both John Knox and now Thomas Chalmers - let me remind you of what one of your own once said. “A man's needs are few... Indeed, only three things are truly necessary in order to make life happy: the blessing of God, the benefit of books, and the benevolence of friends.” Unfortunately, I did not bring any books. Nevertheless, I hope that our growing relationship with you might be a blessing as we seek to live for Christ in the fellowship of this ecumenical friendship.

Humbly Submitted,  
Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra  
Foreign Delegate (URCNA)

**Appendix 6**  
**Report on the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCSc) General Assembly 2017**  
**and a visit to the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) General Assembly 2017**

*“The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” (Psalm 34:17-19)*

These words filled Liberton Kirk on May 22, 2017 as the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland Continuing sang them in unaccompanied praise to God. This year’s GA was led by Rev. Robert McCurley of Greenville, South Carolina (USA). He took up the sobering role of moderator by addressing the body from Matthew 22:36-40 in a message entitled *“First Things First.”* Pointing to the first table of the law, Rev. McCurley challenged the delegates to remember our obligation to always have God’s love as our first priority.

Unlike some years, this year’s GA did not have a great deal before it outside of the regular reports from the various standing committees. One item of note was the report from the Public Questions, Religion & Morals Committee (QRMC). Their report identified a number of moral and spiritual concerns in Scotland and the wider United Kingdom. The report says, “At the present it is the kingdom of darkness that appears to be flourishing in our nation, and while we are not without evidences that the Lord has not utterly forsaken us, we know that what we need is a Spirit-given revival of true religion.” Given the tone of this report and the minority status the church is increasingly feeling, I sought to pastorally encourage our Scottish brothers in my address.

On Wednesday, the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, I had the privilege of extending ecumenical greetings on behalf of the URCNA. Not only did I seek to encourage the body in light of the QRMC report, I informed them about important developments in our federation. I cordially invited them to Synod Wheaton (2018) especially given the uniqueness of this historic meeting between the URCNA and the OPC. In my address I also took the opportunity to recognize that, while we have differences between our federations, it is our love for the Lord and the truth of His Word, as faithfully summarized in our confessional standards, that unites us in a fraternal bond. I ended my address by quoting from one their historic founders, Thomas Chalmers: “A man’s needs are few... Indeed, only three things are truly necessary in order to make life happy: the blessing of God, the benefit of books, and the benevolence of friends.” It is an abiding joy that we have the privilege of calling the FCSC our friends.

Because the Free Church of Scotland (from which the Continuing body broke away) meets during the same week, in the same general location (Edinburgh), CECCA decided to have me visit their General Assembly as well. As an aside, the OPC has fraternal relations with the FCS but not with the FCSC. The URCNA has fraternal relations with the FCSC and not the FCS. In light of this, and our mutual membership in the ICRC, we took the opportunity of this visit to investigate a more formal relationship with the FCS.

The FCS General Assembly was hosted by St. Columba’s Free Church and was moderated by her pastor, Rev. Derek Lamont. I was only able to attend some of the final

session on May 24<sup>th</sup>, most of which related to expressing thanks to various functionaries and acknowledging the deaths of various office-bearers. Nevertheless, I was able to dine with a number of the brothers from the FCS and informally talk about our respective federations. It was clear from the outset that we have much in common given our similar identities and commitments.

May 25<sup>th</sup> was the final day of General Assembly and I was able to spend the morning with the brothers. The assembly took up the report of the Board of Ministry which recommended a “Pastoral Support Worker” who would serve as the chair of a “Panel of Pastoral Care.” Due to a sensitive pastoral issue that had arisen in the FCS where a minister had recently taken his own life, this proposal took on significant meaning. This recommendation was sustained. In light of this, the GA directed each Presbytery to review their practices and ensure that ministers are mentored, supported and held accountable in meaningful ways.

The final proceedings of the GA were interrupted by a time of national mourning. On May 22<sup>nd</sup>, the UK was devastated by the horrendous attack and murder of concert-goers in Manchester, England. The assembly, along with the nation, paused at 11AM for one minute of silence.

By early afternoon, the proceedings had all but concluded except for one item, a visit from the Lord High Commissioner, Princess Anne (Queen Elizabeth’s daughter). After the proper display of decorum by the assembly, Her Grace addressed the house and touched on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation and Luther’s insistence that “justification by faith alone is at the heart of the gospel.” She said, “The Reformation continues today wherever churches continue to allow Scripture to shape their imagination and to direct their mission.” Her Grace encouraged the assembly by acknowledging, “As with everything that is worthwhile, it is not easy. It does require huge commitment to the cause and to understanding where you are in that discussion. And yet you have continued a very distinctive tradition in which you have welcomed the stranger, read the Bible, sung the psalms and valued education all as part of our gratitude to the God whose grace we encounter freely in Jesus and which we are called to share with others.”

Princess Anne was thanked by the moderator for her challenge and was given gifts of gratitude from the GA. It was a remarkable experience and honor to be present for this occasion.

After Princess Anne and her party had left, I was briefly introduced to the assembly as a visitor from the URCNA and was able to thank the assembly for their generous hospitality in the short time that I was there. With that, the GA concluded. I was able to have a final lunch with a few more delegates as everyone made their way back home. It is my sincere hope that the Lord would continue to strengthen the bonds between our federations as we explore opportunities to deepen this relationship.

Humbly Submitted,  
Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra

## Appendix 7

### Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA)

Rev. Dick Moes  
21556 49B Ave  
Langley, BC, Canada  
V3A 8P6

December 20, 2017

The GK(v)  
C/o Rev. Dr. Melle H. Oosterhuis, Secretary General of BBK  
P.O. Box 499, 8000 AL Zwolle, The Netherlands.  
[bbk@gbouw.nl](mailto:bbk@gbouw.nl)

Dear Brothers,

It is with great sadness that we address this letter to you. As is (no doubt) known to you we, the URCNA and the GK(v), are presently in what we speak of as an ***“Ecumenical Contact”*** relationship with each other. Also, we have (for some time already) looked forward to the day that we would enjoy (what we speak of as) the ***“Ecumenical Fellowship”*** relationship – a relationship wherein we recognize each other as full sister-churches in the Lord.

It is indeed true: a bit of a wrinkle had developed in our present relationship. Since the GK(v) recognizes only a “one-step relationship” and the URCNA practices a “two-step relationship, the URCNA was informed by the BBK that, though we were still welcome to attend a Synodical meeting of the GK(v), we would no longer be able to speak at such a meeting. Hence, we did not attend the last meeting of the GK(v) Synod, “Synod Meppel, 2017”. Nevertheless, it was our hope and prayer that that wrinkle could be straightened out, and that the day would come that we would joyfully recognize each other as sister-churches in the Lord.

We therefore also eagerly looked forward to meeting with the delegates of the GK(v) at the *International Conference of Reformed Churches* when it met in Jordan, Ontario this past July. It was our sincere hope and prayer that we would hear from the delegates of the GK(v) – who had heard the soundly Scriptural words/appeals of the many ICRC delegates who addressed the matter – that they would convey to the GK(v) churches in the Netherlands that the decision that had been made relative to ***“opening the Ecclesiastical Offices in the churches to women”*** should be re-considered/withdrawn, so as to permit the GK(v) to continue to walk in faithful obedience to the Word of the Lord relative to the question of ***“the role of sisters”*** in the church of Jesus Christ.

Sadly, we heard nothing of the kind. Additionally, all subsequent information we have read from the Netherlands relative to that issue confirms for us that the GK(v) is presently fully committed to pursuing the new direction chosen. We must, therefore, inform you that we can no longer maintain our ***“Ecumenical Contact”*** relationship with you. We will so report to our Synod, 2018. It is our expectation that the Synod will adopt our recommendation.

Brothers, we appeal to you, even at this late hour: reconsider, before the Lord, the course you are now intending to pursue. Know well: substituting God’s Word for man’s word (born of a desire to respond to ***“the spirit of the age”***) **will not be unto life, or joy, or happiness – not for today, not forever!** Be assured also, that we (the URCNA) stand ready to embrace and to uphold you – should you, by God’s grace, be led to return to ***“the faith of the fathers”*** as historically confessed by the churches of the Reformation.

May the Lord of the Church grant you His grace and Spirit to recognize the error of your ways and to ***“return unto the Lord – for He will abundantly pardon”***!

In His service,

Rev. Ancel Merwin  
Rev. Ray Sikkema  
Rev. Mitchel Persaud  
Rev. Rick Miller  
Brother Gerald Swets  
Brother Ryan Glomsrud  
Brother Doug Field  
Rev. Jason Tuinstra (chairman)  
Rev. Dick Moes (secretary)

## **Appendix 8**

### **Address to the Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales, Chelmsford, England, March 03, 2018**

Brothers of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales:

It is truly a pleasure to be present with you in Chelmsford on the occasion of the 2018 Assembly. It is a privilege to represent the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and to experience your fellowship together in the Lord Jesus. It is a fulfillment of our Lord words in Jn. 13:35: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

I am here to give evidence of our unity of faith and of our desire to foster that unity. I am reminded of the words of the great John Owen, English Puritan theologian and pastor, about the necessity of catholicity and unity in the true and holy Church of our Lord. Owen wrote that “we own it as our duty to follow and seek after peace, unity,

consent and agreement in holy worship, with all the members of this church, or those who, by a regular profession, manifest themselves so to be; and will, with all readiness and alacrity, renounce every principle or practice that is either inconsistent with such communion, or directly or indirectly is in itself obstructive of it” (Works, 15:81).

With this written upon our hearts, it is with joy that I may be here in England, together with you the EPCEW brothers, enjoying your generous hospitality, sharing together our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; the hope of the coming kingdom of heaven and the eternal life instilled in us through the Word and Spirit of our risen, and reigning Lord Jesus Christ who is most blessed. Amen.

A brief word about the URCNA is in order: We are a comparatively young federation. Our first Synod was in 1996. Our story does not begin there, however, because we stand on the shoulders of many who have gone before us. We share the same beginning as all other Christian churches that submit to the inerrancy, authority and sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as explained in the Ecumenical Creeds of the Christ’s Church.

We find our foundation in the inspired writings of both the Old and New Testament, which are built upon the chief cornerstone, Jesus Christ, who alone is the subject and object of saving faith. In summary, United Reformed Churches are Reformed churches being bound together in the truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity (The Belgic Confession of Faith, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dordrecht). The Westminster Standards, along with The Directory of Public Worship of God, are most valuable and respected standards of Reformed Theology.

The URCNA gathers at least every three years and in current practice every two years, for synodical meeting. The federation is divided into eight classes. Each class ordinarily meets semi-annually. There are currently approximately 120 congregations, including mission works not yet formally organized, spread throughout the United States and Canada. The federation consists of approximately 16,000 communicant members and over 24,000 members in total, including baptized covenant children.

The adopted Church Order depends largely on the Church Order of Dort, adopted by the Great Synod of Dort 1618-19. Ministers in the URCNA have graduated from several different seminaries. The URCNA does not have a federation-operated seminary. A Candidate for the ministry, having received a “call” from a congregation, and having successfully completed a rigorous Candidacy/Ordination Examination, is ordained as a minister of the Word and Sacraments in the URCNA.

The federation has constituted a number of synodical committees. Two of those committees have a mandate to initiate, respond to, and cultivate ecumenical relations with other denominations and federations. These are the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) which devotes its attention to churches in North America and the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) which oversees our relationships abroad or international.

The URCNA, through CERCU, is in corresponding relations with 7 churches and in ecclesiastical fellowship with 5 churches in North America. Internationally, through CECCA, we are in ecumenical fellowship with two churches: the Reformed Churches in New Zealand and the United Reformed Churches of Congo. We are in ecumenical contact with seven churches internationally. Finally, we are grateful for our relationship

and unity in the faith with the EPCEW and anxious to pursue further ecclesiastical relationship in the LORD Jesus.

With regard to missions, the URCNA has been working to establish mission fields and church plants numbering up to seventeen in various cities in the United States and Canada. URCNA congregations support both missions internationally including Italy, Trinidad, India, and Latin America, as well as several locations within the United States. The URCNA churches vary in race, nationality, and occasionally even language - all united by the Spirit and Word in the message of the gospel of our LORD Jesus Christ.

Our next biannual synod plans to meet from 11-15 June 2018 in Wheaton, IL. At our upcoming synod, the Trinity Psalter Hymnal (a joint effort of ours with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) will be completed. The Trinity Psalter Hymnal will include both the Three Form of Unity and The Westminster Confession (along with the WLC and WSC). If all goes as planned, LORD willing, the new Trinity Psalter Hymnal will be printed and distributed in the fall of 2018.

We are thankful the EPCEW is keeping the light of the gospel shining forth in standing upon the shoulders of the great British theologians and pastors like Baxter, Bunyan, Gill, Spurgeon, Owen, and so many others. We are indebted to the history of this great land. Along with EPCEW, we share a relatively recent beginning that finds its roots deep in history.

We are excited about the congregations, the church planting, and the Presbyterian Network of the EPCEW which seeks to advance the denomination's work and to promote Reformed doctrine and church government.

We stand with you, in the unity of the faith, in the fight against the Devil, the World, and the Flesh. Most importantly, there is a standing invitation and hope that the EPCEW will be able to send a fraternal delegate to attend the URCNA 2018 June Synod.

Finally, by the grace of God, let the truth of the holy gospel burn in our hearts together as we seek to fulfill the words of Eph. 4:3, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

May God richly bless the EPCEW and the URCNA in our fraternal love for the LORD Jesus and for each other for the glory of God and the increase of His glorious kingdom.

Lord willing, brothers, we shall see each other again soon. God Bless

Rev. Richard J. Miller

Committee for Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad  
United Reformed Churches in North America

## **Appendix 9**

### **Report of the Visit to the Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales 03 March 2018**

It was a delight to travel as a fraternal delegate from Newark to London to attend the assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales, Chelmsford, UK. The flight was uneventful. Our stay in London was good. We soon realized that it



was the “calm” of an ongoing snow/wind storm titled, by local meteorologists, as the “Beast from the East.”

What made this storm unique and unprecedented was the fact that another storm named “Emma” was coming in from the south. “Emma” and “The Beast from the East” collided on 01 March 2018 to form a massive winter event above the UK, especially Wales by dumping even more snow.

These two storm(s) left large amounts of snow and ice in the area and shut down major airports in the UK, including the halting for some time the “underground” or “tube.” The scheduled Elders Conference on 02 March 2018 and assembly meeting on 03 March 2018 were in jeopardy because most could not make the visit due to the hazardous conditions that have not been experienced in over 26 years.

By God’s grace, the Elders Conference and Assembly were held though greatly abbreviated. Although the agenda for the Assembly was relatively small, coupled with the fact that the many of the local sessions could not come, the assembly chose not deal with issues on the agenda. The Assembly, under the leadership of moderator Rev. Stephen Johnston, decided to table all necessary decisions to EPCEW’s next meeting.

The moderator did believe that it was to their advantage and prudent to receive all addresses/reports, especially from the fraternal delegates attending and read publically from those who sent in “apologies.”

The assembly listened to all the fraternal delegates who were present: CGKN, EPC Ireland, GKN/IPC, MTW of PCA, APC, and URCNA. It is important to note that over half of the scheduled fraternal delegates were providentially hindered due to the weather conditions. The EPCEW were impressed that the URCNA would care so much as to send over a fraternal delegate.

It was with great pleasure to meet the brothers from the EPCEW. The spiritual battle in England and Wales is enormous and fierce as these saints of the LORD seek to restore their lost heritage formulated by the Westminster Divines and Puritan history. They are committed to the restoration of their great Land in the legacy of Goodwin, Bunyan, Baxter, and of course, the great John Owen.

It was a delight to share with the EPCEW our love for them as well as our desire to have an authentic - organic relationship with them built upon the foundation of our LORD in the glorious gospel. The URCNA and the EPCEW are born of one Spirit and carried along with one gospel in the message of the Kingdom of Christ.

May the LORD bless the EPCEW and our relationship with them in the truth of the gospel of our LORD Jesus Christ. LORD willing, we will see them again at 2018 Synod.

Fellow Servant in the LORD

Committee for Ecumenical Relations with Churches Abroad

Rev. Richard J. Miller

## **Appendix 10**

### **Address to the General Assembly of the Fellowship of Reformed Churches (CLIR: Confraternidad Latinoamericana de Iglesias Reformadas), October 30-November 2, 2017**

Brothers and Sisters of CLIR:

It is truly a pleasure for me to be present here with you in Villahermosa on the occasion of your 2017 General Assembly. The privilege of representing the United Reformed Churches in North America is a foretaste of what the Apostle John saw in Revelation Chapter Seven where he describes the church gathered from every tribe, nation, people and language. It is a joy for me to be here with you in Mexico, enjoying your generous hospitality and sharing together our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; the hope of the coming kingdom of heaven and the life of love instilled in us through the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A brief word about the URCNA: We are a comparatively young federation whose first Synod was celebrated in Lynwood, Illinois in 1996. Our story does not begin there, however. We share the same beginning as all other Christian churches that submit to the authority of the Scriptures and the early creeds of our fathers, including the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We find our foundation in the writings and preaching of the Apostles, who in turn had built upon the cornerstone, Jesus Christ, the main subject of the Old and New Testaments. In summary, United Reformed Churches are biblical, historical, and Reformed churches.

The URCNA gathers at least every three years and in current practice every two years, for synodical meeting. The federation is divided into eight classes. Each class ordinarily meets semi-annually. There are currently approximately 120 congregations, including mission works not yet formally organized, spread throughout the United States and Canada. The federation consists of approximately 16,000 communicant members and over 24,000 members in total, including baptized covenant children.

In this young 21st century, the URCNA has been working to establish mission fields and church plants numbering up to seventeen in various cities in the United States and Canada, from Washington D.C. to Grande Prairie, Alberta. URCNA congregations support missions in various world-wide locations including Trinidad, India, Latin America and Canada, as well as several locations within the United States. URCNA churches vary in race, nationality, location, and occasionally even language. More importantly, though, we are united in historic Reformation teaching, teaching that emphasizes the biblical truths of sin, deliverance from it in Christ alone, and gratitude for that deliverance in biblical worship and walk of life.

CLIR is a group of churches that undoubtedly experiences many of the joys and sorrows that we do in the URCNA. We will lift you up in our prayers and remember you before the throne of God's grace that you will receive the grace you need to continue to be a faithful federation of churches here in Latin America.

In conclusion, the United Reformed Churches in North America are a federation of believers and their children who are under spiritual development as is CLIR. We travel

the journey to the new heaven and new earth under circumstances in which we need to support each other and encourage each other to live in Christ, remain in Christ and mature in Christ through faith, especially when it may not be easy to do. 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 the church.

Thank you.

Douglas L. Field

On Behalf of CECCA

## **Appendix 11**

### **Report of the Visit to the General Assembly of the Fellowship of Reformed Churches (CLIR: Confraternidad Latinoamericana de Iglesias Reformadas), October 30-November 2, 2017**

Between October 30 and November 2, 2017, I had the privilege of attending the General Assembly of CLIR, Confraternidad Latinoamericana de Iglesias Reformadas (Latin-American Confraternity of Reformed Churches.) The General Assembly took place at the Seminario Teológico Presbiteriano del Sureste (Presbyterian Theological Seminary of the Southeast) in Villahermoso, Tabasco, México. The CLIR General Assembly was held in conjunction and cooperation with the Congreso del R. Sinodo del Presbyterio de Tabasco (Congress of the Respectable Synod of the Presbytery of Tabasco.) The Congress was organized around celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation on October 31, 2017.

CLIR proceeded to open and conduct its business meeting on Tuesday, October 31 and continued to do daily during the entirety of the Congress. There were present 12 delegates from churches spread among Mexico, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Chile, Perú, Canada and the U.S.

The delegates voted to refer the Nashville Declaration that deals with marriage, human sexuality and biological sexual assignment and the Pronouncement of the Mexican National Presbyterian Church (INPM) relating to Same Sex Marriage and (both declaring clearly that marriage is between one man and one woman and that homosexuality is “contrary to nature” and an expression of sin) to committee for review and recommendation as to whether they should be formally adopted by CLIR. The committee returned at the end of the General Assembly with its conclusion that the INPM document was the more clear and complete proposed acceptance of it alone. The General Assembly decided to recognize and appreciate the Nashville statement. It adopted the INPM document (recognizing that it is “mexicocentric” and not altogether sufficient for utilization in the rest of Latin America) and agreed to maintain the matter under consideration and to instruct the committee to develop CLIR’s own position using as resources the above statements as well as others that are available.

Finances were discussed in detail. CLIR receives the large majority of its funding (76%) from churches in Canada and the U.S, almost exclusively URCNA. The remainder comes from book sales (19)%, and offerings from Latin-American sources/CLIR members (5%). Receipts for 2016 totaled USD \$155,000. Printing expense accounted for 67% of expenditures, administrative and general expenses 26% and other projects 7%. Total expenditures were nearly \$145,000 such that there was a small surplus for last year. CLIR has 7 full-time employees and translators and organizes about 30 conferences per year. There are 131 titles in publication. Some of the member churches are not meeting their askings, but even if all did as required there would result only a small increase in receipts. Obviously, CLIR is almost entirely financed by Canadian and U.S. sources.

CLIR has 25 member churches and six adjunct members. The latter are all in Cuba and are laboring under difficult and complicated circumstances that prevent, among other matters, their contributing money of the confederation.

The President of CLIR rehearsed its primary mission and described it as providing the tools, through its publishing efforts, to all reformed people in Latin America to access to accurate reformed theological works with the purpose of “bringing every thought captive to Christ.” It is noted that many of the works of Calvin have been and are in the process of being translated into Spanish by CLIR.

Representatives from Bethany URC in Wyoming, Michigan made a short presentation. Bethany is the Supervising Consistory of CLIR and Rev. Bill Green CLIR’s Supervising Secretary. They acknowledged his good work over the past 17 years. They then noted that the current URCNA practice is to support individual missionaries and not their missions. Accordingly since Bill Green will not be able to carry on his work forever, it was suggested, in essence, that CLIR engage in succession planning and that it undertake greater responsibility for raising its own support as the percentage of support that comes indigenously is remarkably small. It was implied, if not specifically stated, that Bethany is nearing the point of bringing to an end its supervision and support of Rev. Green as he approaches retirement age. (He is now 59.)

On the evening of October 31, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, we had the opportunity to attend Villahermosa’s celebration of the event. It took place in a very large conference hall at the city park. At this remarkable event that lasted three hours there were approximately 5,000 people in attendance. The participants flooded in for over an hour before the service began (and from the U.S. perspective it was notable that there was no security present and no one’s belongings were searched.) Those who attended heard a 500-voice choir, children’s choir and youth orchestra. This was a vibrant event and it is evident that the reformed churches of Tabasco state and the neighboring Chiapas state are well attended and populated with serious and dedicated Christians.

On November 1, Rev. Green, as Executive Secretary of CLIR reported formally that for 50 years now Pentecostalism has made serious inroads in Latin America. All the while it has been hoped and expected that reformed churches in the region would succeed likewise.

This hope has not been realized until recently. In fact the protestant influence in Latin America has been diluted and defused by a profusion of fragmented denominations and general disorganization. Ironically it has been the Catholic Church that in recent years has managed to reestablish itself to a certain extent and has taken leadership in resisting the advancement of liberal social policy in this area. Those efforts notwithstanding, corruption, violence, drugs family problems and the advancement of the LGBT agenda continue to characterize life in the Spanish-speaking countries.

The positive news is that a true interest has arisen in knowing the roots of Protestantism and the Reformed faith in particular. CLIR has been active in responding to this renewed interest by 1) concentrating on the needs of young people between that ages of 25 and 35, 2) in conjunction with other printers including Poeima and Faro de Gracia, publishing reformed works of high quality and 3) strictly avoiding accommodation with feminism, 'emerging' theology, climate change and the LGBT movement.

I had opportunity to talk at length with Brother Green. He described the Presbyterian/Reformed situation in Southeast Mexico and Central America as one of intense and very successful expansion and church planting. The problem is that with such exponential growth the churches' theological knowledge is very shallow. Of course, it is CLIR's brief to respond to the need for much more profound theological and biblical education through its book and literature translation and publication. I recall that CLIR is now up to 130 or so titles in publication and Brother Green had many of them present and on display.

Brother Green and I had further opportunity to discuss what role and what assistance CECCA might offer to the development of the Reformation and reformed church in Latin America. As has done Brother Neal Hageman of MINTS (whose comments I have described during our most recent telephone conference and who subsequently kindly and at our request offered us his opinions in writing), Rev. Green counseled against the formation by CECCA of formal alliances with individual churches and lesser assemblies. In his view CECCA should restrict itself to alliances with only the broader assemblies. He offered CLIR as a knowledgeable local resource and source of counsel and assistance should we develop further interests south of the U.S./Mexico border.

The remaining business of the General Assembly was procedural, structural and financial referring to its internal operations and concerns.

You may be interested in just a brief word on the Congress that was held in conjunction with CLIR's General Assembly. At three days the Congress of the R. Synod of Tabasco was comparatively long. Numerous topics were covered including Sexuality and the Love of God, the role of the churches in continuing the Reformation, and the legacy and theology of John Calvin. Lengthy performances of three local choirs and the very high level of cultural interest in Tabasco were evident and enhanced the substantive elements of the Congress.

Finally, you should know that I met and shared an evening meal with Rev. Elias Gaete. He is Secretary of the Presbytery of the Iglesia Presbiteriana Nacional (IPN) National Presbyterian Church. This is a Chilean denomination that consists of 22 congregations distributed around the entire country. It is organized onto a single presbytery. Rev. Gaete was very interested in the URCNA and in CECCA's work. The IPN formerly had a fraternal relationship with the PCA but that has discontinued. He indicated that he believes that the IPN would be interested in exploring the possibility of ecumenical relations with the URCNA. The IPN evidently has some experience with ecumenical relationships as he mentioned that they have a questionnaire document that they send out and have received and expect to receive similar documents from other churches.

As it happens, I will be in Valparaíso, Chile on December 9 of this year on other business. Valparaíso is near Viña del Mar, where Rev. Gaete's church is and he and I have agreed (unless the Committee would instruct to the contrary) to meet with some of the other officers of the Presbytery for lunch and further conversation.

I appreciate the opportunity of attending this most interesting and rewarding General Assembly.

Respectfully submitted,  
DOUGLAS L. FIELD

## **Appendix 12**

### **Press Release ICRC 2017**

The ninth meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches was held in Jordan, Ontario, Canada, from July 12 – 19, 2017, in the facilities of the Immanuel United Reformed Church and the Heritage Christian School. It was a blessed time of fellowship with one another as delegates and with our hosts, which not only included the calling Immanuel United Reformed Church of Jordan, and her local sister churches, but also regional church members of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), Free Reformed Churches (FRCNA), Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC). The welcome was warm and generous, and a great opportunity to see and experience the Lord's work in this part of his vineyard.

Following the beginning of the meeting with a Prayer Service held under the auspices of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) on Wednesday evening, July 12, we were able to work our way steadily through the schedule, capably led by the Chairman, the Rev. Dick Moes.

It was our brother Moes, who, throughout the meeting, in light of the 500th year since the nailing of Martin Luther's 95 Theses, focused on four of the Reformational Solas – Solus Christus, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Sola Scriptura in the morning devotions.

It was a joy to receive into the membership of the ICRC the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) and the Presbyterian Church of Uganda (PCU) after

reports from sponsoring denominations and consideration by the Membership Committee. We look forward to a fruitful work together with them. Already the CRCA is involved with the Presbyterian Church in Eastern Australia (PCEA) in hosting the 2019 Asia-Pacific Regional Conference due to be held in Australia.

It was with much sadness, however, that the Conference suspended the membership of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN), as it was deemed that they have broken with Article IV:4 of the Constitution in their recent synodical decision to permit the ordination of persons to the offices of minister and ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture. This took up much time in the meeting as there was much discussion and various options considered. A number spoke of the blessed help the RCN have been in the past to their federations and so this involved an extra heaviness of heart. Yet it was quite clear that the view of the RCN is not the view of any of the other churches in the ICRC, and certainly was not the view of any of those, apart from the RCN, who spoke at our meeting. Please pray for our brethren there, that the Lord in his grace would turn them in repentance to his Word and so be able to join fully with us once more.

The various Committee Reports brought out the Lord's blessing upon the member churches and service to him in various spheres – Theological Education, Diaconal, and Missions. A new Committee set up is the Publications Committee which takes in the new ICRC magazine – *Lux Mundi* – and the current website. In connection with these different aspects of ICRC work there were four very well received and helpful panel discussions on theological education and growing future leaders for the Reformed faith, the ministry of mercy and the Reformed faith, bringing the Reformed faith to Asia, and on the future direction of the ICRC.

There was also much time given for bilateral and multilateral meetings among the member delegations. It was also a blessing to have a number of observer churches present.

Financially the ICRC is very healthy with an excess from the past four-year period. It was felt prudent to retain such a balance and continue to receive membership assessment payments to meet the actual costs for the next four-year period.

A highlight of the meetings were the evening addresses, given respectively by the Rev. Hiralal Solanki on 'A Brief Overview of Christian Mission in India', the Rev. Dr. Derek Thomas on John Calvin's preaching on the Book of Job, Dr. Matthew Ebenezer on 'Bringing the Reformed Faith to India', and Dr. Joel Beeke on 'Reformed Piety: Covenantal and Experiential.'<sup>1</sup> There was also a valuable time of discussion on these occasions where we were joined by many from the local Reformed churches.

We were well provided for – physically and spiritually. We leave refreshed in the precious faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and looking confidently for future worship and service of him, praying the Head of the church to keep us faithful to his Word.

## **Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU)**

### **Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

#### **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 many confessionally faithful Reformed bodies that share with us like and precious faith.

We also remain sensitive to the challenge and irony that the pursuit of our ecumenical calling can still be, at times, an 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 perseverance. And we need the collective wisdom of the body, it is a work we believe can and will only progress as the Lord blesses us with a great degree of unanimity. Unity requires work, but we also understand that by God's grace, it can be a patient work. We have come to see that if the churches feel rushed, forced, or unconvinced with regards to unity, that true and helpful unity will not materialize. Our committee is committed to work according to the mandate we have received from the churches, that we work "with a view toward complete church unity" (CERCU mandate). We believe that in principle, if not always in practice, there is a large degree of unanimity amongst us as URCNA churches on this. We are also humbly aware, though that for a variety of reasons, such complete unity will not always be attained

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 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 regarding 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. Only with His blessing, therefore will organic unity ever come to 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 patiently to be pursued. Jesus prays and works for greater expressions of unity, in order that the world may know that the Father has sent Him (John 17:21,24).

For the sake of our witness, therefore, we continue to count it a privilege patiently to pray and work for greater expressions of unity. We rejoice that we experience God's blessing as our ecumenical calling serves our missionary calling and vice versa. Through ecumenical relations 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 enhanced our witness to the world.

The question remains, 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 conviction 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 our relationships. As long as we remain on this side of Christ's return, we will not have "arrived", we ought to 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.

We seek to carry out this important work joyfully according to 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 and Terms, Budget, and Policy

### *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 2010 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:

<b>Classis</b>	<b>Delegate</b>	<b>Alternate</b>
1. Central United States	Rev. Todd De Rooy	Rev. Joel Vander Kooi
2. Eastern United States	Rev. Calvin Tuininga	Rev. Kevin Hossink
3. Michigan	Rev. Casey Freswick	Rev. Matthew Nuiver
4. Ontario East	Rev. John Bouwers	Rev. Martin Overgaauw
5. Pacific Northwest	Mr. Doug Field	Rev. Craig Davis
6. Southwest United States	Rev. Brad Lenzner	Rev. Movses Janbazian
7. Southwestern Ontario	Rev. William Van Hal	Rev. Daniel Ventura
8. Western Canada	Rev. Ralph Pontier	Rev. Lou Slagter

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

Members-at-large:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Term</b>	<b>Action Suggested</b>
Rev. William Boekestein	Appointed by Synod 2016 with term ending July 1, 2019	Re-appointment to term ending July 1, 2022
Rev. Richard Miller	Appointed by Synod 2012 and 2016 with term ending July 1, 2019	Re-appointment to term ending July 1, 2022
Rev. Steve Swets	Appointed by Synod 2014 and 2016 with term ending July 1, 2020	none

*b. Budget*

We are asking that the annual budget for CERCU be maintained at \$10,000. The annual meeting of NAPARC each year is the primary place that CERCU meets and that is where the majority of our budget is spent. As a committee, we see the need to continue to have at least one face to face meeting each year. The importance of classical representation necessitates our being a large committee. It is also important to travel for the synods/GA's of other churches to continue our encouragement in unity. The Korean American Presbyterian Church will be hosting NAPARC this year, likely either in Philadelphia, PA or Irvine, CA. For the past 2 years, CERCU has kept expenses under budget, for which we are thankful.

*c. Handbook*

As a committee, we have found it helpful to adopt policy guidelines to assist those who are delegated as fraternal delegates to synods, working as a CERCU subcommittee, etc. When a new member comes onto our committee, there is a steep learning curve to get that brother caught up on what takes place annually. A policy handbook is designed to help. We have appended our recently developed policy handbook at the end of this report. Several elements of it are modeled after, and dependent upon, a similar document used by the OPC. Since it is for internal use within CERCU, we are not seeking approval from synod, but would welcome comments and suggestions from any interested person.

### **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)

At Synod Wyoming 2016 CERCU proposed “Guidelines for speeches of fraternal observers and delegates to our Synod” (Article 20.10 of the *Acts of Synod*) which was approved and immediately implemented. Those guidelines served us well in 2016 as we trust it will in 2018 and going forward.

### **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 November 2017, the ARP had 9 presbyteries with a total number of organized and unorganized churches at 271. Their total membership was 32,568. The ARPC and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA) have been in a process of growing closer to each other as denominations. They have expressed this in more urgent unity meetings, joint General Assemblies at Bonclarken, Flat Rock, NC, among other activities.

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. They were also at one-time members of the ICRC, but 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 Two relationship. Congregations and classes are urged to pursue opportunities for ecumenical fellowship with ARP congregations and Presbyteries.

## **2. Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRC)**

The Free Reformed Churches were established in 1921. As of November 2017, they had a total of 21 congregations with a total membership of 5,143. 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.

Since our last synod, CERCU has had the opportunity to sit down with representatives from the FRC and discuss what is taking place in our churches. The FRC is in a growing relationship with the Heritage Reformed Congregations. We are encouraged to see this. There are still significant hurdles to union between those two bodies. One of the issues that keep them separated regards the role of a theological seminary. The HRC views Puritan as a witness to the world where men can come from many countries to be trained and then sent back into the field. The FRC views a seminary as an instrument of the church to train their own men for the gospel ministry. The FRC is a federation which has a strong emphasis on experiential preaching. With this in mind a subcommittee of CERCU has been meeting in Ontario for the past several years with representatives from the FRC to discuss the different styles of preaching. Both subcommittees have listened to numerous sermons from each other and then offered critiques. This process has been fruitful. Nevertheless, it would appear that the FRC still continues to have concerns about how some of the preaching is done in the URC. Their criticism is that many of the sermons assume the regeneration of the congregation and that there is not enough discrimination in the preaching. In the discussions, which are ongoing, we have sought to clear up areas of misunderstanding.

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

### **3. Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)**

The HRC was established in 1993. Their synod meets annually with each of their 9 congregations sending a delegation. They hold to both the Three Forms of Unity and 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 the last 4 years 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 PRTS is having in the world. We continue to encourage active engagement in opportunities for advancing this relationship at the consistorial level as well.

The HRC committee mentioned to CERCU that there are misperceptions from both sides. For instance, some view the URC as too close to the CRC and some view the HRC as too close to the NRC.

### **4. Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)**

The KAPC was established in 1978. They are a primarily Korean speaking church which makes a pursuit of fuller union with them complicated. Their membership has risen since our last report. As of November 2017, they have 80,000 members in 650 congregations over 30 presbyteries. Most of their growth has taken place due to immigration to America. Their churches are located primarily in large urban centers. They hold a General Assembly annually.

At NAPARC 2016 CERCU met with the representatives from the KAPC for the first time. This was a good meeting. Much of this meeting was “getting to know” each other. They have a fascinating history and relationship with the KPCA (Kosin). We look forward to continuing the process of getting to know each other, but for the foreseeable future, we do not anticipate growing much closer with the KAPC until their church becomes more thoroughly English speaking.

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

The KPCA was established in 1985 and as of November 2017 they have 6,200 members over 149 churches. They have active mission fields in many countries where Korean have immigrated.

We have not had any direct contact or meetings with the KPCA except for informal contact at NAPARC. This is a denomination which is even more connected to Korea than the KAPC. Their services are in Korean and they foresee this as a potential hurdle in the future as the next generation seeks English speaking churches.

## **6. Presbyterian Church in America**

The PCA was established in 1973 as a break off of the PCUSA over the issue of the inerrancy of scripture. It is the largest members church of NAPARC. As of November 2017, the PCA had 374,161 members over 1,892 churches/mission works. They hold to the Westminster standards. In addition to NAPARC, they are members of the National Association of Evangelicals and the World Reformed Fellowship.

The PCA has two levels of ecclesiastical relationships. They designate their entry level of relations as Corresponding Relations. 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 NAPARC 2016 and 2017 our CERCU committee has had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the PCA. It should be noted that even though the PCA is the largest denomination of NAPARC, they ordinarily send the fewest delegates. In 2017, only one delegate attended from the PCA, whereas there were 10 from the URC. We decided to send a smaller delegation of our committee to meet with their representative. In our bi-lateral meeting with the PCA, we asked their delegate why he was the only one from the PCA. He explained that part of the reason is because their committee is not very well funded by the PCA and they have financial constraints. Also at this meeting in 2017, the Comity Agreement of NAPARC was discussed. It has been the experience of some URC's that a PCA church plant comes to their town and slowly



draws some of their membership away. After a frank discussion, we encouraged each other in the work of missions and church planting.

We encourage local churches to seek greater dialogue with their local PCA's.

## **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. We thank God for this relationship and believe the Lord continues to use it for much mutual blessing between the churches of our respective federations.

As of November 2017, the CanRC consisted of 69 congregations (including foreign and domestic mission works not yet organized) and 19,035 members (17,975 in 2012) with 86 ordained ministers (active and retired).

In many places, our *Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship* relationship has borne the fruit of much greater spiritual unity with Canadian Reformed brothers and sisters and congregations in ways that could not have been imagined but a few decades ago. While we thank God for this, it must also be acknowledged that this is not an experience that has been shared by everyone. As the Canadian Reformed Churches exist almost exclusively in Canada, lack of interaction of and with many of our churches in the US is a large factor. It is not the only factor, however. Even in Canada, there remains skepticism among our churches owing to a history of separation, antagonism and isolation, and/or a conviction of incompatibility in terms of church government.

The Canadian Reformed are perceived by some of us as being more hierarchical in polity. Generally, there doesn't appear to be enthusiasm among United Reformed Churches for beginning to function together under the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO).

At Synod Wyoming 2016, CERCU communicated to the churches its intention not to come with any recommendation to proceed to Phase Three, Step A (Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union) with the Canadian Reformed Churches for at least six years. Generally, this commitment appears to be welcome by the churches as an opportunity to catch our breath, ecumenically speaking. Given this commitment, our interaction as CERCU with our Canadian Reformed counterparts has been reduced at the committee level. As matters stand, it appears to us that a Phase Three, Step A recommendation would also be unlikely by Synod 2022. Of course, the Lord's ways are not our ways, but we believe much would have to change before we could be confident of our churches' readiness and willingness to take the next step on the path toward church union with the Canadian Reformed Churches. While we do see it as our task to encourage and assist the churches in the pursuit of our ecumenical calling toward greater unity, we have also become convinced through our years of engagement together that such unity must finally be given by God in a way that is clear to all the churches. As such, when the churches are ready and enthusiastic about moving forward, we believe such a recommendation should come from the churches.

May it be that as we continue to enjoy the unity the Lord has given us in our present level of relations (Phase Two, Ecclesiastical Fellowship), that the way forward could one day materialize by God's grace, in God's good time. In the meantime, while we enjoy and work with what we have, we can also patiently wait upon the Lord.

By way of background, we also believe it would be helpful for us to give an account of some of our own efforts and thought processes as a committee regarding our engagement of this relationship that have led us to this point.

Initially, having been encouraged by the fruitfulness of the Colloquium on Covenant that took place at Synod Visalia 2014, and as suggested by some of the dialogue from the floor during that Colloquium, CERCU considered the possibility of arranging for a subsequent Colloquium on Church Order matters. Our thinking was that perhaps this was something that could take place during Synod 2020, with an encouragement to our churches to engage the matter in the years leading up to that synod. Our reflection together on that prospect, however, led us to the conclusion that, as churches, we are currently not prepared for, or sufficiently interested in, such a discussion.

The prospect that a broader form of unity with a broader Church Order (i.e. a Church Order more inline with our current URCNA CO as opposed to what is perceived as a narrower arrangement in the Can Ref CO and also the PJCO) has also been pondered. The notion that Reformed Churches in North America could find one another under a broader umbrella seemed worthy of at least some consideration. Some of the advantages would be that it could potentially allow for a union to materialize more quickly. Some of what are perceived as narrower practices in the Canadian Reformed Churches could perhaps still be followed in their churches in such a new union, since the broader wouldn't necessarily preclude the narrower. Also, an every-

congregation delegated synod (as currently practiced in the URCNA) might also be beneficial for the Canadian Reformed Churches coming into such a union, should the Lord be pleased to grant it. The sense would be that, at least for the beginning years, this approach would provide a necessary avenue for the churches to come to know each other.

Synod dismissed the PJCO committee and declared that further revision properly belongs in Phase Three A. As such we are only making observations, we are not in a position to suggest any definitive answers (Acts 2016, Article 44) regarding church order matters. It is our sense, therefore that these are also things that need more time, and perhaps, one day, more discussion. It is our hope that, in time, more clarity on some of these matters will be gleaned from our interaction in, and patient enjoyment of our present level of ecclesiastical fellowship.

Discussions about the national border between Canada and the US also seem to resurface from time to time. That there are regional/national differences between us as United Reformed Churches on matters ecumenical cannot be denied. It would be too simplistic, however to suggest that there are no concerns about proceeding further with the Canadian Reformed at this time among the URCs in Canada. As a committee, we have also made clear in our discussions with the Canadian Reformed Unity Committee, and amongst ourselves, that there is a unity we enjoy across the national border within the URC that is rich and deeply profitable, and that we believe that as churches this is something we are certainly not willing to give up.

If our relationship with the Canadian Reformed is to progress further, we believe it can only come about if it becomes plain to the churches through the further blessing of the spiritual unity enjoyed in the context of our present level of relations. We are encouraged by the developments in Canada of growing interaction between churches in classes, in missions, in youth ministry and in Christian education and seminary education. We would further point to our CO Article 35 and its emphasis on classical ecumenical activity as providing the avenue for more creative and organic development of opportunities together.

We have seen a couple of our classes have joint classical meetings with the CanRC. Classis Central US hosted a meeting with Classis Manitoba of the CanRC in April 2017 and Classis Ontario East met with Classis Niagara of the CanRC in March of 2018.

We would also encourage and recommend any churches who are at a greater distance from Canadian Reformed Churches, to consider making use of the work of the Canadian Reformed Committee for Church Unity (CCU). At their last Synod (Dunnville 2016), in an effort to give expression to their love for the URC and of their desire to seek continued progress in our relationship, this committee was augmented with two more men from the west. The intent was that these men could be ready to interact with questions, concerns or to help with opportunities. Invite them to your classis meetings. They remain willing to do what they can and we would urge the churches to avail themselves of such opportunities as well.

As a gentle encouragement, wherever this relationship has been engaged, the result has 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.

In seeking to be very sensitive to the fact that any further ecumenical progress ought to be widely experienced as given by the grace of God in an organic way, CERCU recommends continued patience and engagement of the unity we enjoy in our Phase Two Ecclesiastical Fellowship relationship. Our sense is that also among the Canadian Reformed, there is a growing recognition and humble appreciation that we ought to let organizational unity continue to be something we all strive for, but only as an expression of being built together on a foundation of spiritual unity in the Lord in complete submission to his Word and with a view to mutual edification. We do not see this as a step backwards, this is something for which to be thankful. Though the way forward for federative unity remains somewhat indeterminate, in many places our local organic unity is absolutely thriving. As we enjoy the blessing of unity that has been given, we can joyfully wait on Him with patience, prayer and persistence.

## **2. Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)**

The RCUS was established in 1746 by German immigrants. As of November 2017, the RCUS had a membership of 3,634 over 49 churches and mission works. Membership in the RCUS has been experiencing a slow decline.

In many places where there are both RCUS congregations and URC's side by side there is a good and mutual opportunity to serve together. We have enjoyed a Phase Two relationship with the RCUS since Synod Calgary 2004. The RCUS are a faithful federation which holds to the Three Forms of Unity. They operate a small seminary (Heidelberg Seminary) in Sioux Falls, SD. The seminary has one professor. In the past year and a half, three of their more prominent pastors have passed away.

In our annual meetings with the RCUS at NAPARC, it has become clear that there is not a great desire of moving the relationship forward between our churches. The RCUS seems content to keep things the way that they are at this point. Though we have noticed over the last number of years that the RCUS is spending more time looking forward to what the future might bring to them as a denomination of churches.

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 is a denomination which began as a stand against liberalism and modernism in the PCUSA in the 1930's. The OPC was established in 1936 and now their membership is 30,198 members among 322 churches and mission works. The OPC has a strong emphasis upon missions in the world. We as a federation view them as something of an older sister who continues to teach us many valuable lessons.

This year we have the privilege of organizing and hosting a joint Synod/General Assembly with the OPC. This is in part a celebration of our new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* which was put together by committees of both of our churches. However, this joint meeting is more than that. It shows a true love and unity we have had in the past, but also one that continues to grow today.

We are in Phase Two *Ecumenical Fellowship* with the OPC since Synod Schererville 2007. Our relationship with the OPC has continued to grow. We have been tremendously blessed by their efforts in church planting. As time goes on, the URC puts into practice many of the policies that are bearing much fruit in the OPC (e.g. a church planting manual, a full-time missions coordinator).

This synod is a special one in our relationship with this sister church. Not only will we enjoy meal times and some devotional times together, but we will also have the opportunity to have a colloquium on the past, present, and future of our work with the OPC. We trust this will be a tremendous encouragement to the churches. The schedule for this colloquium is well underway as we work with a committee from the OPC. It should also be noted that this synod is the first joint broadest assembly that we have ever had a young federation. This may be a monumental event in the history of our churches.

We met with the OPC again this year at NAPARC. From our demeanor and discussion with each other it is clear that we feel very comfortable with each other. Much of our discussion with the OPC at NAPARC dealt with the upcoming synod/colloquium.

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. CERCU 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 is the smallest denomination we have a Phase Two *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* with. They have a membership of 368 among five congregations. The ERQ was established in 1988 and it is the only Reformed denomination in the province of Quebec. All of their churches are French speaking.

The ERQ over the last number of years have been busy in translating solid English books into French. We have had the privilege of hearing about this week each year at NAPARC.

At our bi-lateral meeting at NAPARC, this was the first time the discussion of union seemed to take root. It seemed earlier that since the ERQ is French-speaking, union would be impossible. However, it was noted that we have churches in our own federation which are Spanish speaking and that actually has a positive effect among our churches. It was noted that many denominations have linguistically unique classes and presbyteries. Is this a possibility in the URC? This is what we seek to pray over and discuss in the coming years.

The ERQ is very eager to receive help from our churches and we encourage this. They continue to be in prayer for French speaking pastors. Nevertheless, many opportunities exist for more mission works of URC members who are not ordained. Quebec is a spiritually dark province of Canada, but the Lord certainly has His church there and we can see that with the ERQ.

#### **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 over November 2017, the RPCNA had 7,076 members over 98 churches and mission works. 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 169 years old.

We are in their Level 2 *Fraternal Relations* category. Their category 1, which is full intercommunion is made up of three denominations overseas.

The RPCNA continues to discuss greater unity with the ARPC, which we encouraged. Exclusive Psalmody with no instrumentality seems to be the biggest hurdle in that process between those denominations.

CERCUC met again with the RPCNA at NAPARC. From that meeting we expressed appreciation for the RP's paper on transgenderism. We encourage our churches to read this. It was also noted

that by using the new Trinity Psalter Hymnal, this emphasis toward literal Psalm singing brings us closer to the RPCNA in our worship. Many places in North America where churches are in close proximity, there is a good and healthy relationship. We encourage congregations and classes to continue this process of unity on a grassroots level.

### **C. North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)**

The 43<sup>rd</sup> meeting of NAPARC took place on the campus of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. Steve Park of the KAPC was the chairman of the meeting and Rev. Ralph Pontier is the secretary for NAPARC. NAPARC consists of 13-member churches, all of which we are in a Phase One or Two relationship with us.

The basis of NAPARC's fellowship is "Confessing Jesus Christ as the only Savior and Sovereign Lord over all of life, we affirm the basis of the fellowship of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to be full commitment to the Bible in its entirety as the Word of God written, without error in all its parts, and to its teaching as set forth in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms." (NAPARC Constitution)

A large portion of the meeting is hearing reports from each of the member churches, after which there is an opportunity for questions. It is good to hear updates of each of the churches. On Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning, a discussion took place on four topics suggested by member churches. The topics were:

1. How important is organic union among dissimilar NAPARC denominations? For example, do the denominations which focus on a specific ethnic/linguistic group in North America really need to merge with other NAPARC denominations?
2. What denominational distinctives presently exist as obstacles to organic union? (Examples: exclusive psalmody, delegated or non-delegated assemblies of synods, strict subscription or good faith subscription, unique denominational histories, etc.)
3. What denominational distinctives should be considered as valid obstacles to organic union under biblical scrutiny?
4. Discuss the possibility of a structure that allows for both distinctives and organic union.

The discussion revealed different ideas about the importance and feasibility of organic (organizational) union, but also a common commitment to giving visible expression to that unity which is already ours in Christ. The discussion was helpful in reminding delegates of the two-fold purpose of NAPARC, but also of its limitations. NAPARC continues to provide a venue for its member churches to talk with one another corporately and bilaterally, and to hold out before each other the ecumenical imperative of Scripture. It has strengthened fraternal bonds and

spurred greater cooperation in missions, diaconal services, theological education, and youth ministry.

As CERCU, we use the opportunity of NAPARC to meet in bi-lateral meeting with 5-7 other denominations. This year we met with the OPC, RPCNA, PCA, HRC, FRCA, RCUS, ERQ. These meetings were all fruitful and encouraging.

It is also of interest that over the last few years, there are two denominations which are observers to NAPARC. They are the Bible Presbyterian Church and the Protestant Reformed Church. Both of those denominations explained why they are not yet ready to join NAPARC. Though this led to a bit of discomfort, it was wonderful to experience how a brotherly spirit prevailed. These difficult, but important conversations are important in order that we as church may encourage each other to faithfulness, and also to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

#### **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. Bill Boekestein to a term second three-year term to commence on July 1, 2019. (Rev. Boekestein was first appointed by Synod 2016 to a term beginning July 1, 2016. He is eligible for re-appointment.)
3. That Synod re-appoint as a member-at-large Rev. Richard Miller to a third three-year term to commence on July 1, 2019. (Rev. R. Miller was first appointed by Synod 2012 to a term beginning July 1, 2013. He is eligible for re-appointment.)
4. That Synod maintain the budget for CERCU at \$10,000 US per annum.
5. That Synod remind the churches of our mutual responsibility to engage one another in our ecumenical task through prayer, classical dialogue, local efforts and expression of concerns.
6. That Synod take note that the Canadian Reformed Committee for Church Unity (CCU) has been supplemented with more members to help answer questions, speak at classes, and promote the unity of our churches. Synod encourages the classes to use them to that end.
7. That the classes be commended for their faithfulness in appointing or reappointing classical representatives (and alternates) to CERCU in the manner the classes deem appropriate.
8. That Synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its various dialogues.

Humbly Submitted,  
Rev. John A. Bouwers, chairman  
Rev. Steven A. Swets, secretary



# CERCU HANDBOOK

## I. CERCU Meetings

- B. CERCU generally meets once a year in conjunction with NAPARC at the NAPARC venue which changes every year. NAPARC begins at 2:00 pm on the second Tuesday of November and continues through Thursday Noon. We begin with supper on Monday followed by an evening meeting, a meeting Tuesday morning, a meeting Wednesday night, and then bilateral meetings with other NAPARC delegations during the time slots which NAPARC allows for such meetings. Flight arrangements should allow for bilateral meetings on Thursday morning.
- C. In 2017, we also began the practice of video meeting, one held in April and one the beginning of November.

## II. CERCU Agenda Template

(Note: insert CERCU Agenda Template here)

## III. Fraternal Delegate Guidelines (Instituted at Synod Wyoming 2016)

- A. Fraternal delegates to the major assemblies of sister churches (Phase Two) are appointed by the chairman of CERCU in consultation with the other members of the committee. Fraternal observers are sent to Phase One churches which extend an invitation for such. Fraternal delegates and fraternal observers do not need to be members of CERCU. To make your service as a fraternal delegate or fraternal observer as meaningful and useful as possible to the church of Christ and to the cause of ecumenicity, you are asked to observe the following guidelines:

### B. Goals

1. To honor those to whom you are sent as brothers in the Lord.
2. To present the URC to the other body through your address to the body and through personal conversations, seeking to build bridges between the URC and the church to which you are sent. Be aware that you may be the first person from the URC that some in your audience have ever met, and they will judge the URC by what they see in you. They want to know the state of our churches. Tell them about significant developments, problems that might be of interest to them and on which they might help us to seek solutions, and of actions of our synods that relate to them directly.
3. To obtain information about the life of the church whose assembly you are visiting as it is displayed in activities of its congregations and agencies, and in actions taken by the assembly and to make an evaluation. CERCU cannot read all the materials that are before all the bodies to whom we send fraternal delegates, so we must depend on you to distill for us the important information and its significance.

### C. Attendance

Try to be present for the entire assembly. Do not simply zip in, make your speech, and zip out. You cannot adequately represent the URC or learn much about the church you visit during such a brief visit. On arrival, register with the clerk of the body to make your presence known and to receive room and meal assignments and other information. Try to hold private conversations with as many delegates as possible to learn, as much as possible, the spirit of that group and its inner workings.

### D. Preparation

If an agenda of the assembly has been sent to you in advance, familiarize yourself with its contents before you arrive. Refresh your memory on significant developments and happenings in the URC by reviewing the press releases of our two previous synods (available under the “Synod” and “Synodical Archive” tabs at URCNA.org).

### E. Addressing the Assembly

If you are to address the assembly, write out your remarks in full, both so that you may be sure to be brief and avoid wearing out your welcome. (Not over 10 minutes and observe their limits if they instruct you to take less than 10 minutes.) If possible, your address should not be completed until you have been at the meeting for several sessions and obtain a sense of their direction. Seek to commend the body that you are addressing for its accomplishments and virtues. Do not speak pontifically, as though you are the voice of the URC. In speaking of the position of the URC on any matter, cite actions of the synods, not your own opinion. Do not air your personal views on matters before the

body that you are visiting. Seek to avoid negative criticism in your address, and use discretion in private conversations.

F. Advisory Committees

Attend advisory committee meetings (or their equivalent) that are dealing with matters that would be significant to the URC or our relationship with them, if you are permitted.

G. Decisions

Try to get copies of reports submitted to the body by its agencies or committees (including advisory committee reports), and record significant actions taken by the body.

H. Report

Please prepare your report while the events of the assembly are still fresh in your mind. Send it to the chairman of CERCUC within two weeks after the end of the meeting. The report should include the actions that you believe are of significance and comments that you think would be helpful to our church and CERCUC for understanding the nature of the body whose meetings you attended. Please enclose a copy of your address to the body. Keep in mind that reports of major assemblies are sometimes published as addendums to CERCUC's report to synod.

I. Public Comment

Remember that you are a guest at the assembly not a delegate. As such, you should generally refrain from public comment on matters of controversy. Be careful not to reflect negatively on that body or its individual members. If, after the assembly is concluded, you believe public comment on their actions is necessary, include your proposal for such a comment in your report to CERCUC.

J. Expenses

Your travel expenses are the responsibility of the URC. Submit an account of those expenses to the chairman of CERCUC for approval using the synodical expense form. He will forward his approval to the appropriate federation treasurer. You should travel by the most efficient means; if by car, submit mileage, tolls, meals during travel; if by public transportation, submit actual costs. If you chose to drive when it would be cheaper to fly, submit the lower cost. Lodging and meals at the meetings are generally provided by the host church, but check on this when you register. If they should slip up on this, include the cost in your expense accounting.

We appreciate your willingness to serve our church in this way, and we wish you a profitable and blessed time in fellowship with those of like faith.

#### **IV. What We Do with Each Denomination or Federation**

A. Phase One Churches – 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:

1. view and place of the Holy Scriptures
2. creeds and confessions
3. formula of subscription to the confessions
4. significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology
5. church order and polity
6. liturgy and liturgical forms
7. preaching, sacraments, and discipline
8. 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.

B. Phase Two Churches – The second phase of ecumenicity is one of recognition and is entered 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:

1. the churches shall assist each other as much as possible in the maintenance, defense, and promotion of Reformed doctrine, liturgy, church polity, and discipline
2. the churches shall consult each other when entering ecumenical relations with other federations
3. the churches shall accept each other's certificates of membership, admitting such members to the Lord's Table

4. the churches shall open the pulpits to each other's ministers, observing the rules of the respective churches
5. the churches shall consult each other before major changes to the confessions, church government, or liturgy are adopted
6. 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.

- C. For further insight into CERCU's function consult our mandate.  
(Note: insert CERCU Mandate here)

#### **V. Alternating NAPARC Delegates**

Each year we are allowed four delegates to NAPARC. Since we can have up to 11 CERCU members present, not all can be delegates. The chairman and secretary of CERCU alternate as delegates every other year and serve alternately on the NAPARC Interim Committee. The other members of CERCU may serve as delegates for two years in a row as desire and opportunity arise. It is unlikely that everyone will have an opportunity to be a delegate to NAPARC.

#### **VI. Duties of the Classical Representatives**

- A. Attend all CERCU meetings or arrange for the alternate to take your place. If the elected alternate is also not able to attend, ask the convening consistory of the next classis meeting to appoint someone, suggesting to them who might be able and willing to serve.
- B. Attend all meetings of your classis.
  - a. Give a written report on CERCU's activities to the classis for distribution with the printed agenda (i.e., observe the agenda deadline). You can freely borrow from other representatives' reports to their classis (and you are encouraged to share your report with other reps).
  - b. Answer questions from classis delegates about CERCU's work.
  - c. Listen to any concerns of the delegates of classis and convey those concerns to CERCU.
- D. Representatives and alternates should read all CERCU emails and minutes. Representatives should respond to emails, as requested, in a timely manner.

#### **VII. Duties of the CERCU Secretary**

- A. Take minutes of all CERCU meetings and distribute the minutes in a timely manner.
- B. Take minutes of all bilateral meetings and distribute the minutes in a timely manner. The chairman may ask other CERCU members to assist in taking the minutes of the bilateral meetings.
- C. Prepare a draft report for the upcoming Synod in cooperation with the Chairman. They will then send this to the committee for approval in a timely manner.

#### **VIII. Reimbursement**

- A. Costs associated with the work of CERCU will be reimbursed by the URC treasurer(s). These costs include travel, lodging, and food.
- B. A synodically approved expense report must be submitted to the treasurer of the country in which one lives. This report will have to be approved also by the Chairman of CERCU. The Chairman's expense report will be approved by the secretary of CERCU.
- C. Mileage to and from a meeting will only be paid up to the value of an airline ticket for the same trip. If one desires to drive a long distance, we encourage the use of a rental car and gas reimbursement instead of mileage.

#### **IX. The Ecumenical Imperative**

We do our work in the light of the biblical command to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and in the light of Jesus's prayer that the church might be one so that the world will know that the Father has sent him. We are recognized as disciples of Jesus by our love for one another and our unity is a testimony to the truthfulness of the message of reconciliation.

(Note: insert ecumenical imperative document here)

#### **X. Definitions and Direction in working in NAPARC**

- a. **Organic Union:** Organic union is defined as two or more NAPARC Churches joining their diverse gifts, heritage and calling on the basis of the Scriptural mandate (Ephesians 4:1–16; Acts 15:1–16:5; John 17; 1 Corinthians 12:12–31) to form one church by uniting together in theology, polity and ministry. This would require the eventual integration of church courts and administrative and legal structures. (From the Report of the Committee on Collation and Organic Union (Paper R, Recommendation 2), which was adopted by the 28th (2003) Meeting (Minutes, Article XII.B, page 5)

b. **Golden Rule Comity Agreement (NAPARC 1984)**

“Golden Rule” Comity Agreement

Comity has meant different things to different people. We representatives of the home missions agencies and committees or boards of our denominations resist territorial statements on comity in light of the social and cultural complexity of North American society and the great spiritual need of our many countrymen who are apart from Jesus Christ. Out of a concern to build the Church of Jesus Christ rather than our own denominations and to avoid the appearance of competition, we affirm the following courteous code of behavior to guide our church planting ministries in North America:

1. We will be sensitive to the presence of existing churches and missions ministries of other NAPARC churches and will refrain from enlisting members of these existing ministries.
2. We will communicate with the equivalent or appropriate agency (denominational missions committee or board, presbytery missions or church extension committee, or session) before initiating church planting activities in a community where NAPARC churches or missions ministries exist.
3. We will provide information on at least an annual basis describing progress in our ministries and future plans.
4. We will encourage our regional home missions leadership to develop good working relationships.

c. **Transfer of Membership among NAPARC Congregations**

Adopted at the 13th (1987) Meeting:

Recognizing that the churches of NAPARC have on occasion unintentionally received members or ordained officers who were under various states of discipline in another NAPARC church, thus creating tension between the churches, and at the same time recognizing the need for mutual freedom and openness on the part of the churches, we agree to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of the other denominations as follows:

- i. **Regular Transfer of Membership.**  
That in the regular transfer of membership between NAPARC churches, the session/consistory or presbytery/classis not receive a member until the appropriate document of transfer is in the hands of the receiving church.
- ii. **Transfer with Irregularities.**
  - a. That upon request for a transfer of membership by a person under discipline, the sending session/consistory or presbytery/classis inform the receiving body of the nature and extent of the disciplinary procedure before implementing the requested transfer, thus enabling informal consultation between the pastors and elders of both churches.
  - b. That such a person not be received officially until the judicatory/assembly of the receiving church has taken into serious account the discipline of and the information supplied by the sending church.

- c. That such a person not be received officially until the judicatory/assembly of the receiving church is satisfied that proper restitution has been made and/or reconciliation has been seriously attempted.
- d. That a “fugitive from discipline” who is no longer a member of a church or who is no longer on the roll of a presbytery shall not be received until the former judicatory/assembly has been contacted to determine if proper restitution has been made and/or reconciliation has been attempted.

iii. Recourse and Appeal.

Where communication or action regarding the sending/receiving of a member or ordained officer/office bearer does not satisfy either the dismissing or receiving judicatory/assembly, communication may be submitted to the interchurch relation committees of the denominations involved with a view to mediation of the problem. If this proves unsatisfactory, the session/consistory or presbytery/classis may register its concern to the appropriate judicatory/assembly of the other denomination.

iv. Congregational Transfer.

That a congregation seeking to leave a NAPARC church to become affiliated with another NAPARC denomination be received only after it has complied with the requirements of the form of government of the church from which it is separating, and the receiving church shall be responsible to see that this is done.

**d. Young People Activities**

From the Report of the NAPARC Committee of Review to the 38th (2012) Meeting (page17):

Provision for the Needs of Our Young People Taking note of—

-our desire to see our covenant young people enjoy good Christian fellowship with those of their own age and be firmly established in the Reformed faith;

-the difficulty many (especially those in more isolated situations) have in finding a spouse who is also firmly established in the Reformed faith

—your Committee recommends:

1. That the need of our young people for good Christian fellowship be highlighted by adding the phrase “activities for young people” to section 4 of the NAPARC Constitution, III (Purpose and Function);
2. That presbyteries/classes and sessions/consistories be encouraged to invite young people from other NAPARC congregations in the area to planned activities for young people, especially to camps/retreats for those of high school or college ages;
3. That the youth committees of the presbyteries/classes of the NAPARC Member Churches be encouraged to meet together from time to time to explore possible ways in which they might cooperate in planning activities for our covenant young people;
4. That Member Churches be requested to organize periodic consultations of youth ministries representatives; and
5. That information regarding upcoming camps/retreats hosted by NAPARC Member Churches for those of high school or college ages be included on the NAPARC website.

**e. Pursuit of Organic Union**

From the Report of the NAPARC Committee of Review to the 38th (2012) Meeting (pages 17–21, some footnotes omitted):

#### Pursuit of Organic Union

... Taking into account the discussion at the 37th (2011) Meeting and the comments it has received on the matter, your Committee is not recommending any substantive change to this clause in the Constitution.<sup>3</sup> Your Committee observes that the subject of this clause is “the constituent churches,” and therefore believes that the correct reading of the clause is that it is the Member Churches, not NAPARC, who are to do the “hold[ing] out before each other.”<sup>4</sup>

1. Confessional Considerations. Both sets of the confessional standards enumerated in the Basis Your Committee is united in the conviction that any proposal for one Member Church to begin a process of uniting organically with another Member Church(es) should originate in the appropriate assembly(s) of the Member Churches themselves, and should not be initiated or driven by NAPARC. And, with this understanding, your Committee offers the following as information that might be helpful to the Member Churches as they continue to “hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.”

2. Counsel From Several of Our Reformed/Presbyterian Fathers and Brethren. In preparing for its discussions on the issue, your Committee sought counsel from the writings of several of our Reformed/Presbyterian fathers and brothers, including Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), Benjamin B. Warfield (1851–1921), Charles Hodge (1797–1878), and Iain Murray.... of NAPARC speak to the teaching of Scripture on the unity of the church, the communion of saints, the government of the church, and the binding of the conscience....

3. Some Options. The unity which those in the one catholic or universal church enjoy begins with their being joined, by faith, to Christ, her Head and Husband. Appreciating the “already/not yet” dimensions of the coming of His kingdom, particular churches wrestle with how best to express and manifest that unity among themselves in this age. At least five possible options for how a Member Church might take up its responsibility to “hold out before each other ...” come to mind:

a. Do nothing. Your Committee simply observes that such is not faithful to that to which the Member Churches have already committed themselves.

b. Negotiated bilateral mergers. Most of us are wary of anything that might resemble a “top/down” effort by denominational leaders, focusing on the more administrative/organizational dimensions of the union, to press forward in negotiating a merger of two Member Churches before the hearts of the people in both churches have been knit together among themselves. Well-intended efforts to merge two churches (“A” and “B”) into one (“AB”), before they are ready, could easily end up resulting in three churches (the new “AB,” the “Continuing A,” and the “Continuing B”), instead of the desired one, as members’ consciences feel taxed beyond what they are able to bear.

c. Gradual long-term process. This is a longer-view approach in which Member Churches, instead of devoting their resources and energies to trying to negotiate bilateral mergers in the short term, focus instead on developing ways to serve, edify, and deepen their fellowship with other Member Churches over the long term, perhaps a generation or more. Member Churches would actively look for ways and opportunities to work (in areas such as missions, relief efforts, training of men for the ministry, Christian schools, activities for young people, and church education and publications) and to worship together with one or more other Member Churches. Such things might include:

- pulpit exchanges
- participating in occasional services of public worship (e.g., “Reformation Day”) conducted by the other Member Church

- mutual invitations to youth and family camps
- intentional cross-pollination in the training of men for the ministry
- scheduling concurrent meetings of major assemblies and classes/presbyteries
- closer cooperation in world missions endeavors, including the sending of missionaries to labor with a mission established by the other Member Church
- annual bilateral meetings of interchurch relations committees' representatives
- coordinating responses to major disasters
- joint publication projects
- joint involvement in Christian schools.

As the years roll by, and as it pleases the Lord to allow the bonds of mutual trust and affection to ripen and deepen between/among them, Member Churches, having already laid a foundation for working and living more closely together, can begin to explore whether, without sacrificing principles of conscience with respect to their own distinctives, they might be ready to put a formal structure in place to capture what is already a present reality in their mutual lives.

Your Committee believes that this approach fits with the logical order of the dual purposes of NAPARC—"to advise, counsel, 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".

d. "A Reformed Dream" General Assembly.

—and most of the changes your Committee is proposing are focused on helping the Member Churches better carry out their responsibilities with respect to the first.  
... Your Committee is of one mind with regard to the idea of establishing a general assembly, with each (former) Member Church becoming a particular synod under that general assembly: that a specific proposal for such should not be originated by NAPARC, but only in the appropriate assembly(s) of the Member Churches, who are seeking to become part of the new general assembly, themselves. Your Committee also believes that, even if as many as a half dozen of the Member Churches were to unite in forming such a general assembly, there would still be some Member Churches left behind, who are not yet (and may not be in our lifetimes) ready to unite. Therefore, there will still be an ongoing valuable purpose and function for NAPARC to carry on, both for the Member Churches who are not (then) able to become part of the new general assembly, and for the new general assembly which (one might hope) would also become (or continue) a Member Church in NAPARC.

e. Combination of c. and d.

This approach would build on the gradual long-term process described in "c. Gradual long-term process," above, with a view that whatever formal structure might eventuate would resemble the new general assembly in "d. 'A Reformed Dream' General Assembly," above. It might also include pursuing the gradual long-term process simultaneously with more than one other Member Church, waiting upon the Lord for His blessing, with one of the possible fruits over the long term being the formation of a new general assembly by several Member Churches, like the one envisioned in d.

4. A Way Forward. Your Committee is thankful that both the Reformed and the Presbyterian traditions are represented and embraced in NAPARC, and observes that, generally speaking and without wanting to limit what our Lord is able to do among us, the obstacles to be surmounted when contemplating any form of organic union among Member Churches would be fewer among those Member Churches that are from the same tradition. Accordingly, your Committee would encourage Member Churches, as each considers possible courses or options to pursue in taking up its responsibility to "hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice," to;

- -be involved actively in seeking opportunities “to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with” all other member churches;
- -seek opportunities for working together with other Member Churches in particular ministries;
- -develop regular conversations with other Member Churches, particularly among those from within the same tradition, with a long-term view towards possible organic union; and
- -keep in mind that full organic union of all Member Churches will occur upon the Second Advent, for which we all long today.



## **Liturgical Forms Committee Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

Greetings in the name of the Lord.

### **Publication**

Since our last Synod, the work of the Liturgical Forms Committee has been occupied with getting our book to print and preparing the Creeds and Confessions Booklet for approval by this Synod. Early in our work on the Forms and Prayers book (FP) we committed to using the same Printer as the Trinity Psalter Hymnal (TPH). This was done so that there would be a consistency of quality in our books, and a consistency of design. When those involved in the TPH decided on LCS Communications as their printer, we began a dialogue with that company for the printing of our book. For the same reason, we chose Jim Scott of Presbyterian and Reformed Publisher as our copy editor and publication editor. Jim was the copy editor for the TPH. Again, we were looking to maintain consistency in type face and quality between our books.

As a Committee, we reviewed each of the documents included in our book and made any cosmetic changes necessary for a clean publication. We also reviewed any suggestions sent to us by Jim Scott. In a document of this size it is very difficult to eliminate all errors, but we have done our best to ensure the best work possible for this book.

### **Inclusion of Creeds and Confessions in FP**

As we prepared the contents of this book for publication, it became apparent that the material formatted as presented to Synod, particularly the Confessions, would present a problem for the TPH. As presented, the Confessions would take up too much room in the TPH, increasing both its size and cost. Thus, formatting of the Creeds and Confessions in the TPH is more condensed.

After discussing this with the editor of the TPH, and after presenting our idea to the calling church of this Synod and the Stated Clerk of the Federation, we decided to include the Creeds and Confessions in our book in their fully formatted version. The reason for this concerns the layout of the Confessions, especially the Heidelberg Catechism. Knowing that the Catechism is regularly used in our worship services and knowing that the format presented to Synod 2016 was in a more appealing and readable format, we believed it would serve the churches to have the Confessions available to them in this format. Though this increased the cost of the LFB slightly, we were convinced this cost was justifiable.

### **Cost**

At the time of this writing we are unable to provide an accurate cost for the Creeds and Confessions (CC) booklet. We cannot provide an accurate cost because any quote we might obtain before the publication of the Agenda for Synod would no longer be valid by the time

Synod meets. Quotes of this sort are only valid for 30 days. An accurate price will only be possible after Synod. A new quote will be received after the Synod has approved its publication. The number of CC books to be published also affects the price of this booklet. At our last Synod, the churches committed to publishing both a hard and soft cover version of this booklet. If we print 10,000 copies as a soft cover booklet, it will cost approximately \$1 USD. If we print 1000 copies of the hardcover booklet, it will cost approximately \$5 USD. The total cost of printing the book will be \$15,000 USD. Assuming Great Commission Public Publications distributes this book (as it does the TPH and the FP), there will be an added 10% to the cost. An estimated cost for this booklet, therefore, would be \$17,000 USD. The material in that booklet will be presented in the same format, with the same introductions as is found in the FP. As all the pre-publication work for compiling this booklet has already been completed in the preparation of FP, getting it printed will not take much time.

As the Canadian Corporation is the copyright holder for the FP, we recommend that they be tasked with taking care of any future print runs of both the FP and the CC books.

### **Electronic Publication**

The committee has had numerous requests for electronic access to the synodically approved liturgical forms, prayers, creeds, and confessions. While we have focused our efforts on timely delivery of print products, we believe that digital publication and distribution is essential both for the use of the churches of our federation and for sharing with the broader church outside the URCNA.

Furthermore, we believe that there is tremendous value in producing a high-quality web version of our creeds and confessions, as well as a mobile app platform for use in the home and classroom. As the URCNA is publishing for the first time in its history a standard version of our creeds and confessions, we believe that we should create a similarly branded destination website for electronic versions of these resources. This website could be easily accessed from our church websites, saving individual churches from having to design their own pages, and further promoting the confessional bonds we have as a federation. Furthermore, electronic publication of our common confessional identity will also help in the missionary efforts of the URCNA as we seek to share our heritage with universal church beyond our federation.

However, we believe the web architecture and design required to develop state of the art web and mobile products is likely beyond the capacity of the current [urcna.org](http://urcna.org) platform. While the bulk of the print publication work of the Liturgical Forms Committee is now completed, we recommend that a reduced version of our committee be mandated and provided the resources to professionally develop and explore electronic publication, including web, mobile, and Kindle / eReader.

### **Committee Personnel**

As we sought to fulfill this work, it became apparent to our Chairman, Rev. Danny Hyde, that he was unable to give this work the attention it required. Rev. Hyde asked to be relieved of his duties, which we granted, grateful for all the excellent work he had accomplished to this point. The Prayers section of our book is especially the work of Rev. Hyde and is a rich blessing for the churches. We selected Rev. Dr. Brian Lee to serve as Chairman in his place.

### **Recommendations**

- 1) We recommend Synod mandate the Liturgical Forms Committee to produce electronic versions of the forms, prayers, creeds, and confessions for the churches, in a state of the art web design accessible from [urcna.org](http://urcna.org) and church websites.
- 2) We recommend Synod mandate the Liturgical Forms Committee to produce a mobile app version of our creeds and confessions.
- 3) We recommend providing a budget for professional design and web development of web and mobile app products, in the amount of \$10,000.
  - a. Grounds for Recommendations 1 – 3:
    - i. Electronic publication enables the churches to reap the maximum harvest from the labor already invested in the production of these documents.
    - ii. Electronic publication will enrich family worship and classroom use.
    - iii. Electronic publication will expand the reach of our creeds and confessions beyond the URCNA and increase the visibility of our federation.
    - iv. Electronic publication will facilitate missions.
- 4) As the pre-publication production and editing tasks of the committee have been completed, we recommend releasing the following members of this committee with the thanks of the churches for their work over these past number of years: Rev. Dr. Mark Beach, Rev. William Van der Woerd, and Rev. Mitchell Dick.
  - a. Grounds: These men have served well and well-deserve their release.
- 5) We recommend retaining in order to complete the work of printing CC and electronic publication a reduced committee comprised of Chairman Brian Lee and Secretary Joel Dykstra, as well as other committee members who may bring subject matter experience in the area of electronic publishing.
  - a. Grounds: There remains work for the committee, though at a reduced level. Continuity with current Liturgical Forms committee membership is useful in the preparation and publication of these documents, and the addition of subject matter expertise would be welcome.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Joel Dykstra, Clerk

# **Missions Committee Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

## **I. Introduction**

The URCNA Missions Committee has been hard at work over the last two years to fulfill its mandate, particularly as it was expanded at Synod Wyoming (2016) to include advising the churches in the matter of missions.

The primary focus of our efforts over the last two years has been to work with sending churches of foreign missionaries to develop continuance and exit strategies for their various works. This has been a very delicate exchange; we respect that our churches have overseen these mission works with countless hours, prayers, and dollars over many years. Our goal has been to come alongside such churches to learn from them and give advice where we can. Overall, we believe that so far the process has been very beneficial, and we look forward to meeting further with more churches to continue this process.

One change you'll see in our report this year is that we have not included updates on the various URCNA Mission Works. With the Trumpet now operating at full throttle and up-to-date prayer requests being sent out to the churches for weekly inclusion in their bulletins, we felt that this portion of our report would be redundant. We were also grateful to hear that we would have 2 hours during Synod for reports from those church planters and missionaries that are present. We are thankful that the awareness of our federation in regard to our mission works has greatly increased.

We have also had one membership change within the committee. Pastor Michael Brown has taken a call to serve the church in Milan, Italy as Pastor Andrea Ferrari moves to Perugia, Italy to be the pastor there. This has led to the resignation of Pastor Brown from our committee, and Pastor Tom Morrison has been appointed as the new delegate from Classis Pacific South West. We extend our thanks to brother Brown for his many years of service on the committee, and warmly welcome brother Morrison as he takes up his work with us.

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 make disciples of all nations.

## ***Table of Contents***

- I. Introduction
- II. Report of the Missions Coordinator
- III. Advisory Matters
- IV. Clerical and Financial Matters
- V. Appendices

***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 and facilitating cooperation 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 serve 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.
  - (e) The committee shall serve 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.
  - (f) 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).
  - (g) The committee shall produce a report on the work of URCNA missions to each synod.
  - (h) 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 Richard Anjema (Cl. WCAN)*  
*Pastor Jared Beaird (Cl. PNW, Clerk)*  
*Pastor Harry Bout (Cl. EON)*  
*Pastor Richard Bout (Cl. SWON, Missions Coordinator)*  
*Pastor Greg Bylsma (Cl. SWON, Chairman)*  
*Pastor Jody Lucero (Cl. CUS, Vice-chairman)*  
*Pastor Tom Morrison (Cl. SWUS,)*  
*Pastor Paul Murphy (Cl. EUS)*  
*Elder Paul Wagenmaker (Cl. MI)*

## **II. Missions Coordinator's Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

### **A. Introduction**

Now well into the fourth year as Missions Coordinator, I am excited to report to our federation of the progress made and the developing vision for the future. As I have visited throughout our federation I have sensed a growing excitement about our mission works and a growing desire to work together more, both at home and abroad. My hope is that this report will serve to unify our plans and prayers for our mission works. In everything, we have the promises of a faithful God who will be with us as we go and make disciples, and as we gather in His name. What a comfort and what a motivation!

My visits and communications with our domestic and foreign works this year have served to deepen the communication and trust that we need to work together in unity. Some works need little input, but most works grapple with the logistics of mission work from month to month. I feel privileged to work alongside and add my labour to the labours of our sending churches and missionaries, together with the Synodical Missions Committee. I am constantly aware of how much work there is to do in the harvest field, and how insufficient our own efforts are. Thank the Lord for His powerful Word and Spirit that will accomplish His will perfectly, despite our imperfection.

### **B. Analysis**

Because this synodically appointed position gives me a uniquely broad, yet close-up, view of our entire federation's activities, one of my responsibilities is to give analysis and proposals. The following analysis has been reviewed and approved by the Missions Committee as they have laboured very closely with me through this last year. I have tried to be brief and to the point. It is given with the deep desire to encourage and build up, even as we "look in the mirror" and plan for the future together. May God bless us as we humble ourselves before Him and continue to work together.

Since the inception of the URCNA, most of our mission works have not been planned together. An expansion takes place when a local church decides to begin a new work or when a ministry of the URCNA internally adds a new position. When we close a mission work, the sending church makes that decision, even though the mission may be supported by many others within our federation.

But in both expansion and closure, there is little or no thought given as to how the work or the missionary fits into the big picture of URCNA missions works. This affects our churches, our missionaries, and the people to whom they minister. Luke 14:28-30 exhorts us to consider the cost of building a tower. *Unfinished works are, in many cases, a poor testimony to the world.* I believe that this should give us pause and cause us to reflect on our present course of action.

Here are some of the issues that we are facing:

- i. The reality of local churches sending out missionaries is that there is often *little historical foundation* from which to work. There is no body of collective knowledge to draw from, no standard set of protocols. We start fresh every time and much manpower is devoted to reinventing the wheel.
- ii. The motivation or impetus is potentially the *vision of a few* (sometimes down to one), rather than a shared or unified vision. This weakens the work's stability and longevity. (ie. changeover of consistory members.)
- iii. We currently *lack proper self-analysis* as to whether or not we are "doing well" in our missions. A mission work can languish for many years without any clear direction. This has been detrimental to our ability to grow together in missions.
- iv. Many of our sending churches have found that it is much more difficult to oversee and support a missionary than they had initially imagined. "*Missionary-sending fatigue*" has set in, and many churches feel they need practical help in keeping their missionary on the field. Many overseeing committees, JVCs, and other bodies have been created to help in the oversight and management of our mission works. But many of them have gotten bogged down in the day-to-day input required. Churches are so busy with their own local situations and have difficulty investing time and energy into their missionary.
- v. In the last number of years we have closed several mission works. We are struggling to make long- term plans for several others.
  - Two domestic works (Hawaii and Maryland) have been closed, and the missionaries have taken calls to other churches.
  - Two foreign missionaries have come off the field, and the works they were involved is suspended.
  - These closures are in addition to 10-15+ previous mission works that were begun and then closed.
  - Several missionaries are presently approaching retirement, and churches have no plan of action for the long-term.

My overarching concern is that we presently do not have an organized way of doing missions with proper checks and balances. While URC missions has a logo on its map and correspondence, we are functioning more as "independent" churches rather than reformed or presbyterian. It is natural for me as coordinator to be concerned that I have no norms or policies to bring to our mission works. Our conversations with our missionaries and their elders tend to become a prayer for them to be "warm and well-fed," but lack the encouragement that comes from true help and direction. This has also made it difficult as a committee as we try to solve problems without clear guidelines. I am convinced that there is a need for strategic, big-picture planning in order to work effectively together for the future of missions.

**The question that I would like to lay before you is, "*How do we address these concerns as a federation and move forward in a new direction?*"**

It is encouraging to realize that the concerns before us have been addressed by other faithful Reformed denominations. Even a cursory glance at the history of Reformed

missions shows the blessing of God on intentional, careful missionary work. Up to this point in our history, the URCNA has not availed itself of the precedents and policies that have been characteristic of faithful Reformed missions.

Over the last year I have had discussions with leaders and missionaries in several NAPARC churches and have felt that there is much that we can learn from them. The Missions Committee has also had meetings with the OPC and their two primary missions coordinators to see how they are going about their domestic and foreign mission work. Many of the policies that they have in place have helped them plan and coordinate their home and foreign works for close to one hundred years. I personally have been very impressed at the care that they are giving to their missionaries, and the policies that they have developed to oversee their men. They seem to balance very well being an overseeing committee and not a missions board.

Here are some core principles that dictate the logistics of missions in the OPC:

**1) Thorough investigation of potential fields is not only done by local churches but by a wider body of representatives.**

- In home missions, there is a thorough assessment process that potential church-plants must go through to determine their viability.
- In foreign missions this assessment process includes an in-depth investigation of the field, multiple visits to the field by several representatives over many months, as well as a setting up an “exploratory field”<sup>1</sup> before a long-term commitment is made.

**2) Vetting of prospective missionaries is an essential part of strong mission work.**

- The OPC is committed to getting the right man for the right job. All of their men in both foreign and domestic missions are fully vetted through a rigorous assessment process to be sure that they are both qualified and gifted for mission work.
- Pastors with experience are normally chosen to fill the role of church-planting.
- In foreign missions the OPC normally does not send national men to the country of their origin as missionaries of the OPC, but instead seeks to call men from their own denomination who have a proven track record.

**3) Initial and ongoing training is given to all missionaries.**

- For domestic church planters, this involves internal training before being sent out. Further training is given while on the field (something that the OPC is currently seeking to strengthen).
- For men sent to the foreign field this includes one month spent at a Missionary Training Institute in Colorado Springs, CO, as well as language and cultural training. (I visited this facility last year.)

---

<sup>1</sup> OPC Making Disciples of All the Nations: A Plan for Reformed Foreign Missions – Part 3



**4) Practical oversight is given to every missionary by the missions committee through regular communication and feedback.**

- In both foreign and domestic works this includes regular reporting to the committee, on-site visits, plus yearly reviews of progress/difficulties in the work.
- This allows for a system of healthy checks and balances that encourages the missionary in his work.

These four principles are the building blocks and basically show the way to spiritual “quality control.” Qualifications are important, both for the missionary and his sender. Consider that while Paul received a special commission from the Lord Jesus to his apostleship to the Gentiles, he regularly defended his qualifications in very human terms (2 Corinthians 11). He also qualified his workers to the churches (Philippians 2, Ephesians 6, Colossians 4, etc.). He also qualified the churches to the elders (Acts 15, 21).

I am convinced that it would be prudent for our federation as a whole to look carefully at the OPC model as an example for us to follow. Their model promotes cooperation and coordination among the churches. Moreover the OPC model supplies broader accountability and oversight beyond that which a local church or even a JVC can provide.

At the present time our investigation of new fields, our vetting of new missionaries, our training of our present missionaries, and our oversight of our missionaries can be strengthened. We need to improve in all these areas. My hope is that we will look at our present model of missions and adopt the above practices, where possible, and make them our own. By doing this we will create more stable and healthy mission fields and will have clearer guidelines and procedures that give us a way to grow together as a federation in the future.

**C. On-going Projects of the Missions Coordinator in 2017-18:**

- The Trumpet. I have continued to correspond with our missionaries, edit articles, and send out the Trumpet to our congregations each month.
- Prayer Map. The fourth edition is just off the press and will be distributed in March 2018 to all of our churches. A Spanish edition of the prayer map was produced for our Spanish speaking works in 2017.
- Website. I continue to update the [urcnamissions.org](http://urcnamissions.org) website regularly, as needed. On it we have separate pages for each of our mission works. The latest editions of the Trumpet, prayer requests, and reports on the persecuted church are regularly updated.
- Bulletin Prayer Announcements. These are produced on a monthly basis and are sent out to all URCNA congregations for use in their weekly bulletins.
- URCNA Missions Conference. Together with Rev. Brian Cochran and Rev. Norm Van Eden Petersman, the Missions and Pastors Conference was organized in May 2017 in Guelph, ON. Speakers from several NAPARC churches spoke on

the theme, “Every Church a Church-Plant.” It was a wonderful time of growth and fellowship together. Initial plans for the 2019 Conference are presently being made.

#### **D. Specific Activities of the Missions Coordinator in 2017-18:**

Below are recorded my activities and meetings for all of 2017 and January – March 21, 2019. Not specified here would be my office work (e.g. writing and preparations for my meetings, presentations, sermons, travel arrangements, regular correspondence and phone calls, as well as the URCNA missions web-site management).

#### **2016**

- April 1<sup>st</sup> – The Trumpet & monthly prayer requests sent.
  - Meeting with Rev. Norm V. (planning of URCNA missions conference)
- April 3<sup>rd</sup> – Preached in Living Water URC.
- April 5<sup>th</sup> – Meetings with Rev. Steve Williamson, Scotty Wright (MARS Student), Hilmer Jagersma (CANRef student), Eric Hoeksma – Missionary worker in Hamilton URC.
- April 12<sup>th</sup>-14 Pastor’s Conference.
- April 20<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> **Visit to URC Missionary Andrea Ferrari – Milan & Perugia, Italy.**
  - Spoke in church in Milan.
  - Preached and spoke at family conference in Perugia.
- May 1<sup>st</sup> - Trumpet and weekly prayer requests sent.
- May 3<sup>rd</sup> – Speak in Hope Reformed School
- May 12 – CPAC Phone Meeting – Central Classis Missions Committee
- May 15 – Meeting with Rev. Jose Ramirez.
- May 20 – Meeting – with Mission Committee Chair – Rev. Greg Bylsma
- May 29 – Preach in Scarborough URC Church Plant.
- May 31 – Conference Call with Missions Committee
- June 5 – Preach Spanish Migrant Work
- June 1<sup>st</sup> - Trumpet and weekly prayer requests sent.
- June 9 CPAC phone meeting.
- **June 13-17 Trip – Synod, Wyoming, MI**
- June 19 – Preach Hamilton URC
- June 26 – Preach Niagara Falls URC Church Plant.
- June 28 – Meeting Strathroy URC
- June 29 – Meeting – PCA Pastors
- June 30 - CPAC Phone Meeting
- July 9 – 16 – VACATION
- July 1<sup>st</sup> Trumpet and weekly prayer requests sent.
- July 17 – Preach in Living Water & Redeeming Grace URC Churches
- July 19 – Meeting - PCA Pastors
- July 26 – Conference call.

- July 27 – Meeting with URC Missionary Tony Z.
- July 30 – August 6 – VACATION
- August 1<sup>st</sup> - Trumpet and weekly prayer requests sent.
- **August 8-15<sup>th</sup> Trip – Calgary, AB**
  - Spoke in Summit Youth Conference
  - Spoke in Soccer Outreach of Edmonton URC.
  - Preached/presented in Calgary URC
- **August 18 -22 Trip – Jersey City, NJ**
  - Led a team of YP to help/visit Sam & Emily Perez
  - Preached in Jersey City URC Church Plant.
  - Visited URC in NYC.
- August 22<sup>nd</sup>- Sept. 2 - VACATION.
- September 1 - Trumpet and weekly prayer requests sent.
- September 4 – Preach Niagara Migrant Ministry
- September 8 – CPAC Phone Meeting
- September 10 – Spoke in conference at Canadian Reformed Seminary
- September 15 – Meeting with MC Chair – Rev. Greg Bylsma
- **Sept. 20 & 21 – TRIP - NAPARC Meeting – Philadelphia, PA**
  - Meeting with OPC General Secretary of Foreign Missions, Mark Bube
  - Meeting with General Secretary of Domestic Missions, John Shaw
- **Sept 22 – Oct. 4 – TRIP to India**
  - Visited southern India – Rev. Moses
  - Preached/taught in pastor's/elders conference
  - Visited Steve & Nalini Poelman
  - Spoke in university gathering.
- **Sept. 11&12 - TRIP – Visit to Eastern Classis US**
  - Meeting of classical missions committee
- October 18 – Conference call with Missions Committee
- October 24 – Visit with URC missionaries – Ernie & Betsy Landegndoen
- October 26 – Church-planter training monthly training session.
- October 27 – Visit with Rev. Eric Kagayan
- **Oct. 31 – Nov. 3 Trip to Chicago/ MI**
  - Visit with URC church-planter Ruben Sernas
  - Visit with OPC student Ruben Zartman
  - Meeting with CPAC – Central Classis Missions Committee
  - Presentation at MARS/meeting with faculty
  - Presentation in Cornerstone URC, MI on trip to India
  - Meeting with Cornerstone consistory to discuss trip.
- Trumpet and weekly prayer requests sent.
- **Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>- 15<sup>th</sup>. Trip to Colorado Springs church plant.**
  - Visited with Tony & Donna Phelps
  - Met with Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen & Rev. Phelps
  - Preached/presented in Colorado Springs church-plant.
  - Day-long visit to MTI (Missionary Training International)
- Nov. 16 - Visit with migrant workers & Jose Ramirez

- Nov. 17. CPAC phone meeting.
- Nov. 20 Preach – Living Water URC
- Nov. 23 – PCA church-planter training – monthly day-long session.
- December 1 – Trumpet and weekly prayer requests sent.
  - Meeting with Rev. Daniel Ventura.
- December 4 – Preached in Toronto Covenant URC
- December 10 - RMS board meeting – phone conference call
- December 12-19 VACATION
- **December 20 – 29 - Trip to Tepic, Mexico**
  - Preached/presented in Tepic church-plant.
  - Visit with Matt. & Anne-Marie Van Dyken.
  - Spoke in family conference.

## 2017

1. Jan. 1 Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
2. Jan. 6 - Meeting with Rev. Rich Bultje.
3. Jan 6. Meeting with Rev. Greg B. – missions chair
4. Jan. 9 – Missions conference meeting with Rev. Norm Van Eeden Petersman.
5. Jan. 13 – Meeting with Rev. Mitch Persaud.
6. Jan. 16 – Meeting with Rev. Christo Heiburg.
7. Jan 24- 27 – **Mission Committee Meeting – Phoenix, AZ.**
8. February 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
9. February 1&2 **Trip to MI**
  - Meeting with Cornerstone URC, Rev. Vos
  - Meetings with Rev. Freswick, Rev. Najapfour
10. Jan. 24-27 **Trip** - Missions Committee meeting – Fl.
11. Feb. 1. - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
12. Feb. 7-9 – **Trip to Phoenix, AZ** - Cohorts Conference
13. Feb. 20 – Visit with Rev. Marty Vogel.
14. Feb. 22 Church-planter training.
15. Feb. 23 – March 1 – **Trip to Honduras** with Rev. Langendoen & Rev. Bouwers
16. March 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
17. March 3. – Visit with Rev. Gerald Malkus from OPC.
18. March 4- Visit with OPC missionary Eric Tuiniga.
19. March 7&8 – **Trip to Cape Coral, FL** - MINTS meeting.
  - Visit with Rev. Neal Hegeman & Rev. Jose Ramirez.
20. March 10-15 - **Trip to CA**
  - Visit to Rev. Taylor Kern.
  - Preached in Ontario Hispanic Ministry.
  - Visit with CA Southwest Classis, visit with Rev. Gordon.
21. March 19 – Preach Niagara Spanish Ministry
22. March 20 - Prayer maps printed – Beamsville, ON
23. March 21 – Church-planter training – Hamilton
24. March 22 - Meeting with Rev. Greg Bylsma
25. March 23 – Visit to Classis Eastern ON
26. March 24 – Meeting with Rev. Rich Bultje and oversight committee

27. March 30 – Meeting with Rev. Ernie L. and Honduras oversight committee of Immanuel URC.
28. March 31 – Prayer maps sent to all URCNA churches.
29. April 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
30. April 19 – Church-planting course Toronto
31. April 20 Meeting with Tom Van Manen (missionary to Africa)
32. April 30 – Preach in Spanish Migrant Work Dundas, ON.
33. 36 km – April 21 - Meeting with Greg Bylsma
34. April 23 - Visit to Rev. Tony Zekveld
35. April 24 - Meeting with overseeing church of Hope Center - Wyoming URC
36. April 26 - Meeting with Rev. Tony Zekveld & Arjan De Visser.
37. May 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
38. May 3 - Meeting - Guelph Bible conference
39. May 4 – Meeting with Can Ref seminary student Scott Bradenhof
40. May 5 – Preach in Spanish migrant service Dundas
41. May 7 – Speak in London URC/CanRef missions evening
42. May 11&12 - **Trip to MI**
  - Meeting with Cornerstone URC.
  - Meeting with Rob Brinks – Reformed Mission Services
43. May 14 – Preach in Listowel URC
44. May 15-18 **URCNA Missions Conference** – Guelph, ON
45. May 25 - Visit to Rich Bultje & Thabet Megaly – Niagara Falls, ON.
46. May 30 – June 1 –**Trip to MI.**
  - Visit to Bethany URC, Wyoming,
  - Visit with Rev. Phil Vos, Rev. Sernas,
47. June 1<sup>st</sup> - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
48. June 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> – **Visit to OPC General Assembly.**
49. June 13 – Visit with Can Ref – Hamilton Seminary
50. June 7 - Classis meeting – Strathroy, ON
51. June 15- Meeting with Rev. Bylsma
52. June 16 - Visit with Rev. Thabet Megaly – St. Catherines
53. June 18 - Preach in URC church-plant – Scarborough, ON
54. June 21 – Church-planting training PCA – Toronto
55. June 25 – Preach in URCNA church plant – Living Hope
56. June 29-July 5<sup>th</sup>. **Trip to NJ, NY, MD**
  - Visit with Sam & Emily Perez
  - Meeting with Eastern Classis Church-planting Committee
  - Visit to NY – MERF - Rev. Paul Murphy
  - Visit to Cambridge, MD – Rev. Steve Arrick
57. July 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
58. July 9 - Preach Migrant Ministry– Dundas, ON
59. July 16 – Preach – URC Church-plant - Niagara Falls, ON.
60. July 14-19<sup>th</sup> – **ICRC Conference, Jordan, ON.**
61. July 23 – Preach – Sheffield URC, ON.
62. July 25 – Visit Rick Postma – Word & Deed (Free Reformed mission organization).

63. July 27 – Visit with Will Hesterberg – ITEM.
64. August 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
65. August 7-11 **Summit Youth Conference**, Calgary, ON
66. August 20 – Preach Redeeming Grace & Living Water URC.
67. August 21-September 4 – VACATION.
68. September 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
69. September 6 – 8 Meeting with MI classis church-planting committee.
70. September 11 & 12 **Trip to Central Classis meeting** – Waupun, WI
  - Meeting with Pella consistory – overseeing consistory of Ecuador mission.
71. Sept. 14 – Meeting with Arjan De Visser, Professor of Missions at Can Ref Seminary in Hamilton ON.
72. Sept. 15 – Meeting with Rev. Eric Pennings - MINTS
73. Sept. 21–25<sup>th</sup> **Trip to Romania** (with Rev. Paul Murphy).
  - Visit with Rev. Mihai Corcea.
  - Preached in Bucharest.
74. Sept. 25<sup>th</sup> – October 2<sup>nd</sup>. **Trip to Italy** (with Rev. Paul Murphy).
  - Visit with Rev. Andrea Ferrari.
  - Visit to Milan, Turin, Perugia.
  - Preached in Milan
75. Oct. 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
76. Oct. 11<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> VACATION
77. Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>- November 8<sup>th</sup> – **Trip to Can Ref church plant** – Queretaro, Mexico
  - Investigation of viability of a church plant
  - Visited and hosted area church leaders
  - Preached 3 Sundays in Queretaro churches
  - Met with leaders from Pan de Vida orphanage and Can Ref churches
78. Nov. 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
79. Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>- 27<sup>th</sup> – **Trip to Nayarit**
  - Visit with Rev. Matt & Anne-Marie Van Dyken
  - Preached in Eternal Life Church URCNA– Nov. 19 & 26
80. Nov. 28<sup>th</sup> – Dec. 5<sup>th</sup> VACATION
81. Dec. 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
82. Dec 6<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> **Trip to TN, IL.**
  - Visit with Rev. Andrew Spriensma
  - Visit with Rev. Nathan Brummel & Rev. Ken Anema – Divine Hope
  - Meeting with MARS students and Rev. Jeff De Boer.
  - Meeting with Rev. Ruben Sernas
83. Dec. 12 – Consultation and meeting with Can Ref churches in Toronto.
84. Dec. 12-14 **Trip to NY.**
  - Meeting with Rev. Paul Murphy.
  - Visit with OPC - Domestic and Foreign Coordinators, Mark Bube, John Shaw.
85. December 18 – Visits with URC missionaries - Rev. Rich Bultje, Rev. Thabet Megaly.
86. December 31 – Preach in URC church-plant Redeeming Grace, Living Hope, ON

## **2018**

87. January 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
88. January 7 – Preach in Living Water URC and Trinity URC.
89. January 11 – Meeting with faculty of Can Ref Seminary
  - Meeting with Rev. Hillmer Jagersma
90. January 13 – Meeting with Rev. Rich Bultje.
91. January 15 – Visit with Rev. Ernie and Betsy Langendoen.
92. **January 22<sup>nd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> Yearly meeting with Mission Committee, San Diego, CA.**
93. January 26<sup>th</sup> – Meeting with Christ URC (Italy mission)
  - Meeting with Westminster CA students
94. January 31 – Meeting with Rev. Al Bezuyen.
95. February 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
96. February 5 – Muslim TV program – Rev. Thabet Megaly – St Catharines, ON.
97. Feb. 6-8 – **Trip to Phoenix, AZ** - Meeting with URCNA ministers – Cohort conference.
98. Feb. 13 – Meeting with Rev Mitch Persuad.
  - Meeting with Rev. Tony Zekveld.
99. Feb. 25<sup>th</sup> – Preached in Redeeming Grace.
100. March 1 - Trumpet and Prayer requests sent.
101. March 4 – Preach in Niagara Spanish Ministry – Jordan URCNA.
102. March 5 – Meeting with Rick Postma – Word & Deed
103. March 6 Meeting with seminary student – Scott Bradenhof
104. March 8 – 15 – Vacation.
105. March. 14 – Meeting with OPC church-planter - Rev. Eric Watkins.
106. March 17 & 18 **Trip to visit URCNA church-planter - Rev. Zac Wyse, Cincinnati, OH.**
  - Preached in Westside Reformed Church
  - Visit with Zac & KC
  - Meeting with leaders of Westside RC.
107. **March 19-21 Trip to MINTS meetings – Ft. Meyers**
108. March 21 – Classis Southwestern, ON.

### **III. Advisory Matters**

Part of our mandate as the URCNA Missions Committee is to advise churches in the work of missions in both the foreign and domestic field (Mandate 1.e.). As part of our accountability to Synod for that we share the following:

#### **A. Foreign Missions**

Over the last two years we have focused upon advising churches that are overseeing men on the foreign field. When we have met with these churches formally, we have done so with the goal of helping them develop entrance, continuance, and exit strategies that are in line with our adopted guidelines for

foreign missions. To date we have met for this purpose with the Consistories, local missions committees or representatives thereof from the following churches:

- a. Emmanuel URC, Jordan (overseeing Rev. Ernie Langendoen in Honduras)
- b. Covenant Reformed Church, Pella (overseeing Rev. Pablo Landazuri in Ecuador)
- c. Bethany URC, Wyoming (overseeing Rev. Bill Green in Costa Rica)
- d. Christ URC, Santee (overseeing Rev.s Andrea Ferrari, Mihai Corcea and Michael Brown)
- e. Cornerstone URC, Hudsonville (overseeing Rev. Steve Poleman in India)
- f. Trinity URC, Caledonia (overseeing Rev. Nick Lamme in Costa Rica)

These visits have gone to various depths depending upon the interest and desires of the local churches. Some churches have more eagerly worked with us in these areas, and others less so. Some churches have simply not been able to meet with us yet due to other factors. We strive to fulfill our mandate from Synod insofar as we are able based on the cooperation of the local church and the time we have available as committee members, and we are thankful for the general welcome that we have received among the churches of the federation.

#### **B. Relationships with International Students Studying in North America**

In giving advice to the churches of the federation we have noticed a growing trend for international students studying in North America to develop relationships with local URCNAs during their seminary years. This is a great way to show care and compassion to a stranger in our midst, and as a result of this Christian love many students seek to have churches send them back to their home countries as URCNA missionaries. While we praise God for this growing relationship and display of unity in the universal body of Christ, there are times when our desire to do good can actually hinder the well being of Christ's church overseas. This has led us to draft a document entitled, "International Seminary Students and the URCNA: A Way Forward." It is in Appendix 1 of our report, and we would like to ask Synod to adopt this as pastoral advice to the churches. We also ask that Synod approve this as a document which we would use as a committee in helping international students serve faithfully in their home countries as this continues to arise in the future.

**Recommendation 1:** That Synod adopt Appendix One of this report, "International Seminary Students and the URCNA: A Way Forward," as pastoral advice to the churches in working with international seminary students who desire to return to their home countries as URCNA missionaries.

**Recommendation 2:** That Synod encourage the Missions Committee to use, "International Seminary Students and the URCNA: A Way Forward," as they advise churches and international students regarding cooperation with foreign nationals in Gospel ministry.



### **C. Support for Those Serving in Para-Church Organizations**

Part of our task in helping the churches cooperate in missions is to help congregations know which missionaries, either at home or overseas, can use additional financial help. To that end we have begun an annual letter to the churches highlighting which missionaries may be in special need of financial help to meet their yearly budget. This letter is sent out in November of the given year, and has been very well utilized by the churches to ensure that our missionaries are well supported in their labours.

In doing this, however, we have become aware that as a federation we are closely tied to some worthy para-church organizations that have significant budgets (such as MINTS and/or Divine Hope). To help ensure that URCNA missionaries labouring with these ministries are supported we have and will continue to publish need where URCNA *pastors* are falling short of the finances they need for their own individual support. However, to ensure that these ministries do not drain too many resources from the federation, we have restrained from showing the shortfall for the budget of the *organization*. We wish to share this decision with Synod to maintain transparency and allow comment should they have a concern with this approach.

### **D. Domestic Missions**

As we work with the churches in giving advice we have become aware of how much work there is to do. Up to the year 2014, the work of the Missions Committee focused primarily on policy and advice for domestic missions (missions within North America). Since Synod 2014, the committee has focused primarily on policy and advice for foreign missions. Looking forward to the next two years, the Missions Committee recognizes that they still have more sending congregations to meet with in developing entrance, continuance, and exit strategies for our current missionary works. We have also had numerous potential missionaries (all foreign nationals studying in North America) who desire to be sent back to their home country, and each of these takes time to give advice as a Missions Committee. The result of this is that our advice and focus upon domestic missions has not been what it ought to be.

To help remedy this we are seeking several things from Synod Wheaton 2018. Some are noted in recommendations below, while others have been brought to Synod through overtures from local churches to ensure, as much as possible, that proper ecclesiastical procedure is being followed. We are heartily in favor of overtures that may come forward asking to add a second Missions Coordinator with a focus on domestic missions. We believe that cooperation between two dedicated men could greatly strengthen our abilities to advance the kingdom through reaching the lost.

We also are giving recommendations that churches begin considering how they can help strengthen domestic missions by creating ministry teams within urban centers. One of the points raised at our 2017 URCNA Missions and Pastor's Conference was on the difficulty of keeping consistent strong leadership within highly urbanized churches. In such settings membership tends to be more transient; people come to the big city for jobs and often find themselves moving from one place to another in a highly competitive market. At the conference a number of pastors laboring in an urban setting noted the potential benefit of having a second full-time man working alongside them, either as a second pastor or a paid, full-time ministry worker. Having heard of this potential help, we are encouraging that churches interested in helping urban church plants contact the church planters to see what help might be most appropriate in the given context.

**Recommendation 3:** That Synod add four qualified members-at-large to the Missions Committee.

**Grounds:**

1. The URCNA Missions Committee has an important but work-intensive task. More workers on this committee with a missions background would allow them to diversify and serve the federation more faithfully.
2. The URCNA Missions Committee is currently composed of 8 pastors and 1 elder. Adding 4 members-at-large would allow us to increase elder representation by 2-3 men, and diversify the gifts present on the committee.
3. Giving advice on matters of difficulty involving missions is a difficult process. Visits to the field and discussions with Consistories are best held with more than one member from the committee, but asking committee members to frequently travel for this purpose is difficult. More members could better share this task.
4. This would allow for greater diversity of gifting within the Missions Committee, and could include someone with a financial background, if needed.

**E. Missionary Training Institute Proposal**

**Background:**

In setting new goals for a shared strategy for foreign missions in the URC, Synod 2016 asked the URCNA Missions Committee to, "investigate concrete means," by which we could give additional training to those called to the mission field in the URC (above and beyond the already required seminary training). (*Acts of Synod 2016, Art. 64, pt. 12*)

The need for men to be well trained for the work of gospel ministry is one that as a church we expect for all of our men going into the ministry. Yet for many graduates who desire to go into missions and church-planting, they do not feel equipped to go to the field directly from seminary. There is a strong desire for further "hands-on" training on the field where they would be mentored in the work and prepared practically on the field.

As part of this strategy, we are looking to develop a year-long internship program through which future missionaries and church planters can work with some of our veteran mission workers to be better prepared for the field.

In considering areas where this one year intern could operate, we believe that an internship based out of New York City under Rev. Paul Murphy would be exceptionally beneficial. New York City is the home of cultures from around the world, allowing exposure to many people from countries where our missionaries may go. It also is near to a number of church plants and outreach focused churches (Washington DC, Cincinnati, Cambridge) within the URCNA where men could learn. It is also within an eight-hour drive of at least 5 current URCNA church plants (Revs. T. Zekveld, M. Persaud, R. Bultje, B. Ziegers, D. Ventura) who also could give input and direction.

Details on how we anticipate this working out are given below.

### **How would it work?**

The year-long internship would be based of New York City under the direction of Rev. Paul Murphy. While taking advantage of concrete work opportunities, the students would do course work organized for them by Rev. Richard Bout and Rev. Paul Murphy in consultation with other URCNA missionaries. The courses would be geared to missiology, methods of evangelism, understanding and adapting to cultural contexts, and other topics that complement, but do not overlap with the typical seminary course of study.

#### **1) Who would be eligible?**

This program would be open to men who have the objective of serving as a missionary or church planter in the URCNA. Preferably these men will have finished their education entirely, however it is possible also for a man to enter the program after completing two years of study.

Eligibility and entry into the program will be managed by both the URCNA Missions Committee. We hope to establish close ties with other NAPARC denominations and our seminaries to help in this process.

#### **2) Where would the financing come from for the MTI?**

Financing for the MTI would come through funds received in the proposed URCNA general fund.

#### **3) How much would it cost per year?**

A stipend of \$2000.00 USD would be paid per month plus housing. Estimating housing at \$1500.00 per month, the total 12-month package would cost approximately \$42,000 – \$50,000 USD, with some flexibility based on housing costs.

#### 4) What benefits would there be for those who complete this internship?

- Opportunity for interaction with experienced men and their ministries in their distinct stages of growth, as they prepare to take on the challenges of church-planting.
- In-depth instruction of other belief systems and cultural training.
- Input and encouragement by the missionaries, as well as assessment of their aptitude for mission work.
- An equipping of our men more adequately for the mission field, and providing a concrete “track of study” for missions-minded seminarians
- We will be promoting more success and longevity for our mission projects and church plants, at home and abroad through a hands-on training.

#### F. Learning From the OPC

As a Missions Committee, we have been both humbled and blessed to learn from the faithful, organized, and zealous work of missions happening within the OPC. We wholeheartedly believe that both our established churches and our efforts at Kingdom advance through church planting could be greatly benefited through a greater understanding and conformity to the principles exercised by this faithful sister church.

One of the strengths we see in the OPC is a strength that, for some in the URC, will be a very scary thing. While continuing to have missionaries called and overseen by churches, the OPC has a central committee which oversees the administrative details of *all* their foreign mission works. This means that local churches have close connections to missionaries, but local elders aren’t burdened with making all the decisions both for the home church and for the church plant they oversee. This allows more churches to step forward in sending missionaries because they can step into such a position without needing to pull significant manpower away from the home church to do so. As a result the missional, ‘feel,’ of the OPC is stronger; more churches have meaningful connections and involvement with the mission field.

The OPC also has home missions committees that look strategically at the North American map, and pro-actively start church plants in cities with little NAPARC presence. They strive to maintain two, “Parachute,” church plants at a time; church plants that do not begin with core groups, but simply with a pastor going into an area to evangelize the lost. This is something few local churches could take on and oversee, but with the help of an overseeing committee it can be done.

We believe that learning more from the OPC will greatly benefit our efforts to advance the Gospel both at home and abroad. Adopting their model of oversight in missions as much as possible will help us strengthen our cooperation and coordination in missions as a federation.

**Recommendation 4:** That Synod appoint a five member, “OPC Missions Study Committee,” with the following mandate:

To investigate the current oversight structure (including financing) which the OPC uses in its missionary endeavors, and to report to the next Synod recommendations for moving URCNA missions to an organizational model based upon that used in the OPC.

**Grounds:**

1. Learning from the organizational structure of the OPC will strengthen our faithfulness and effectiveness in extending God's Gospel Kingdom.
2. The organizational structure of the OPC allows the resources of the federation to be channeled more wisely and strategically for the advance of God's kingdom.
3. The model of the OPC allows local churches to be intimately involved in missions even when they don't have significant local manpower or finances. This model allows smaller churches to be meaningfully connected to global and domestic missions, whereas our current model tends to function only within churches of 200+ members.
4. The OPC model is tested and tried. It has been utilized faithfully for many years without leading to a hierarchical system that hinders pure Gospel teaching or advancement.
5. Study is required beyond the scope of our current Missions Committee if this is going to be a direction we explore as a federation. A Synodically-appointed study committee shows the churches are willing to consider moving in this direction.

**IV. Clerical and Financial Matters**

We have a few clerical matters for Synod to attend to for the functioning of the URCNA Missions Committee.

**Recommendation 5:** That Synod re-appoint Rev. Richard Bout as the URCNA Missions Coordinator.

**Grounds:**

1. Pastor Bout has served well in his first term as Missions Coordinator, and through his labours the federation has grown in unity in missions.
2. Pastor Bout is frequently called upon to serve the churches of the federation in giving advice and visiting church planters both foreign and domestic for encouragement and advice.
3. The Policies of the URCNA Missions Committee require re-appointment of the URCNA Missions Co-ordinator by a 2/3 majority vote of Synod at the first Synod following every three years of service. (Policies C.2.c)
4. Pastor Bout's calling Consistory, the Living Water Reformed Church of Brantford, approves of this reappointment.

**Recommendation 6:** That Synod set Pastor Bout's salary at \$73,780; housing at \$25,616.40; RRSP at \$9939.64 (CDN dollars), and keep all other areas of finance as formerly determined.

**Ground:**

The 'correction' to Pastor Bout's salary at Synod Wyoming 2016 (due to exchange rates) saw a significant decrease from the amount approved in 2014. This amount seeks to strike a middle ground between those numbers.

**Recommendation 7:** That Synod increase our annual budget from \$15,000/a to \$16,000/a.

**Grounds:**

1. If Synod has granted us 4 additional committee members (Members-at-large) we will have extra travel expenses for our annual face-to-face meeting.
2. Our average spending over the last two years, with nine committee members and including all publications, has been \$10,000/a. Years when we host a Missions Conference generally see a \$3,000/a increase.

**Recommendation 8:** That Synod grant the Missions Committee permission to work with the US and Canadian Board of Directors and/or local congregations to establish General Missions Funds. These funds would be distinct funds, with US churches giving and receiving support through the US fund and Canadian churches giving and receiving support through the Canadian fund. These funds would be administered through the URCNA finance committee under the direction of the Missions Committee and be used for the following three purposes:

- 1) To fund needy URCNA mission works that are facing year-end deficits.
- 2) To fund URCNA ministerial students seeking specific practical training for the mission field in the Missionary Training Institute.
- 3) To provide start-up capital for new initiatives and to begin working in new areas.

**Grounds:**

1. In our present system, ministries that are efficient at fundraising are able to use funds to maintain and expand their work, while those who are not, struggle to meet their budgets (some of our mission works were facing shortfalls at the end of 2017). This would allow for funding of needy mission works that are having difficulty meeting budget.
2. Churches desiring to donate to works cross-border have difficulty in doing so due to taxation restraints. This would alleviate the difficulty in giving across Canadian/US borders by having one body that could receive and distribute funds.
3. Donations to URCNA missions by individuals, churches or through estate planning is not presently possible and a system for receiving funds is needed. Many desire to give towards a general URCNA fund rather than to specific ministries. This would provide long-term backing of existing works URCNA works for years to come, through churches, individuals, and estate planning.

## V. APPENDIX ONE

### International Seminary Students and the URCNA: A Way Forward

#### Background

Helping churches in foreign countries without hurting them is probably the most difficult aspect of mission work. The danger of developing a dependency or paternalism is real. On the one hand, we want to give generously to those in need. On the other hand, we need to be good stewards of those resources that God has entrusted to us, seeking to accomplish His work without encouraging unhealthy dependency on North American money. In many cases, a mission work will appear to function well as long as the “oil” of money from abroad keeps things running smoothly. However, when that money is reduced or taken away completely, a mission work trained on dependency will usually fall to pieces. As we think about beginning new mission works, we need to take this into consideration.

It is also important to think about how we begin work in new mission fields. Our missionary endeavors should not be started simply because we have the ability to fund an available man who has a passion for his home country. While there are many valid and needy places throughout the world where we might consider working someday, we must realize our own limitations. As a small federation, we must commit ourselves to careful planning for long-term work in certain foreign fields and focus on them. This is a course that will mean fewer foreign fields for the time being, but health and longevity for the future of our current mission works.

In recent years an increasing number of men from different countries have come to seminaries in North America to study for the ministry. Our seminaries have opened their doors to these men; they have provided them with generous scholarships that make study abroad financially feasible; and they have done much to prepare these men for the work of ministry. We are very thankful to God for returning so many men to their homelands where they are faithfully preaching the Gospel for the advance of the Kingdom throughout the world.

The question that arises for churches in the URCNA is whether or not we should send more of these men as *our* missionaries. At present there are more than a few international students at North American seminaries who are looking for URCNA Consistories that will send them back home as missionaries. The Synodical Missions Committee is well aware of the fact that some of our current foreign missionaries are nationals of those countries where they are serving. We support these men, and are fully committed to encouraging the churches of the federation to continue supporting them as well. But it is our conviction that our young federation needs to pause so that we can assess the situation, and determine how we can most responsibly move forward.

To that end we propose this report for the consideration of Synod, presenting both the common difficulties that arise in sending foreign nationals as well as a possible way forward for responsible service in the future.

## **I. Common Difficulties in Sending Foreign Nationals**

Training an international man and then sending him back to his home country as a URCNA missionary can have great appeal. He will already have expert knowledge of his own language and culture so that no training in these areas will be needed, whereas a great deal more work must go into the missionary training of a man from North America. Why, then, have numerous NAPARC churches made it their policy *not* to send foreign men back to their homelands as missionaries of North American denominations? In short, the practice has historically not worked well, handicapping both the sending church and the foreign national church in different ways.<sup>2</sup> Some of the most common problems that occur are the following:

### **A. Foreign Money Means a Foreign Church:**

Our goal in missions is to create a self-supporting, self-governed, and self-propagating national church, defined by the Gospel of Christ rather than by our own western culture and ideals. As a federation we have adopted phases of mission that have as a goal the removal of foreign influence as God grows His believers in the foreign field. When a national church sends a man to seminary in North America and he returns to that culture as a URCNA missionary, the following unhelpful trends are set.

1. **Dependency:** In our Foreign Missions Manual we describe dependency as follows: “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.”<sup>3</sup> Sending a man back to his home country as a URCNA Missionary under URCNA funds causes a national church, previously self-governing and functioning, to revert back to a stage of dependency on others rather than remaining or growing into a financially self-supporting congregation.

---

<sup>2</sup> See the OPC’s *Manual of the Committee of Foreign Missions*, section 4.1.4.3, p. 26. “In the cultural context of missions, the maintenance of a national believer in the country of his origin, as a representative of a foreign church, can easily be harmful to his ministry and to the church in which he labors. To minimize this difficulty, the Committee ordinarily shall not support a national as a missionary of the OPC in the country of his origin unless he is a citizen of the United States, has lived in the United States at least ten years, and has been engaged for at least five years in an active service as a minister of the OPC.”

<sup>3</sup> Peter Beyerhaus, *The Responsible Church and Foreign Missions* (1964).



2. **Paternalism:** In our Foreign Missions Manual we state that, “A missionary will render his ministry ineffective unless he diligently assumes the humble posture of a learner before a national people.<sup>4</sup> Our goal on the foreign field is not to reproduce a North American church.”<sup>5</sup> When nationals are sent home as employees of the North American church, we reinforce the idea that the only Christians who can really oversee Gospel ministry and provide true Gospel teaching are North American (or those trained there). This is the very definition of paternalism.

Financial support by a North American church for a returning national can also lead to the man’s having a standard of living that is far above that of his neighbors. The serious disparity in income will be an obstacle to united fellowship, not only between the missionary and those under his teaching, but also between the missionary and other pastors. Indigenous peoples may come to view the missionary as a hireling of his North American church.

Within the same category we must also realize that if a pastor’s oversight is ultimately held within North America, his accountability in the local context is significantly reduced. Those who see him the most often are not the same as those who ultimately determine his faithfulness or support him in the ministry. Without a high degree of communication and cooperation between the two churches, the foreign home church can be bypassed or even ignored when the North America church seeks to determine the man’s fitness for ministry. This would completely contradict the spirit of our church order.

3. **A Negative Cycle:** North American support of foreign nationals *will* attract to the ministry other nationals who will in turn seek a seminary education in North America. Through this process international students often lose their desire for ministry in their homeland – in fact, they may even lose their desire to live there again. Historically, a high percentage of international students remain indefinitely in North America following their seminary education. If they do return home as “foreign” missionaries of a North American denomination the problems noted above are usually perpetuated.
4. **Unhealthy National Churches:** “When most or all of the funding for a local church’s budget comes from foreign sources, the local believers are

---

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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).

not themselves invested in the church's work in their community. They do not have true ownership of what God is doing among them. It is foreigners who are taking the financial risk of giving generously to the ministry or to pay their pastor. From a biblical perspective, this also robs the local believers of the blessings that come from giving to the Kingdom. It also fosters the idea that God has not given them what they need to reach out to their own community on a regular basis."

## **B. Foreign Missionaries Means a Passive Church**

A North American church can also develop an unhealthy dependency on its foreign missionary when he is a national of the country that he serves. Since the man is naturally knowledgeable with regard to the language, culture, geography, etc., of his own country, the sending church can become passive with regard to its thorough investigation of the field, and its efforts to exercise oversight of its missionary can be greatly undermined.

Moreover, the North American denomination can easily develop a dependency on foreign countries *to supply it with missionaries* instead of raising up and sending its own men to the foreign field. The result of both of these dangers is an outsourcing of missions, and a failure of the denomination to grapple honestly and faithfully with its calling to see God raise up men and women who can serve internationally in God's great call to make disciples of all nations.

These problems will not happen in every case, but they have happened with such regularity in our sister churches that various NAPARC churches have made it their policy not to employ foreign nationals as their foreign missionaries. The URCNA would be wise to learn from history and from much older and experienced sister churches so that we do not make the same mistakes.

## **II. A Way Forward**

The difficulties that can arise in sending foreign nationals should not lead us to ignore the way we can positively serve our brothers and sisters in other nations, nor how they can positively serve God and His kingdom with the gifts God has given them. The goal of this document is not to prevent any future cooperation with foreign churches, nor to cut current or future ties to Christians from other nations that study in a North American context. Rather, the goal is to help the URCNA work wisely and faithfully to avoid potential pitfalls, and to promote the path leading to the greatest Kingdom benefit when such opportunities for cooperation with foreign Christians (and Christian churches) arise. To that end we suggest the following guidelines for working with seminary students who seek support from the URCNA to return to their home nations as missionaries.

### **A. Conduct Thorough Vetting of Potential Pastors, Including the National Home Church in the Process**

The New Testament shows us a local church which identified and approved qualified men from its own number, and then sent out those men as missionaries (cf. Matt 28:16-20; Acts 13:1-3). This is the model we have sought to follow in our Church Order when we state in Article 3, “Competent men should be urged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man who is a member of a church of the federation and who aspires to the ministry must evidence genuine godliness to his Consistory, which shall assume supervision of all aspects of his training. . .” Ordinarily, such competency is established in the local church as men demonstrate before those church leaders who know them best not only a genuine godliness but also a commitment to serve the Lord and others. Men who meet the qualifications listed in I Timothy 3 and who show that they have the gifts to be a minister of the Word are recommended for consideration.

*But how do we determine this competency and genuine godliness in the case of men who come from foreign lands?* Here we are ordinarily working with two church bodies, the national home church and the church in North America. North American churches must develop a very close relationship with foreign men and their home churches *before* deciding to work together in mission. Much work will be required to establish such a relationship. The national church will need to be visited, and a translator (who is not the student) will often need to be used.

The following questions should be carefully considered by the local URCNA. These questions should be asked regarding the life and testimony of the student not only during his seminary years, but also during those years preceding his seminary education in North America, which will involve thorough communication with his home church.

- 1) How has it been established that the candidate meets the qualifications for pastor as laid out in Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3?
- 2) How has it been established that the man has been faithful in his life and doctrine not only before seminary (while in his home country) but also during his seminary years?
- 3) Have the gifts/abilities required for pastoring and church-planting been demonstrated in the life of the candidate before and throughout his seminary education?
- 4) How has the man demonstrated long-standing commitment to service in a local church?

Once these qualifications have been met, we can begin to speak of partnering in mission to see this man serve his national church in a pastoral capacity.

## **B. Determine the Best Strategy for Cooperation in Kingdom Work Abroad**

The Committee proposes three strategies that should guide the URCNA in working with seminary graduates from other countries who desire to return home to serve as Gospel

ministers. These should serve as helpful categories both for local churches hoping to continue a support relationship with a seminary student after graduation as well as for seminary students who are hoping for a relationship with the URCNA in the future.

### **1. Blessing**

This category of co-operation pertains to a country where we are not presently working. In such a situation an official relationship with the URCNA would not normally be considered a possibility. Under this level of support:

- The student would return to his home church with the blessing, encouragement, and prayer support of the churches he has come to know during his time in seminary.
- The student would not be sent or ordained by the URCNA, nor receive financial support from us either directly or indirectly.
- A request could be made for the federation to investigate the possibility of opening a new field under special circumstances.

### **2. Partnership**

This category of co-operation pertains primarily to countries where we are already working. In such countries a candidate and his home church could enter into a partnership with URCNA churches for the cause of the Gospel. Such a partnership would involve the following:

- Contact would be made with the national church and a relationship developed with them to determine their spiritual needs and how best to work together.
- The student would be ordained within the national church, and his oversight would ideally be held by the congregation that supported him in coming to North America to study.
- Financial support, where needed, would be paid through the local church. The elders and deacons of that church would determine a faithful pay scale, and administer the funds as needed.
- Financial support would ordinarily be on a declining scale over a 5-8 year period.
- The goal would be to help the national churches become healthy and responsible (self-sustaining, self-governing, self-propagating).
- This would encourage men from other countries to remain intimately connected and accountable to their own national church.

### **3. Direct Oversight**

A foreign man may become a URCNA missionary sent back to a mission field where we are currently committed only if the following requirements are met:

- He has become a citizen of the United States or Canada;
- He has lived in the United States or Canada for at least ten years;

- He has been engaged for at least five years in an active service as a minister of the URCNA.<sup>6</sup>

By following these three policies, our federation would be able to present a clear path to international seminary students. We open the door to working in cooperation with foreign men and their churches as opportunities arise, without promising what we cannot provide. These policies should encourage the URCNA to focus on raising up and sending out missionaries from our own churches. They will also help our federation to dedicate ourselves administratively and financially to that goal without ignoring the needs of our sister churches in various areas of the world.

---

<sup>6</sup> These are the guidelines developed by the OPC. See the *Manual of the Committee on Foreign Missions*, section 4.1.4.3 (p. 26).

# **Psalter Hymnal Committee Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

## **I. Introduction**

In 1997, when a committee was appointed to explore the possibility of producing a songbook, the delegates at 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.”

It is our joy to report that now, 21 years later, that work is complete! The *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* is published.

Since we believe that this publication marks the completion of our mandate, we have nothing new to report and simply present the following recommendation:

## **II. Recommendation**

1. That synod declare that the Psalter Hymnal Committee has completed its mandate and dismiss the committee members with its gratitude;

## **III. Conclusion**

It has been our joy to serve the churches on this committee. Our prayer is that this songbook will be a blessing to the churches in assisting God’s people to worship Him in song.

David Buursma  
Rev. Brian Cochran  
Rev. Christopher Folkerts  
Rev. Rand Lankheet  
Denise Marcusse  
Joel Pearce  
Angeline VanderBoom  
Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen (chairman)  
Rev. Harry Zekveld

## Web Oversight Committee Report to Synod Wheaton 2018

March 26, 2018

Dear Esteemed Brothers,

Greetings in the Lord from the members of the URCNA Web Oversight Committee!

The Web Oversight Committee (WOC) is a standing committee of the federation whose mandate concerns matters related to the federation website <http://www.urna.org> as well as the production and publication of an online directory of church-related information. The members of the Committee include both a synodical appointee (the Webmaster, currently Mr. Gary Fisher) and appointees from each of the Classes of the federation. It operates under the authority of the Oversight Consistory of the Web Oversight Committee (OCWOC) who act both as a legal entity and as the responsible ecclesiastical assembly (in the time between Synods) for purposes of clarification and assistance to the WOC in the fulfillment of their mandate, when such is requested (*Acts of Synod 2010*, Art. 57, pt. 14); the OCWOC also serves as one of the courts of appeal in the matter of disputes regarding website postings (*Acts of Synod 2014*, Art. 71, Rec. 5). A report on their work is filed separately from this one.

The current members of the WOC are as follows:

Stephen Adamus	Classis Central US
Rev. Adrian Dieleman	Classis Pacific Northwest
Tim Feijer	Classis Ontario Southwest
Gary Fisher	Synodically appointed Webmaster
Cameron Kellner	Classis Western Canada
Rev. Chuck Tedrick	Classis Southwest US
Bruce Vrieling	Classis Ontario East (Chairman)
Rev. Joel Worries	Classis Central US
(Vacant)	Classis Michigan

In addition to providing assistance to the Webmaster in the execution of his duties (largely through advice, review and approvals), the Committee is often assigned work to do by a Synod. What follows is a summary of the work the Committee has accomplished since the last Synod, and a number of recommendations our Committee is asking this Synod to adopt. In addition, a report from our Webmaster is appended to this report in Appendix A.

### Work Accomplished

Synod Wyoming 2016 asked the WOC to undertake a number of projects:

1. Create a *Recent Ministerial News* section on [www.urna.org](http://www.urna.org) (*Acts*, Art. 17)

In response to an overture, Synod Wyoming 2016 instructed the WOC to create an area on the federation website where important church news relating to Ministers of the Word could be posted. A list of matters appropriate for reporting were summarized by way of an addition to the general responsibilities of the Webmaster outlined in our *Regulations for Synodical Procedure*, item 4.7.4r:

Post the ministerial information received from the consistories of the federation, including the calling of pastors, the answer to this call, availability for call, dissolution of ministerial relationship, the sustaining of ordination and candidacy exams, receiving a license to exhort, suspension, reinstatement, deposition, emeritation, and the deaths of ministers that take place in our federation.

This work has been completed. Please see Recommendation 5 at the end of this report concerning a suggested change to this paragraph.

## 2. Improve the Church Profile Data Collection process (*Acts*, Art. 18, Rec. 2)

Synod Wyoming 2016 encouraged the churches, through their clerks, to submit accurate church information (statistical or otherwise) to the website to be included in the online directories, including the Archive Directory. At the time, the WOC admitted that the data submission process could be confusing due to a number of factors. In an attempt to address this issue, the Committee has done the following:

- i. *Style and Formatting Guide* update: This Guide is a document which outlines how to enter the necessary directory information into the web forms. It has been substantially updated for clarity.
- ii. *Field name changes*: The URCNA website is managed using a proprietary Content Management System (CMS). Due to the fact the statistical forms of the CMS were originally written to collect information on *people*, not *churches*, some of the default field labels in the forms do not make obvious sense for a client who is a church (eg. the “Primary First Name” field where clerks are in fact supposed to enter the name of their church); assistance often had to be sought from the *Guide* to know how to fill the forms in properly. As a result of some development work, this should be corrected by the time Synod meets and the names of the form fields better reflect what they are supposed to contain.
- iii. *Direct phone contact with the clerks*: Our Webmaster, Mr. Gary Fisher, undertook the task of calling each of the churches’ clerks by phone starting in December 2017 and into the new year. The purpose of the calls were to offer assistance and ensure the church statistical information was correct for the 2017 Archive Directory. These phone calls have been completed.



Keeping track of and collecting directory and statistical information is rarely an enjoyable task. It is our hope that the above changes will minimize the frustration associated with this important work.

3. Post the text of the three Creeds approved by Synod Wyoming 2016, with prefaces, on the website (*Acts*, Art. 98, Rec. 11)

This has been completed.

4. Post the text of the three Confessions approved by Synod Wyoming 2016, with prefaces, on the website (*Acts*, Art 69, Rec. 11)

This has not been completed since the final text, with copyright, has not yet been received from the Liturgical Forms Committee at the time of the writing of this report.

## **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** That Synod thank Mr. Gary Fisher for his work as Webmaster, and re-appoint him for another term until the conclusion of the next Synod.

**Recommendation 2:** That Synod thank the Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church of Waupun for their oversight of the Committee, and request that their oversight continue until at least the next Synod.

**Recommendation 3:** Synod Nyack 2012 directed the Web Oversight Committee to recommend an appropriate stipend for the Webmaster. His current annual remuneration stands at \$4500 USD. The Committee recommends this be changed to \$5000 USD/yr starting in 2019.

Grounds:

- a. Mr. Fisher dedicates many hours every week into his work as the Webmaster.
- b. The Committee believes \$5000 USD is a more accurate level of remuneration than his current stipend.

**Recommendation 4:** That Synod maintain the current Classical ‘askings’ amount of \$100/yr for the WOC fund.

Grounds:

- a. The current askings amount provides the Committee with adequate funds to do the work assigned to it.

**Recommendation 5:** That Synod change the wording of article 4.7.4r of the *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* (concerning postings to the “Recent Ministerial News” section of the website) as indicated below. Additions are in *italics* and deletions are in ~~striketrough~~.

Current:

Post the ministerial information received from the consistories of the federation, including the calling of pastors, the answer to this call, availability for call, dissolution of ministerial relationship, the sustaining of ordination and candidacy exams, receiving a license to exhort, suspension, reinstatement, deposition, emeritation, and the deaths of ministers that take place in our federation.

Proposed:

Post the ministerial information received from the consistories of the federation, including the calling of pastors, the answer to this call, availability for call, dissolution of ministerial relationship, the *scheduling and* sustaining of ordination, ~~and~~ *candidacy and licensure* exams, ~~receiving a license to exhort~~, suspension, reinstatement, deposition, emeritation, and the deaths of ministers that take place in our federation.

Grounds:

- a. It is useful to announce in advance the *scheduling* of ordination, candidacy and licensure exams, not just their sustaining
- b. The new wording is clearer than the old.

## **Appendix A – Webmaster’s Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

Brothers;

This Report begins with a summary of the duties I perform on an ongoing basis, then on to some specific work accomplished on the website since Synod last met, and finally to some details on website utilization.

### **1. Ongoing Work**

In a typical month I process:

- 12-15 help requests from churches regarding logins, updating or similar issues
- 35-50 Profile updates
- 15-20 announcements and calendar items
- 1-3 “live” walkthrough / training sessions
- Document updates and edits as needed
- 15-20 requests from outside the Federation
- URCNA email daily
- Website function check daily
- Website requests (signups, uploads, updates, Ministerial News items, etc.) daily

- General website cleanup and organization weekly
- 8-10 information requests from the Stated Clerk, committees, classes, churches, etc.
- Communications as needed with the Hosting company re updates, issues and requests
- Periodic reminders to Clerks of Classes for updates on changes, plants, etc.
- Periodic communications with Missions Coordinator on plants and Missionaries
- As items are received, I update the various files used in preparation of the Directories.

Some of these items are very quick to process, others take considerable time. I generally work an hour or two a day plus an additional one to three hours on Saturday on website issues, though those numbers go far higher as we near preparation of a new Directory, before and during Synod, or when major site updates occur.

The vast majority of contact I receive from the churches, committees and elsewhere is through email, which I check first thing in the morning, last thing in the evening, and several times throughout the day. My cell phone number is also available on the website, and I am contacted through that medium several times in a typical week.

When support or Directory work is not pressing, I spend as much time as I am able checking and updating the various documents, lists, files and other pages on the website. However, I currently have a backlog of such projects because the technical and record-keeping duties have occupied a great deal of time this year. I recently received, processed and uploaded the new URCNA editions of the Ecumenical Creeds; as of this writing I am still waiting for new versions of the Confessions to be completed and sent. Furthermore, to assist the churches in updating I maintain an Updating Guide which is widely available on the website and sent to new churches, new clerks, and anyone who requests it. I also typically send a copy to anyone who has made use of my assistance in setting up or editing their information. The updating guide itself must be updated regularly as changes occur to the website, and fully redoing the guide, as is currently necessary and in process, requires a full week or more to complete.

And yet, though the work is sometimes tiring, it has never been overwhelming, and I thank God for the opportunity to serve the United Reformed Churches in North America in this way. The acquaintances and associations I've made, the challenges which have stretched my understanding, and the blessing of working within this Federation of which I've been part since before it began, remind me daily of God's great Grace. Soli Deo Gloria!

## 2. Developments Since Synod Wyoming 2016

### • Ministerial News

A significant mandate from Synod 2016 was the development of a feature which would facilitate posting by the churches of vacancies, calls, candidacies, and other important ministerial news of interest and importance to the entire Federation. Because of the unique structure of the Content Management System software underlying our website, this was an interesting challenge and considerable effort was expended to achieve it. The Archive Directory was in production simultaneously, but the initial version of Ministerial News for

internal use on the “Private Side” of the website was activated in December of 2016. Additional hurdles, mostly related to website security, delayed the implementation of the “Public Side” presentation of Ministerial News but it became active early in 2017.

- **Live and Archive Directory**

A major function of the URCNA website has always been to provide a continuously updated source for both churches and members, as well as other visitors, of relevant information regarding the URCNA. On the website, members of our churches or of the general public who wish to contact or visit a URCNA church can quickly locate churches in a specified area by map, by state or province, by city, or by classis, and within seconds obtain the address, contact information, and even detailed driving directions. For use within the churches, much more information is quickly available to authorized users; this has been used by committees, by the treasurers, and by individual churches. Once each year an Archive Directory is produced, which is intended to reflect the state of the churches at the close of the preceding year. This Directory is by nature out of date as soon as any church makes a change; however, it is used by some as a desk reference and so the greatest effort each year is to ensure that each church is reminded, and has the opportunity, to update her online information. Since Synod 2012 the churches have had the ability, and the responsibility, to update their own information.

In past years collecting information has been a great burden, as churches simply haven’t made it a priority to keep their Profiles up to date. Last year permission was granted to include a “Last Updated” tag in each church’s Directory listing to alert users of the Directory to the fact that a listing might not be entirely accurate. We also hoped it would provide an incentive for the churches to have a recent “Last Update” tag in future listings, and this appears to have helped with about a third of the churches, but each year I learn, after publication, of information which was not provided in time. I still seek ways to improve this.

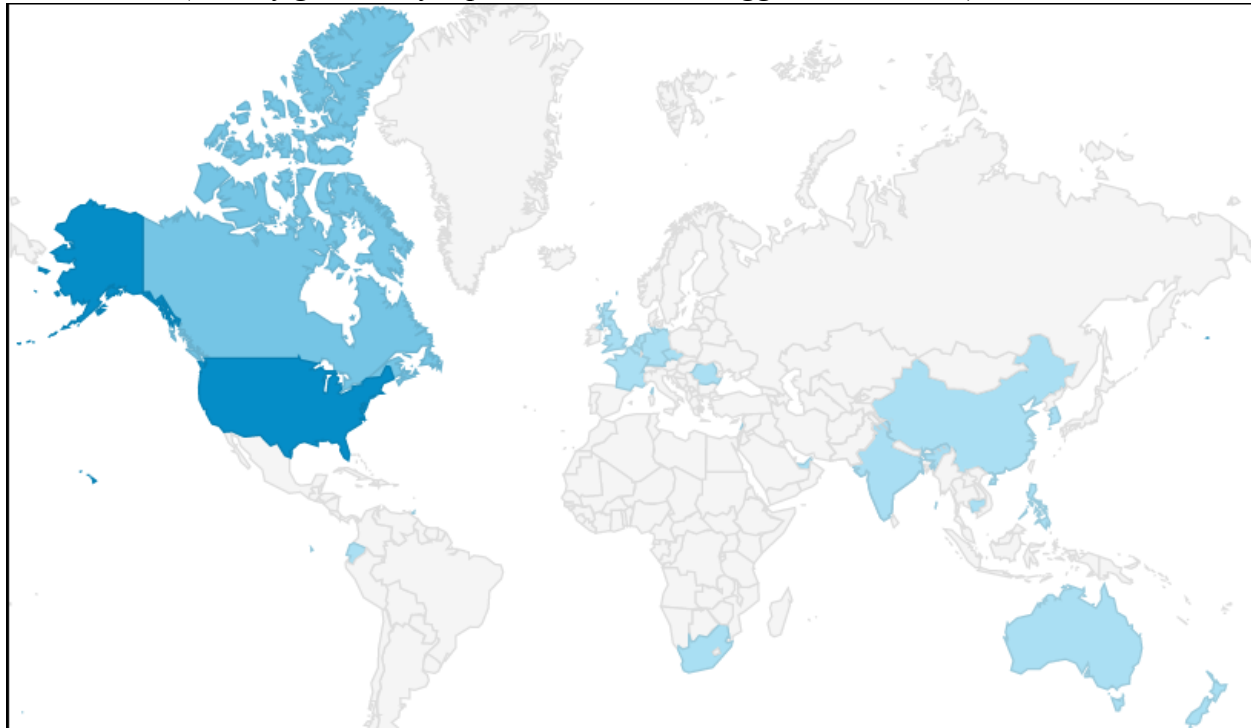
- **Technical Updates and Improvements**

The website undergoes continuous improvements, many of them invisible to users, some quite major, but most in between as the state of the art and changes in user needs arise. Among these are new database fields which record Seminary, Degree, and year of graduation for each Candidate and Minister; this came at the specific request of a Clerk of Classis with approbation from the Website Oversight Committee. A new system for organizing and collating church statistics was implemented which greatly simplifies and speeds this once onerous process. A function was installed which organizes updated and edited church profiles and related information into master files for publication, again reducing turnaround time and potential errors. Most visibly, the entire website has very recently been reconfigured to optimize it for mobile use as well as on the desktop. And in what may be the most significant “subtle” change, our hosting company is updating the Content Management System so that we can replace the confusing “Primary First/Last Name” and other labels with titles which actually define the information churches are to

fill in. This solves a problem which we have struggled with since this website was first implemented some ten years ago, and which was until recently insoluble.

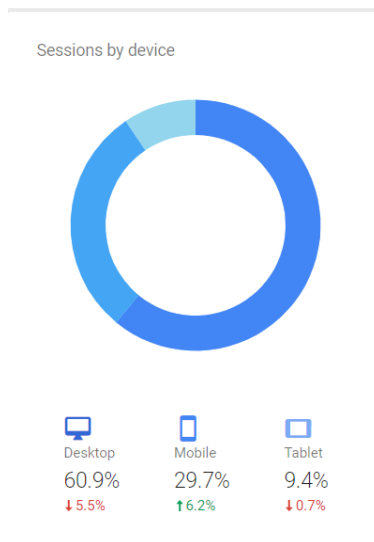
### 3. Website Utilization

In the past year, URCNA.org has served users from twenty-three countries, primarily the U.S. and Canada but also the U.K., India, South Korea, and more. Because some countries prohibit Christian websites, some of our visitors may have used “VPN” technology to hide their location, but some visitors have come to us from the Arab world, specifically the UAE. *(These figures are for public visitors, not logged-in churches.)*

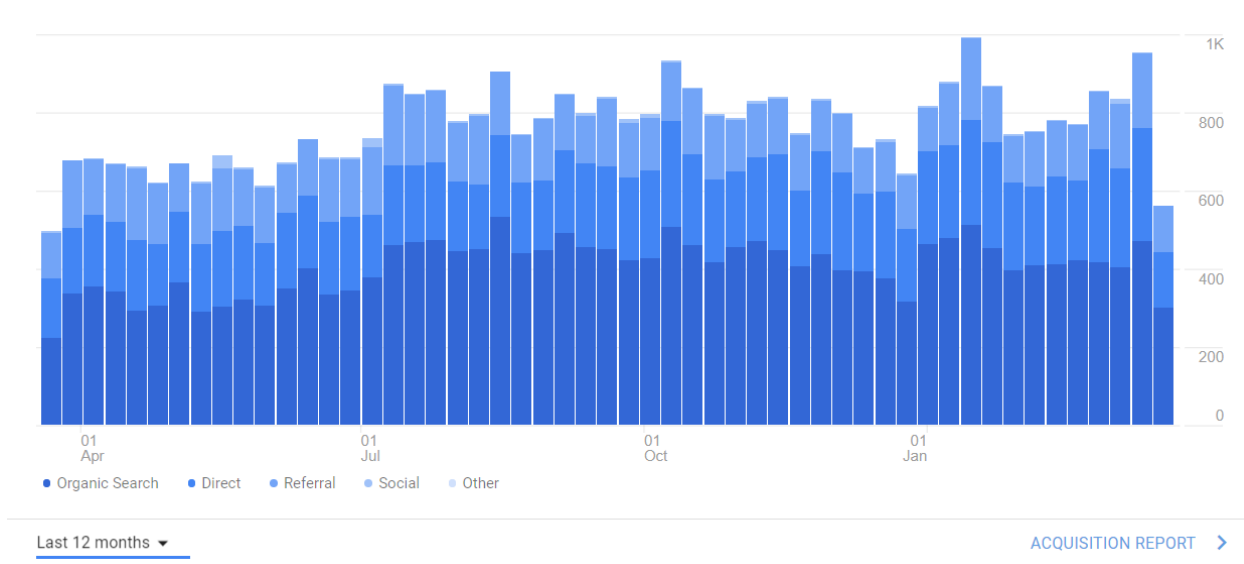


WEBSITE VISITORS CAME FROM COUNTRIES MARKED IN BLUE

While most of our users – 60.9% over the past year – utilize desktop computers to visit URCNA.org, the percentage is dropping in favor of cell phones, currently responsible for 29.7% of visits. Tablet computers have also dropped in usage, though only by 0.7% to 9.4% of visitors over the past year.



The most popular page, perhaps not surprisingly, is the “Find-A-Church” feature, but “What We Believe” and such documents as the Three Forms of Unity, the Creeds and the Church Order also figure highly. 54.3% of our first-time visitors come to us through search engines; 25% come directly by typing in the name of the website, and 20.5% arrive through links, perhaps on individual church webpages, the Missions site, NAPARC and elsewhere. Currently the percentage which arrives through social media such as Facebook is minimal, but likely to increase as that form of communication is better utilized.



For the first quarter of 2018, our website has served an average of 1,282 visits per day, with our busiest day so far bringing us 2,782 visits on March 8<sup>th</sup>. We typically serve well over 37,000 visits per month.

Submitted sincerely in Christ,  
 March 26, 2018  
 Gary Fisher, Webmaster

## **Oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee**

### **Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

March 25, 2018

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 Wyoming 2016 (article 18 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 actions taken since the last synod were to pay for items related to the operation of the website.

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 recommendation for synod:

That synod appoint a different Consistory to serve as the Oversight Consistory for the WOC.

#### Grounds:

1. Synod Wyoming's request of Grace URC was "until the end of the next synod."
2. Our pastor has accepted a call to a different church, which will make it difficult for the Grace URC Consistory to fulfill its mandate given our size (two elders).

Sincerely, in Christ,

Rev. Talman Wagenmaker

Clerk

Grace United Reformed Church (Waupun, Wisconsin)

## Study Committee on Appeals Report to Synod Wheaton 2018

Esteemed brothers,

### **I. Introduction**

Our committee is honored to serve the churches by studying the matter of appeals. Synod Wyoming 2016 appointed the Study Committee on Appeals and gave it the following mandate (Article 70):

- a. Survey and assess the wisdom and experience of federations in ecclesiastical fellowship (Phase 2) in handling appeals, with particular focus on appeals from individuals against the actions of a consistory, classis or synod (or their equivalent assemblies).
- b. Develop and recommend a clear set of guidelines for submitting and adjudicating appeals that can be added to our Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix B, Guidelines for Appeals and as an appendix to our Church Order.
- c. The guidelines developed should ensure that the method of handling of appeals will be consistent for all parties.
- d. The guidelines developed should give attention to the matter of communicating decisions in an edifying manner to the parties involved.

The Synod also clarified some of the reasons this needed to be done. In recommending that Synod accede to the Overture requesting the formation of this committee, the Synod adopted the following grounds (Article 70):

- a. Our current synodical regulations and guidelines do not answer every question regarding the best way to adjudicate appeals.
- b. Clear guidelines outlining how consistories, classes, and synods should adjudicate appeals will help the churches move forward confidently and consistently in their judgments.
- c. Clear guidelines outlining how consistories, classes, and synods will adjudicate appeals will help those appealing better submit to the decisions of the assemblies regarding their appeals, since clear, public guidelines will allow appellants to know what they can expect from the assemblies and help appellants in knowing that the appeal has been dealt with fairly.
- d. Even a brief survey of procedure from our sister churches reveals many areas from which we could benefit in this area as a federation. (For example: is there a limit on how long a member has for registering an appeal? And if an appeal is defined as a “written request” (as we do define it), should appellants be allowed to speak in defense of their appeals; and if so, under what circumstances?)
- e. The appeal process is worth taking time to improve and strengthen, as it is closely related to upholding righteousness and justice among the churches of Christ represented within our federation, and as our decisions as a church reflect our only Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.



The Synod appointed the following men to this committee: Rev. Doug Barnes, Rev. Bill Godfrey, Rev. Harold Miller, Rev. Bradd Nymeyer, Rev. Ralph Pontier, Rev. James Sinke, and, Elder Mark Van Der Molen. The Synod set a budget of \$3,000 US per annum for the work of the committee.

Our committee held a face-to-face meeting at Mid-America Reformed Seminary on June 12 and 13, 2017. The committee met via video conference calls on September 20, 2016 and October 18, 2017. We carried on much of the additional committee work via email correspondence as well.

## **II. Surveying and Assessing Appeals Procedures**

This study committee researched the procedures of the churches with which the URCNA is in Phase 2 fellowship, namely the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), and the Reformed Church of Quebec/L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ). The committee is very thankful to the Lord for the fraternal spirit exemplified by the brothers from these denominations who engaged in answering our questions. Their input was very helpful and much appreciated.

The committee found that the different churches have a variety of approaches to handling appeals. Some churches were more formal and structured, while others employed more of an ad hoc, case-by-case approach. In addition, the different polities and approaches to church government represented by our sister churches meant that some of their procedures cannot be identically replicated in the URCNA. However, their procedures did help to identify how weaknesses in our current appeal system can be addressed and remedied. A brief summary of the survey of our sister denominations' procedures is included below. While it is impossible to do full justice to the procedures of our sister churches in these few paragraphs, hopefully a brief summary will give our churches some sense of how these matters are handled by them.

### **A. Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)**

When it comes to matters on appeal, the CanRC makes a distinction between “appeals” and “requests.” An appeal comes to an assembly concerning a decision previously taken, motivated by the conviction that the decision was wrong because a necessary ground was not true or because the logic from grounds to decision was not valid. An appeal requests a review of the decision with the grounds on which it was made. Appeals are always submitted to the next major assembly.

By contrast, a request is a submission to an assembly concerning a decision previously taken, challenging the grounds, i.e. the truth or wisdom of the decision taken. Thus a request brings new grounds to bear on the matter. Requests come in two forms, a request to rescind or revise a decision and a request to review a decision. A request to rescind or revise a decision almost always concerns non-personal matters. A request to review almost always involves personal matters. A request is most like an appeal, except that it introduces new grounds for consideration. One minister described it as being similar to a secular “retrial in the light of new evidence.”

The assembly reviews the previous decision and makes a determination on whether to uphold or deny the appeal or whether the previous decision should be maintained or rejected. The broader assemblies also have the power to stay the execution of the original decision.

These matters are discussed in Articles 31 and 33 of the CanRC Church Order. Beyond the Church Order, they do not have an appeals procedure that is spelled out in detail.

#### B. Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

Article 50 of the RCUS Constitution provides that “Cases over which a lower judicatory has original jurisdiction can be brought before a higher judicatory only by reference, complaint, or appeal.” In this description, some of the church polity differences between the URCNA and our sister church are evident. The RCUS regards the assemblies of the church as higher and lower judicatories rather than narrower and broader assemblies. As such, the appeal process has much more of a judicial character for them than it usually does for our churches.

The discussion of their appeals process occurs in Part III of their Constitution entitled, “Discipline.” The Constitution outlines a very detailed process that cannot be completely recounted in this brief summary, but several points are worth particular mention. Article 114 indicates that the Spiritual Council is responsible to inform the accused how to appeal and to provide counsel to help accomplish the appeal. Article 115 provides that a notice of appeal must be filed within 30 days, allowing another 30 days for lodging the reasons for the appeal. Article 129 requires that every judicial case must be put down in writing, and Article 143 provides that any exception taken to any of the rules or proceedings of the trial are to be entered on the record to be available for future appeal.

As with the CanRC, the RCUS makes some distinctions between appeals and other actions. Specifically, a distinction is made between an appeal and a complaint. A complaint is a written grievance for matters other than those that necessitate an accusation and judicial trial. By contrast, an appeal comes in response to a previous judicial act. The means by which these complaints and appeals are handled are clearly spelled out and mirror in many ways a secular judicial process for trials and appeals.

#### C. Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

As with the procedure in the RCUS, the OPC follows a Presbyterian structure of lower and higher courts of the church rather than our way of speaking of assemblies in the URCNA. As with the RCUS, the OPC also makes a similar distinction between complaints and appeals. Another similarity to the RCUS is the detailed and orderly procedure for filing and adjudicating an appeal.

A notice of appeal must be filed within ten days from the date of the action that is being appealed. The purpose of this notice is to inform the body that an appeal will be received and to request that any censure be withheld pending the appeal. The appeal itself must be filed within 30 days of the date of the action being appealed. The OPC has forms for the Notice of Intention to Appeal as well as for the Appeal.

The OPC has a Standing Appeals Committee for the General Assembly (GA) that receives the record on appeal and undertakes to prepare a chronological summary of the case, to make a recommendation whether the appeal is in good order, and to meet with and assist the GA Advisory Committee with any questions they may have. However, the Standing Appeals

Committee does not make recommendations on how the appeal should be adjudicated by the GA. When asked, the Standing Appeals Committee will also give informal advice to any presbytery that seeks it from them. Some presbyteries have their own appeals committees, while others simply appoint ad hoc committees as needed.

In their appeals procedure at General Assembly, the appellant has a right to appear and orally defend the appeal. Each GA has the discretion to set the time limit for such oral presentations, which are typically limited to 15 to 20 minutes. These presentations and the debates on the appeal are held in open session. Only for weighty reasons and by a three-quarters majority vote can the GA enter into a closed/executive session while handling the appeal.

#### D. Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

RPCNA also distinguishes between complaints and appeals. Appeals relate solely to discipline cases. Complaints are similar to appeals, but a complaint does not relate to discipline. A complaint is made to a higher court alleging that one or more persons have been aggrieved by an action of a lower court. The differences in these procedures are carefully spelled out in their Book of Discipline. Again, it is not possible to recount the entirety of their detailed procedures, but many aspects of their process are worth noting.

Appeals, regarded as disciplinary in nature, are handled in a timely manner. Notice of intent to appeal must be made within 30 days of the accused being informed of the disciplinary action. At that point, the higher court receiving the notice of appeal must provide the appellant an advisor to help guide him or her through the appellate process. The appellant has 60 days to prepare the appeal and submit it to the clerk of the assembly to which the appeal is addressed, along with the statement of reasons for the appeal and all relevant documents. It is expected that the appellant will prosecute the appeal in person or through an advisor. Both the appellant and the relevant assembly have the opportunity to present an oral defense of their cases. New evidence is not to be admitted in these oral arguments. They are intended simply to present a summary of the appeal and to offer a rebuttal to the arguments of the other side.

In adjudicating the appeal, the assembly may dispose of it in one of two ways. The assembly may deny the appeal, confirming the original decision, or it may sustain the appeal, reversing the decision in whole or in part. When the appeal is sustained, the case may be returned to the original assembly for reconsideration or it may be handled by the higher court.

Complaints are handled in a similar manner to appeals. The procedures for both are spelled out in great detail, laying out the deadlines and the responsibilities of the parties involved. The assignment of an advisor to help the appellant navigate these procedures has helped the RPCNA to handle appeals properly and in good order. Advisors have also helped to protect appellants from being disadvantaged because they do not understand the process.

Finally, it is worth noting that in preparing for the RPCNA Synod, a Business of Synod Committee reviews all agenda matters, including complaints and appeals, and formulates recommendations for how the assembly can effectively handle these matters. The synod can accept or reject those recommendations. The synod may also appoint a committee to help handle an appeal or complaint. These committees can be assigned to hear testimony and submit a summary of the appeal to the synod, which helps significantly to reduce the work of the assembly itself.

#### E. Reformed Church of Quebec/L'Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ)

Contacts with the ERQ revealed that they do not have a written procedure for handling appeals apart from the provisions of their Church Order. They handle appellate matters on an ad hoc basis as they come before their assemblies. As a result, they did not have an appellate procedure to share, but expressed an interest in seeing what the URCNA develops as a result of this study.

### **III. Proposed Guidelines for Submitting and Adjudicating Appeals**

After surveying and assessing these various appeals procedures, this committee recognized the need to adopt some changes to the current process in the URCNA. The changes recommended are explained in this section.

#### **A. The Establishment of a Standing Committee on Appeals**

Some of our sister churches surveyed use standing committees in order to help them handle matters brought on appeal. This committee concluded that a standing committee would be helpful for us as well and therefore is proposing that Synod Wheaton 2018 establish a Standing Committee on Appeals. The purpose of this Standing Committee would not be to adjudicate appeals, but rather to prepare the appeals for adjudication by the synod. This study committee is firmly convinced that the adjudication of an appeal is a matter best left to the synod as a whole.

Therefore, the purpose of the proposed Standing Committee on Appeals would be to receive and review appeals prior to synod so that the data in the appeal can be gathered, summarized, and indexed for adjudication at synod. Such work provides a twofold benefit. First, the Standing Committee would be able to help the convening consistory assess the admissibility of submitted appeals prior to synod. Second, the Standing Committee would be able to advise the appropriate advisory committee of synod regarding the proper and timely handling of the appeals assigned to it, making suitable recommendations to that advisory committee. The Standing Committee would not make any recommendations as to the adjudication or disposition of the appeal. Those recommendations would be left to the advisory committee to which the appeal has been assigned.

#### **B. Adjudicating Specifications of Error Rather Than Adjudicating Validity of Grounds**

##### **1. Current Procedure**

This study committee identified a weakness in the current process for the formatting and adjudication of appeals. The current Rules for Synodical Procedure, Appendix B, Guidelines 3 and 6 read as follows:

- 3.** Since an appeal requests an assembly to make a decision or judgment regarding a matter previously decided by an assembly of the federation, the appeal must:
  - a. Provide a written copy of and reference to the specific decision of the narrower body which is being appealed.
  - b. Provide a written history or background of the appeal.
  - c. Stipulate specific grounds for the appeal.

6. When an appeal has been admitted, the adjudicating assembly shall respond to each ground of the appeal by
  - a. stipulating whether each ground is valid, and why or why not, and
  - b. stipulating upon which of its grounds, if any, the appeal has been sustained.

This current procedure requires the adjudicating assembly to adjudicate appeals by first responding to all of the stipulated grounds of an appeal and then by determining whether the appeal has been sustained or not sustained. However, sometimes the question of whether a particular ground is valid or invalid has little bearing on the overall disposition of the appeal. But since the current guidelines require an assembly not only to determine the validity of the ground, but also to specify why the assembly has reached its conclusion, much time can be spent on a matter that will have little ultimate bearing on whether the appeal is sustained or not sustained. The current procedure also leaves unanswered the question of what to do if none of the grounds for an appeal are found to be valid. Must the adjudicating assembly adjudicate the appeal solely on the grounds given by the appellant, or may the assembly sustain or deny the appeal by formulating its own grounds? These are questions that the current guidelines do not definitively answer.

## 2. Proposed Changes

In order to address these questions, this committee proposes changing the language in the synodical guidelines. As a preliminary matter, this study committee notes that its mandate was modified on the floor of Synod 2016 such that the recommended guidelines not only become part of the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, but also be added “as an appendix to our Church Order.” This committee believes that a study committee is not authorized to make recommendations to amend the Church Order. Amendments or Church Order appendices can only be codified by way of specific overture arising from a consistory. This committee certainly intends and desires that the recommended guidelines be used by all federation assemblies rather than just the synod, but such broader binding application would need to arise from a consistory overture requesting that the recommended guidelines be made “an appendix to the Church Order.”

The proposed guidelines would now require appellants to state clearly which decision they are appealing and specify the alleged error(s) made in that decision, along with the grounds which support the allegation(s) of error. The adjudicating assembly then will be tasked with adjudicating the specifications of error. The assembly will have the ability either to use the grounds provided in the appeal or to give its own grounds for the decision to sustain or not to sustain the alleged error. If none of the appellant’s specifications of error are sustained, then the appeal is not sustained. If any of the appellant’s specifications are sustained, the adjudicating assembly will have several options for disposing of the matter. First, the adjudicating assembly may conclude that the sustained error is not of sufficient importance to sustain the appeal. If the assembly concludes that the sustained error does require further action, it may direct the narrower assembly whose decision is being appealed, with grounds, to re-adjudicate, modify, or reverse the appealed judgment.

### 3. Explanation

The survey and assessment of our sister churches revealed much wisdom in allowing a broader range of options for disposing of appeals than merely to sustain or not sustain. This committee recognizes that this would be a new concept for our churches and that a more detailed explanation of the rationale for this procedure would be beneficial.

This committee discussed whether it would be advisable to speak of a broader assembly “directing” a narrower assembly to do something. Specifically, the discussion focused on whether this change in procedure would be “lording it over” other churches or office-bearers in violation of Church Order, Article 65. This committee concluded that allowing for a range of options for disposing of appeals would not be a violation of Article 65 for the following reasons.

First, the URCNA Church Order in Article 29 already provides that decisions by broader assemblies regarding appeals are to be considered “settled and binding, unless it is proved that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order.” Consistories have already agreed to delegate the authority to decide appeals to the broader assemblies. A synod or classis would not be stepping outside of its authority or improperly aggregating power to itself by directing a narrower assembly to re-adjudicate, modify, or reverse an appealed decision. Such an action would be a “decision” consistent with Article 29 and continue to be an expression of the mutual goal of local churches stated in the introduction to the Church Order: “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.”

Furthermore, this is consistent with the way which Reformed churches have historically viewed the authority of a broader assembly to decide an appeal. This perspective on appeals is reflected in the *Revised Church Order Commentary* by Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma:

Major assemblies most certainly can deliberate and decide. But if their decisions are contrary to the decisions taken by minor assemblies, these minor assemblies must conform themselves to the conclusion of the major assemblies...Practically it does not make much difference whether one looks upon an adverse decision of a major assembly as an invalidation or nullification of the minor assembly's decision, or as being essentially an advice, and not a decision to nullify the minor assembly's conclusion. *The minor assembly follows the advice of the majority assembly. And it must do so, inasmuch as all the churches have agreed to submit themselves to the opinion of the majority and to abide by the decisions mutually taken. Only when the Word of God forbids may any church or group of churches refrain from abiding by the decision of major assemblies.* But for all this, major assemblies do not dictate, and they do not have the inherent right to invalidate the decisions of minor assemblies. The local church or groups of churches do not receive superior orders which they must obey without further question, but they receive conclusions reached by common consent, and as such they will respect these conclusions.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Revised Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 129; emphasis added.

Finally, the settled and binding nature of the judgments of broader assemblies on appeals is expressed in the current Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix D, 4 and 4.2 which read as follows:

4. **Synodical Judgment.** A *Synodical Judgment* is the answer of Synod to an appeal (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B).

4.2 A Synodical Judgment should be received by the appellants with respect and submission and shall be considered settled and binding, unless proven to be in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order (Church Order Articles 29 and 31; *Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B, 7).

This committee found the above rationale persuasive. URCNA churches have already agreed to accept the decisions and judgments of broader assemblies regarding appeals as being “settled and binding” as stated in Church Order, Article 29 and in the Regulations for Synodical Procedure. Furthermore, any individual, consistory, or classis believed to be wronged by such a decision has a remedy, namely that the decision can always be appealed to a broader assembly. Even the decision of a synod could be appealed to the next synod, alleging whatever errors are perceived in the decision.

#### C. Counselor for an Appellant

The “Definition” section of the current Guidelines for Appeals (Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix B) provides that an appellant may register and defend an appeal “either on his own behalf or through a representative.” This committee believes that the use of a counselor could be a help both to the appellants and to the broader assemblies who receive these appeals. The need is evident from past experience. Sometimes appellants are ill-equipped to write their own appeals in the proper form. Many do not know how, to whom, and/or when appeals must be submitted. As a result, the broader assemblies have done much work formatting appeals before they can be adjudicated. This committee thought it would be advisable for appellants to be informed of their right to have a counselor to help them write and submit the appeal in the proper time and form. The new proposed guidelines would assign the responsibility to the appellant’s consistory to explain the process of an appeal and to facilitate the provision of a counselor if the appellant so desires.

#### D. Timeliness of an Appeal

The current regulations do not set a timeline for the submission of appeals. This committee believes that it is important to set such a timeline. The proposed guidelines provide that a notice of intent to appeal must be filed with the clerk of the adjudicating assembly within 60 days of the announcement of the decision being appealed. The appellant would then have until the regular deadline for submitting materials for the agenda of the adjudicating assembly to submit his or her actual appeal.

#### E. Format of an Appeal

This study committee has added guidelines for what must be provided in the notice of intent to appeal, as well as for the appeal itself. With the notable exception of the aforementioned substitution of specifications of errors for stipulated grounds, the format of the appeal remains substantially the same as the current guidelines. But this committee also recommends adding language clarifying which decision the adjudicating assembly is to address.

Because appeals are “complaints of having been wronged by the decision of another assembly” (CO Art. 29), questions have been raised in the past regarding which assembly’s “decision” is under review on appeal. For example, if someone appeals the decision of his consistory to classis, and then appeals the matter to synod, is he appealing the original decision of his consistory or the appellate decision of the classis? And then accordingly the question arises, is the synod reviewing the consistory’s original decision or the decision of classis to sustain or not sustain the appeal? The new proposed guidelines endeavor to provide clarity to these questions. The broader assembly is reviewing the original decision being appealed, not any subsequent appellate decision.

The proposed guidelines provide that appeals which proceed from narrower to broader assemblies must remain the same in substance. While the appellant must provide documentation regarding the disposition of the appeal by a narrower assembly, the appeal is still about the original decision. New evidence may not be added to the case, and the appeal is not to be altered when advancing it to a broader assembly. It remains an appeal regarding the original decision alleged to have been made in error. The appellant may respond to the arguments, decisions, and grounds used by the narrower assembly in its disposition of the appeal. However, these responses will be treated as a communication to classis or to synod, not as part of the appeal requiring adjudication.

All of this is intended to make clear that the substance of the appeal always remains the same as it advances through the broader assemblies. The broader assembly is adjudicating the original decision that the appellant alleges was made in error. So, for example, if an appeal originally alleges specifications of error about the decision of a consistory, then the appeal before classis or synod remains a question of whether his or her consistory erred in its decision as alleged by the appellant. Documents relating to the disposition of the appeal at the narrower assembly will be part of the record, but synod will make its determination regarding the original decision that has been appealed. This committee hopes that these guidelines will clarify which matter(s) are properly to come before the broader assemblies on appeal.

#### F. Oral Presentations

This study committee found that many of our sister churches afford the appellant or his or her representative an opportunity to make an oral presentation regarding the appeal. In the interests of justice and truth, this seems to be a sound practice that ought to be adopted. Therefore, the proposed guidelines provide for oral presentations. The appellant or his or her representative will be provided the opportunity to make a concise oral summary and defense of the appeal. Also one delegate from each of the narrower assemblies that have previously adjudicated the appeal shall also have the opportunity to present a concise defense of its decision. None of these summaries or defenses by any party may introduce any new evidence that has not been previously submitted in writing. These oral presentations may be made both to the synod as



the adjudicating assembly and to the advisory committee assigned to handle the appeal. Synod will set a time limit for these oral presentations as it sees fit.

#### **G. Adjudication and Disposition of the Appeal**

This study committee recommends that the adjudications of appeals be conducted in open session. This is done by our sister churches, and it is believed to advance an environment of truth, fairness, and transparency in the proceedings. However, if for weighty reasons the assembly decides the matter ought to be handled in executive session, it may do so by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegates.

This committee has also proposed guidelines for delegates who have previously been involved in adjudicating a particular appeal. These delegates may not be assigned to an advisory committee dealing with the appeal, nor may they make any motions from the floor or vote on the matter. At synod, this will apply to any delegates from a consistory or a classis that previously adjudicated the appeal.

As discussed in a previous section, the broader assembly will consider whether to sustain or not to sustain each of the specified errors, giving grounds for its judgments. If none of the specifications of error is sustained, the judgment of the narrower assembly shall be affirmed. If any of the specifications of error are sustained, the assembly shall determine whether the error is of such importance that it requires a re-adjudication, modification, or reversal of the judgment of the narrower assembly.

If the appellant is not present for the adjudication of the appeal, an edifying communication regarding the decision of the assembly shall be given to the appellant by the clerk of the assembly within ten days. This will ensure that all decisions are communicated to the appellant in a timely and caring manner.

#### **IV. Attachments**

As attachments to our report, please find the following documents:

Attachment 1: Guidelines for Appeals

Attachment 2: Form for Notice of Intent to Appeal

Attachment 3: Form for Appeal

Attachment 4: Example #3 for Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix C –  
Standardized Reporting Form for Advisory Committees

#### **V. Recommendations**

1. That Synod establish a Standing Committee on Appeals with the following mandate:
  - a. To receive and review appeals submitted to synod, in advance of synod, in order to gather, summarize, and index relevant documents and data.
  - b. To assist the convening consistory of synod concerning the admissibility of appeal submissions.

- c. To make recommendations to the relevant synodical advisory committee concerning the proper and timely handling of particular appeals, without making recommendation concerning the disposition of the appeal.

*Grounds:*

- a. Our sister Presbyterian and Reformed churches have found the use of a standing committee dealing with appeals to be helpful.
  - b. Our experience has shown that the lack of such a committee has made synod's work with appeals more difficult.
2. That Synod appoint seven ministers and/or elders to the Standing Committee. One alternate member shall be appointed. All members of the committee, including the alternate, shall be from different classes. Elders who have been appointed to the committee may be reappointed to subsequent terms even though they may not be installed and serving at the time of reappointment.
- Grounds:*
- a. Seven members will be sufficient for the work anticipated for the Standing Committee.
  - b. The provision for an elder who is not installed and serving at the time of his reappointment to be reappointed would provide continuity for the work of the committee.
3. That Synod replace Appendix B of our Regulations for Synodical Procedure with the submitted Regulations found in Attachment 1.

*Grounds:*

- a. These Regulations provide clear guidelines outlining how consistories, classes, and synods should adjudicate appeals so the churches can more consistently render their judgments.
  - b. These Regulations help those appealing better submit to the decisions of the assemblies regarding their appeals, since clear procedures let appellants know what they can expect from the assemblies and help appellant be reassured that the appeal has been dealt with fairly.
  - c. These Regulations incorporate the wisdom found in the practices of our sister churches.
  - d. These Regulations are consistent with the principles of fairness, openness, and due process for both the appellant and the adjudicating assembly.
4. That Synod replace the Regulations for Synodical Procedure 3.4 as follows:

**Current version:**

- 3.4 Appeal.** An appeal is a written request that appeals from a decision or judgment, made to a synod by a consistory or individual within the federation, regarding a matter previously decided upon by an assembly within the federation. In order to

be admissible an appeal must provide written grounds. (See **Appendix B, Guidelines for Appeals**)

**Recommended replacement:**

**3.4. Appeal.** An appeal is a written complaint of having been wronged by a decision of an assembly within the federation. The appeal is made to an assembly by a consistory or an individual within the federation. An appellant is either a consistory or an individual who submits and defends such an appeal either on his own behalf or through a representative. (See **Appendix B, Guidelines for Appeals**)

*Ground:*

This change is necessary to have a consistent, uniform definition of an appeal in both the Regulations and in the Guidelines for Appeals.

5. That Synod amend the Regulations for Synodical Procedure 4.5.4.a. “General Responsibilities” by removing the word “appeals.” The amended 4.5.4.a. would read as follows:

“Assist the convening consistory to determine questions of admissibility and good order with regard to overtures and other submissions to synod.”

*Ground:*

The responsibility for assisting the convening consistory to determine questions of admissibility and good order with regard to appeals is part of the mandate for the Standing Committee on Appeals.

6. That Synod adopt Attachments 2 & 3 and attach them to Appendix B of the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

*Ground:*

Standardized forms encourage uniform and clear presentation of appeals which will assist in the fair adjudication of an appeal.

7. That Synod amend the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix C by adding Attachment 4 as Example #3.

*Ground:*

Example #3 will help the advisory committee tasked with handling an appeal report to synod in a manner consistent with the new guidelines.

8. That Synod replace the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix D, 4.1 “Synodical Judgment” as follows:

**Current version:**

- 4.1 A Synodical Judgment either sustains or [sic] denies an appeal on the basis of specified grounds determined to be valid or invalid, responding to each ground of the appeal by
- a. stipulating whether each ground is valid, and why or why not; and
  - b. stipulating upon which of its grounds, if any, the appeal has been sustained (*Regulations for Synod Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B, 6 and 8).

**Recommended replacement:**

- 4.1 A Synodical Judgment either sustains or denies an appeal by
- a. adjudicating whether each specification of error should be sustained and stating grounds for such judgment; and
  - b. adjudicating whether the appeal has been sustained and stating grounds for such decision (*Regulations for Synodical Procedure* 3.4 and Appendix B, 7 and 8).

*Ground:*

This change is necessary to have consistent, uniform language in both the Regulations and in the Guidelines for Appeals.

9. That Synod amend the Regulations for Synodical Procedure, Appendix D, 4.2 “Synodical Judgment” by changing the parenthetical citation from “Appendix B, 7” to “Appendix B, 8.b.”

*Ground:*

This change is necessary to give the proper citation to the new Appendix B Guidelines.

10. That Synod dismiss the Study Committee on Appeals with thanks.

*Ground:*

This committee has fulfilled its mandate.

**VI. Conclusion**

Our committee is grateful for and humbled by the trust placed in us to do this work. We thank God for the unity and harmony our committee enjoyed in laboring over these matters. We hope and pray that God will use this study report to help us advance his glory in the pursuit of truth and justice among Christian brothers and sisters in our federation.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer, chairman  
Rev. William C. Godfrey, reporter  
Rev. Doug Barnes  
Rev. Harold Miller

Rev. Ralph Pontier  
Rev. James Sinke  
Mr. Mark Van Der Molen

## **Attachment 1**

### **Guidelines for Appeals**

#### **Introduction**

In accord with *Church Order*, Articles 29 and 31, the following guidelines must be observed in preparing and adjudicating an appeal. These guidelines shall serve as the standard for admissibility of an appeal.

#### **Definition of an Appeal**

An appeal is a written complaint of having been wronged by a decision of an assembly within the federation. The appeal is made to an assembly by a consistory or an individual within the federation. An appellant is either a consistory or an individual who submits and defends such an appeal either on his own behalf or through a representative.

#### **Guidelines**

1. Appellant: An appeal may be made by a consistory or an individual who is a member of a church within the federation. The appeal may be submitted by the appellant himself or by a representative. Any consistory or church member may appeal against a decision of any assembly of the federation.
2. Origination: An appeal must first be made to the assembly whose decision is being appealed before appealing to broader assemblies. The assembly whose decision is being appealed is the respondent to the appeal.
3. Counselor for an Appellant: The consistory of an appellant shall explain to the appellant the process of an appeal and shall facilitate the provision of a counselor, if desired by the appellant, who can assist in ensuring that the appeal is written and submitted in a proper form and timely manner.
4. Timeliness of an Appeal:
  - a. Notification of an Appeal: Notice of intent to appeal must be filed with the clerk of the adjudicating assembly within 60 days of the announcement of the decision. This applies each time the appeal advances to the next broader assembly. For appeals advancing from one synod to the next synod, the notice shall be filed with the clerk of the convening consistory of the next Synod.

- b. Submission of an Appeal: The appeal must be submitted by the deadline for submitting materials for the agenda of the adjudicating assembly.
- c. If a member objects to a decision of synod regarding a matter pertaining to the churches in common, he should bring the matter first to his Consistory, urging it to appeal the decision of synod.

5. Format of an Appeal:

- a. The notice of intent to appeal shall:
  - i. address the clerk of the adjudicating assembly,
  - ii. cite the decision being appealed and the date the decision was announced, and,
  - iii. identify the name and church membership of the appellant.
- b. The appeal shall:
  - i. be submitted in writing, providing a copy of and reference to the specific decision of the assembly which is being appealed,
  - ii. provide a brief history or background of the appeal,
  - iii. specify the alleged error(s) of the decision being appealed, and include supporting grounds for each alleged error, and,
  - iv. include written evidence to substantiate the allegations being made.
- c. An appeal that proceeds from a narrower to a broader assembly must remain the same in substance, with the following provisions:
  - i. documents relaying the disposition of the appeal by the narrower assembly must be included,
  - ii. new evidence shall not be added to the appeal, nor shall the appeal be altered when advancing the appeal to a broader assembly, and,
  - iii. the appellant may respond to the arguments, decisions, and grounds used by the narrower assembly in its disposition of the appeal. Such response does not alter or add to the appeal under consideration, but shall be treated as a communication under Regulations for Synodical Procedure 3.5.

6. Oral Presentations:

- a. The appellant or his representative shall be given opportunity to present a concise oral summary and defense of the appeal to the adjudicating assembly, as well as to any advisory committee tasked with advising the adjudicating assembly. Such summary and defense shall not introduce new evidence not previously presented through written submissions.
- b. One delegate from each of the narrower assemblies that have previously adjudicated the appeal shall also be afforded the opportunity to present a concise oral defense of its decision to the adjudicating assembly, as well as to any advisory committee tasked with advising the adjudicating assembly, without introducing new evidence not previously presented.
- c. The adjudicating assembly shall set a time limit for oral presentations.

7. Adjudicating the Appeal:

- a. In order to advance an environment of truth and fairness, the adjudication of an appeal shall take place in open session, unless the assembly decides for weighty reasons to enter executive session by a two-thirds majority of the delegates.
- b. For delegates who have been previously involved in the adjudication of the appeal:
  - i. These delegates may not be assigned to any advisory committee dealing with the appeal.
  - ii. In the plenary session dealing with the appeal, these delegates may not make motions or vote on them. If the appeal is from the decision of a classis, this shall apply to the delegates from that classis.
- c. The assembly shall consider and render a judgment to sustain or not to sustain each of the specified errors, giving grounds for its judgment.
- d. If the adjudicating assembly does not sustain any of the specified errors, the judgment of the narrower adjudicating assembly shall be affirmed.
- e. If the adjudicating assembly sustains any of the specified errors, it shall determine if the error is of such importance as to require a re-adjudication, modification, or reversal of the judgment of the narrower adjudicating assembly.

8. Disposition of the Appeal:

- a. If the adjudicating assembly decides to sustain the appeal, it shall direct, with grounds, the narrower assembly:
  - i. to re-adjudicate the appealed judgment, or,
  - ii. to modify the appealed judgment, or,
  - iii. to reverse the appealed judgment.
- b. Judgments of the adjudicating assembly 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 (CO, Art. 29).
- c. This does not preclude appealing the decision further to the next broader assembly.
- d. If a synod does not sustain an appeal, the appellant may file that appeal for a final adjudication only once and to the next synod.
- e. If the appellant is not present for the adjudication of the appeal, an edifying communication regarding the decision of the assembly shall be given to the appellant by the clerk of the assembly within ten days.

**Attachment 2**  
NOTICE OF INTENTION TO APPEAL

To \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk of \_\_\_\_\_ [insert title of the assembly from which the appeal is to be taken] of the United Reformed Churches:

And now, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, AD \_\_\_\_\_, comes  
\_\_\_\_\_ [appellant] and gives notice of intention to appeal to  
\_\_\_\_\_ [insert name of assembly] from the judgment of  
\_\_\_\_\_, made on \_\_\_\_\_ [insert date] regarding  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

[insert description of decision/judgment]

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, Appellant

**Attachment 3**  
APPEAL

To \_\_\_\_\_, Clerk of \_\_\_\_\_ [insert title of the assembly to which the appeal is taken] of the United Reformed Churches:

And now, this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, AD \_\_\_\_\_, comes  
\_\_\_\_\_ [appellant(s) name] and appeals the judgment or decision of  
\_\_\_\_\_ [insert title of assembly from whom appeal is taken] in the  
matter of \_\_\_\_\_ [insert description of the judgment or decision  
appealed], and in support of said appeal states that \_\_\_\_\_ [insert title  
of the assembly from which the appeal is taken] committed the following errors:

1. Specification of Error #1: \_\_\_\_\_ [state concise description of the error].

Ground(s):

- a) \_\_\_\_\_ [state ground supporting the Specification of Error].

[Additional specifications of errors and ground(s) for each error may be listed]

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, Appellant



## **Attachment 4**

### **Example #3**

*If the matter is an appeal, there are several possible recommendations*

## **Synod Nyack 2012 Committee 7-A Appeals**

**Materials:** Appeal #1 (page \_\_\_\_)

---

**Chairman:** Rev. John Calvin

**Reporter:** Rev. Martin Luther

### **Summary**

Give a brief summary of the issues involved in the materials. For example: “This appeal is from the decision of [assembly that rendered the appealed decision] regarding [summarily state the appealed decision].

The appellant has alleged Specification of Errors as follows: \_\_\_\_\_”

### **Recommendations:**

1. That Synod find Specification of Error # \_\_\_\_\_ is [sustained/not sustained]

### **Grounds:**

- a. [In the grounds, it is helpful to cite key documentary evidence and/or biblical and confessional authorities. The advisory’s committee’s grounds need not be any of the grounds cited by the appellant]

2. That Synod [sustain/not sustain] Appeal # \_\_\_\_\_. [If no Specification of Error is sustained, then the appeal is not sustained. If a Specification of Error was sustained, the appeal still may either be sustained or not sustained).

### **Grounds:**

- a. [If recommending sustaining the appeal, state grounds showing how the Specification of Errors warranted sustaining the appeal.]
- b. [If not recommending sustaining the appeal, state grounds explaining either no Specification of Error was sustained, OR why the sustained Specification of Error(s) did not warrant sustaining the appeal]

3. [If sustaining the appeal]: That Synod direct [assembly which rendered the appealed decision] to [select one]: reverse the appealed decision; modify the appealed decision in a particular manner; or re-adjudicate the appeal.

### **Grounds:**

## **Presbyterian and Reformed Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC) Report to Synod Wheaton 2018**

Esteemed Brothers,

As the URCNA liaison to the PRCC, we present the following brief 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) did not see a need to send an observer to the past two annual PRCC meetings in Atlanta, GA. Minutes for these 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: ARPC, KAPC, OPC, PCA, and RPCNA. It is also the endorsing body for two associate member (non-voting) denominations: KPCA and URCNA. Associate membership in the PRCC is limited to NAPARC denominations.

The Commission oversees the work of its executive director, who is assisted by an administrative assistant and three associate directors. The director not only provides endorsements for qualified men, but, with his associate directors, also supports the chaplains in a variety of ways including retreats and training, visiting and advising, newsletters, and intervention when a chaplain faces conflict.

## **B. Chaplains Endorsed by the PRCC**

The PRCC endorses 205 military chaplains (137 PCA; 25 ARPC; 20 KAPC; 13 OPC; 6 KPCA; 3 RPCNA; 1 URCNA). It also indorses 76 civilian chaplains (incl. 64 PCA).

A URCNA Air Force Reserve applicant is currently processing paperwork with the PRCC at the time of this report which may lead to his application. The only URCNA chaplain presently endorsed by the PRCC is Rev. Andrew Spriensma, a U.S. Army Chaplain under the oversight of Faith URC (Beecher, IL). He is stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group, and tasked with giving pastoral care and counsel to the soldiers within his battalion and their families. Rev. Spriensma deployed to the Middle East once again in February 2018 for a six month rotation.

Chaplain Spriensma is grateful for the ministry of the PRCC. They have been a blessing to his ministry in many ways over the years. He notes that the PRCC was recently helpful in locating and contacting a fellow Reformed chaplain to check in on a URC soldier deployed to Baghdad. Also, he is invited to submit three short updates with prayer requests every year for publication in the PRCC's prayer calendar, *The Guardian*. The result is several encouraging emails from some regular prayer warriors when his calendar day comes around. Some senior chaplains have also been in regular contact to offer prayer and support. Chaplain Spriensma can be contacted at amspriensma@gmail.com.

## **C. New Executive Director**

The former executive director, (ret) Chaplain (Brigadier General) Douglas E. Lee, retired from the PRCC in 2017 after nine years of service. His leadership was greatly appreciated by the PRCC and he called his PRCC service "the crowning ministry of [his] life." Dr. James Carter was chosen as the new executive director and began serving in September 2017. While Dr. Carter was most recently serving as the senior pastor of the New Presbyterian Church, Pompano Beach and Wilton Manors, Florida, most of his ministry has been in military chaplaincy. He served for 23 years as an Army Chaplain and reached the rank of Colonel. He brings much enthusiasm and experience and a love for chaplains to the executive director position.

## **D. Dues**

The PRCC requires dues from both its endorsed chaplains and also from its member denominations. The PRCC voted to increase the denominational dues to meet growing budget requirements. The denominational dues are \$900.00 for 2018 and \$1000 for 2019. The dues for chaplains vary depending on rank.

## **IV. Recommendations**

We have only one recommendation: *That Synod set the budget for the PRCC Liaison at \$500 USD per annum to cover the travel costs of attending Commission meetings.*

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Todd Joling  
For the Consistory of Faith URC (Beecher, IL)

## Canadian Board of Directors for the URCNA Report to Synod Wheaton 2018

Over the past two years, the Board of Directors of the Canadian Corporation has sought to fulfill the work assigned it by the churches. Sometimes this work demands satisfying two different “masters”. On the one hand, we seek to be faithful to the churches and the decisions made by our churches at Synod. On the other hand, we seek to be faithful to the government of Canada, especially the authority of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). While it remains possible for us to serve the churches and the CRA, we find ourselves working diligently to keep one eye on the requirements of the churches and another on the requirements of the CRA. It is up to the churches to decide how faithful we have been to their expectations.

The basic requirement for all charities in Canada is the following:

A registered charity is allowed to carry out its charitable purposes both inside and outside Canada in only two ways: by carrying on its own charitable activities, and by gifting to qualified donees. A registered charity must maintain direction and control over its activities (whether carried out by the charity, or by an agent or contractor on its behalf) and must not engage in prohibited political activities or unrelated business activities.<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of simplicity, it may be said that “a *qualified donee*” is defined as another Canadian charity. The actual definition is “an organization that can issue official donation receipts for gifts received from individuals or corporations”<sup>2</sup> The actual list of qualified donees is a little more complex than that. However, in the main only Canadian charities can issue official donation receipts, therefore the simple definition of “a qualified donee” is another Canadian charity.

The reason we bring this up relates to our support of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal (TPH). Over the years, many of the Canadian churches and some individuals have provided funds in support of this work. It was the intent of the Canadian Board of Directors to use these funds in support of the printing of the TPH. To do so in a way that was consistent with the above requirements of the CRA, we needed to enter into a Joint Venture Agreement (JVA), sometimes called a Joint Ministry Agreement (JMA) with the OPC and the American Board of Directors. We already have a JVA with the American Board. However, because the publication of the TPH involved the OPC, the simplest solution was to establish another JVA – this time with the American Board and the OPC.

A JVA is a relatively simple agreement to establish a relationship; the advantage of the JVA is that it permits us to contribute all of the monies received for the TPH for the publication of this book and it explains the relationship of all parties involved in this important work. Additionally,

---

<sup>1</sup> Taken from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/checklists-charities/basic-guidelines.html>

<sup>2</sup> Taken from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/charities-giving-glossary.html#qualifieddonee>

the CRA will be satisfied since our publication of this book will benefit the Canadian churches and is consistent with our stated purpose.<sup>3</sup>

However, when the American Board of Directors declined our offer, we found ourselves in a difficult situation. This was the only way we could contribute to the capital costs of this project. Without a JVA that included the OPC we could not send our monies to this project.

Another requirement of the CRA for all charities is that a charity must use funds raised for a budget line item in fulfillment of that line item. It is possible to include a caveat to the effect that any overage in this line item will be redistributed according to the discretion of the Board. Unfortunately, when this fund was initially established, we did not include such a caveat. Therefore, we are obligated to use all the funds raised for the publication of a Song Book for our churches in fulfillment of that specified project. Since we were, therefore, unable to participate in the TPH capital costs, we still needed to find a way to spend these monies on providing a Song Book for the churches. It was this problem that we wrestled with over the course of several meetings.

In our conversations with the American Board we committed to publishing the Liturgical Forms Book for the Federation. Unfortunately, this commitment didn't really solve our problem. While we could use the monies raised for the TPH in printing the Liturgical Forms Book, the cost was significantly less than we had in our Song Book fund. We still needed to find a way to spend the remaining amount in a way consistent with the CRA's guidelines. What is more, we need to sell the Liturgical Forms Book, even if it's just at cost. There are two reasons for this. First, we may need to reprint future editions and will then need funds for such an undertaking. Second, the CRA indicates that

A registered charity is not permitted to carry out its purposes by simply handing over its money or other resources to an individual or to another organization that is not a qualified donee. Gifting to a non-qualified donee will put the registered status of the charity in jeopardy.<sup>4</sup>

While it is possible to publish material for the express purpose of giving it away, any review of our printing of the Liturgical Forms Book by the CRA would make clear that that is not the purpose of this book. This means that we cannot just give it away, at least not to the American churches. For these reasons, we need to sell the Liturgical Forms Book at cost. As a result, our funds will not diminish at all. So the problem will persist in perpetuity.

Wanting to be sure of our understanding of Canadian law, we contacted an Accountant at Deloitte who specializes in charities. He confirmed our reading of the CRA rules. With this in mind, we continued to wrestle over the best way to use the funds given for the purpose of

---

<sup>3</sup> Our By-laws include publishing as one of the purposes of our Corporation.

<sup>4</sup> Taken from <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/charities-giving/charities/operating-a-registered-charity/activities/charitable-activities.html>

providing a Song Book for our churches. After considering several possibilities, we settled on what we considered to be the simplest solution. We decided to make a purchase of the TPH equal to the number of Canadian families in the Federation. We plan to gift these books to the Canadian churches for use as they see fit: either to offset their own purchase or to give a copy to each of their families. In this way, our funds will have fulfilled the purpose for which they were intended, namely, providing a Song Book for our churches. This will also ensure that some of our monies can be used for future publications of the TPH. We recommended this solution to the American Board for their consideration. They approved of this solution. With their approval, we are planning to proceed with this solution.

When it became apparent that the Canadian Board would be purchasing a significant number of books, we consulted with Great Commission Publications (GCP) on how best to fulfill this order. GCP recommended that the Canadian Board make a single purchase of all the Canadian copies of the TPH. We will also pay for the shipping costs and for the distribution costs. These costs will thereafter be passed on to the churches. GCP does not have a Canadian distributor, so this makes matters simple for them. This will also benefit the Canadian churches, since a purchase of this size reduces the cost of the currency exchange. We have communicated this decision to the Canadian churches.

We've also been busy with publishing the Liturgical Forms Book. In consultation with the Liturgical Forms Committee, we decided that a hard cover was the best option for this book. We have engaged LCS Communications for the printing of this book and GCP for the distribution of these books to the American churches. We will serve as the distributor for the Canadian churches, shipping the Liturgical Forms Books along with the TPH. We look forward to seeing both these books in use among our churches.

In addition to the work of publishing these books, our work has consisted of managing the funds provided us by the churches. We are thankful for the generosity of our churches and their willingness to provide the Corporation with the Askings early in each year. As a Board we review the Financial Statements before they are distributed to the churches. Since fluctuations between our currencies can affect our bottom line, we are careful to communicate to the churches the accurate amount for the Askings. The Board is committed to fulfilling the Synodically approved budget. At times that may require raising the Askings amount for the Canadian churches, while at other times it may mean lowering that amount. We seek to do this work in service to the churches and in fulfilment of our financial commitments.

There are a few budgetary matters that we bring to the Synod's attention. When setting the Budget for 2019 and 2020 it should be noted that our Bank charges are now \$200.00; an amount never budgeted for in the past. The cost of submitting our work for review is \$2500.00 for this year. That number will increase with inflation.

We hereby alert Synod to the fact that we have obtained Directors and Officers insurance at a cost of \$700.00. The current budgeted amount is \$1100.00. No change is required in the

budgeted amount unless significant changes are made to increase the budgeted Askings. The fee is based on our revenues.

Regarding the Treasurer's stipend of \$3000.00, it is currently set in American dollars. We ask that the amount budgeted for our Treasurer be set in Canadian Dollars. We also ask that the stipend provided be reviewed by the Committee dealing with this report.

Submitted on behalf of the URCNA Corp. (Canada)  
Rev. Joel Dykstra

## **United States Board of Directors for the URCNA Report to the Synod Wheaton 2018**

Dear brothers,

The U.S. Board of Directors has met on six different occasions since Synod 2016. Throughout the last two years, additional meetings have occurred with OPC officials regarding the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. In the last two years, there has been one meeting of the Management Committee pursuant to the Joint Venture Agreement with Canada.

The Annual Reports mandated by the Michigan Department of Labor and Regulatory Affairs have been filed and are current, and the corporation remains in good standing with the State of Michigan.

The U.S. Board appointed Rick Blauw to be the alternate Treasurer.

During the last two years, the Board's primary focus has been the publication of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. The anticipated printing of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal is scheduled for March, 2018 with the book becoming available in June, 2018. Great Commissions Publication has been selected to be the broker/seller of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. To date, both the URC and OPC are encouraged by the number of books that have been ordered. With approximately 30,000 copies having already been ordered, we look to print approximately 35,000 copies in the first printing. We are thankful for the OPC's significant involvement and contribution to the entire process as they are better equipped with their existing organizational structure than is the URC to undertake many of the tasks necessary to bring the Trinity Psalter Hymnal to fruition.

The Board entered into a Joint Venture Agreement with the OPC in connection with the development and publication of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal. Pursuant to the terms of the Agreement, the Board appointed Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen, Rev. Christopher Folkerts and Gary Veldink to represent the URC on the joint venture board. The OPC appointed Rev. Danny Olinger, David Winslow and Dr. Alan Strange. The Agreement does not officially include the Canadian corporation given the complexities that would have been involved to satisfy the Canadian Revenue Agency, and the OPC's unwillingness to get involved with a foreign entity and the related foreign laws.

It is anticipated that the Psalter Hymnal Committee and the Liturgical Forms Committee will provide Synod with more comprehensive reports regarding their work as it pertains to the publication of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal and the separate liturgical booklet.

Additional action taken by the Board included obtaining an Errors and Omissions Insurance Policy for the Board of Directors. Further, the Board has entertained the idea of developing a procedures handbook for the Board (and perhaps other bodies) setting forth existing Synod actions/policies. On various occasions, the Board has had to consult the various Acts of Synod for guidance, and has found the process of searching through the Acts of Synod very tedious and time consuming.



Board members Rick Blauw and Ed Wierenga who have faithfully served for the last four years have asked to step down from the Board at the end of their current term. Board members Gary Veldink, Robert Huisjen, Eric Brandt, Mark Van Der Molen, and Will Postma are willing to serve another term.

Past budgets approved by Synod have included budgeted funds for functionaries such as the Treasurers of the two corporations to attend Synod. With the increase in the amount of activities and responsibilities being undertaken between Synods such as the Trinity Psalter Hymnal project, we believe it would be prudent to increase this budget amount from \$2,000 to \$4,000 to allow additional individuals, if necessary, to attend Synod to report on these matters.

#### Recommendations:

The U.S. Board of Directors respectfully recommends that Synod take the following action:

- (1) That Synod appoint seven members to the Board including the five current members willing to continue for another term as well as two new Board members.
- (2) That Synod appoint Robert Huisjen as the U.S. Treasurer.
- (3) That Synod increase the budgeted amount for travel expenses from \$2,000 to \$4,000 for functionaries to attend Synod.

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