

PROVISIONAL AGENDA
 For the NINTH Synod of the
UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES IN NORTH AMERICA
 Convening Tuesday, June 3, 2014, at 8:00 A.M., Pacific Daylight Time
 At Trinity United Reformed Church, Visalia, California
 Ending Friday evening, June 6, 2014
 Registration Monday, June 2, 2014, at 1:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.
 Prayer Service at 7:00 P.M.
 Convened by Trinity United Reformed Church, Visalia, California

I. OPENING MATTERS

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

II. INITIAL BUSINESS

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

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V. CLOSING MATTERS

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

REPORT OF THE HOST CONSISTORY TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014

Greetings from the host consistory of Synod. We thank the Lord for the privilege of hosting Synod and working with the churches of our federation. We pray for the Lord's blessing upon the upcoming meeting.

On behalf of the churches and the Lord of the church we did the following:

- set up a bank account for Synod Visalia 2014
- set the date for Synod Visalia and arranged for accommodation with two area hotels
- sent a letter to the churches in January 2013
- arranged for a young man in the congregation to provide technology support to delegates during the meeting of Synod
- asked the PH Committee to arrange all devotions for the meeting of Synod Visalia 2014
- approved a request by the Board of Trustees of the URCNA, United States, to disburse funds in order to engage legal counsel to protect the interests of the URCNA in a lawsuit that names the URCNA, among others, as a defendant
- shipped out the Acts of Synod Nyack to the churches in the U.S.
- accepted the offer of Westminster Seminary California to host a dessert reception after the Synodical Prayer service
- we responded to a number of letters re the (re)appointment of Mr. Lynn Brouwer to the URCNA U.S. Board of Directors; we thank God all the parties involved consider the matter to be closed
- denied a request from emberstoafame.org to have a display at the meeting of Synod Visalia 2014
- received a request from Christ URC (Santee, CA) to have Mihai Corcea (a Romanian student at Westminster Seminary California) address the delegates of Synod Visalia 2014; we asked the Consistory to process the request through the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA)
- denied a request from the editor of Christian Renewal on behalf of Harvest USA to use the URCNA mailing list (Harvest USA is an organization that helps churches and church members with problems related to sexuality)
- approved a request from Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church that we allow Reformed Mission Services (RMS) to have a literature table at Synod Visalia 2014
- denied a request from the Institute for Reformed Biblical Counseling to address the delegates of Synod 2014
- set the per delegate fee at \$110 to cover the cost of Trinity's expenses for food, technology support, and other related items
- CECCA was granted permission to invite fraternal delegates to attend Synod with the cost of food and lodging paid for by the churches of the URCNA
- made up and sent a fraternal delegate registration form to CECCA
- CECCA was refused a one week extension to submit materials for the agenda
- sent a letter to the churches in January 2014
- made up and sent the registration form to the churches
- granted permission to Providence Christian College to have a display table at the meeting of Synod Visalia 2014
- permission was granted to Word & Deed to have a display table at Synod Visalia 2014
- made up and sent out the Credential for Synod Visalia 2014

-instructed the Stated Clerk of the URCNA to put a note in the Agenda about a communication received instead of the actual communication because it names individuals and consistories in our federation

Various observations:

-all appointments and reappointments done by Synod should be contingent upon the approval of the appointee's consistory; we understand this is the practice but this does not appear to be written down in any of our rules

-Synod should consider establishing guidelines for the convening consistory as it considers requests to address Synod or have displays at the meeting place of Synod and other such matters

-many of the Canadian churches sent checks for registration that were not able to be deposited by banks in the U.S.

Clerk of Trinity Visalia Consistory

John Van Hofwegen

Appendix 1

Report of the Stated Clerk to Synod 2012

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

It has once again been my great privilege to serve as your Stated Clerk. Since our last synod, I have sought to complete all the duties assigned to me.

I prepared the Acts of Synod 2012 and had them published. They were sent to the convening consistory and to Cornerstone United Reformed Church of London, Ontario, for distribution. I am deeply grateful for the assistance of both of these churches in this task.

I made the required updates to the Church Order following their ratification by the churches. However, in that process, I missed one of the changes made by our last synod. The first sentence of Article 10 was changed from “Each church is to provide *adequately* for the minister of the Word,” to “Each church shall provide *honorably* for the minister of the Word.” I did not make that change in the published Church Order. I apologize for my oversight, and will correct it in the next edition of the Church Order.

I conducted the ongoing correspondence of the federation. One notable matter was that I was served with court papers regarding the litigation against the federation. I referred this matter to the convening consistory and the U.S. Board of Directors who handled it.

I have been asked to consult on several matters regarding the application of the Church Order and have sought to give wise counsel. One matter that has come to my attention a number of times is the manner in which the calling process is being carried out when it is applied to men who have not been previously ordained. It seems that some churches are “provisionally” calling these men before they have even been examined or declared candidates. Such a man in this situation may seek to transfer his membership to the “calling” church and thereby avoid the process of taking both a candidacy and an ordination exam. To proceed in this way is foreign to the Church Order (Articles 3, 4, and 6) and actually undermines the intention of two levels of oversight in the examination process.

I have also been asked to provide advice on the way in which ordained men leave our federation. It seems that at times the provisions of Articles 9 and 11 are being ignored or applied in ways not envisioned in the Church Order. In addressing questions concerning the manner in which men enter or leave the ministry, I have urged those seeking my counsel to follow the procedures that have been outlined in the Church Order, as a matter of being faithful to the principles and practices we have mutually agreed to follow.

I have worked to assist the webmaster in the large project of producing the annual directory of the URCNA. I have taken an assisting role rather than a leading role in compliance with the decisions of Synod 2012, that synod adopt the following wording for the list of duties for the

webmaster, “He is responsible to produce and publish alphabetical registers of licentiates, candidates for the ministry, and ordained ministers of the United Reformed Churches” (Acts of Synod 2012 Article 26.5 & 88.2). The role of the Stated Clerk in the process is now defined in terms of assistance. He shall “Assist the webmaster with the content of the alphabetical registers of licentiates . . .” (Acts of Synod 2012 Article 26.6 and Regulations of Synodical Procedure 4.5.4.h). I notice in the Web Oversight Committee report that the recommendations do not reflect the language adopted at Synod 2012. I recommend that the Advisory Committee dealing with this material retain the language adopted at Synod 2012.

I worked with the convening consistory in various matters in preparation for Synod. We received two overtures which did not appear to meet the standards of admissibility. I submitted them to the convening consistory for their decision. We agreed that they did not meet the standards and therefore would not be included in the printed agenda. The convening consistory also directed me not to include a Communication to synod in the printed agenda, since it contained names of individuals and churches within the federation. This communication will be sent to the Advisory Committee to which it is assigned, as well as to any delegate who requests it by e-mail from me.

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

Following our last synod, I was encouraged by several delegates to review the Regulations for Synodical Procedure and recommend appropriate updates. I have included those recommendations as an attachment to this report.

Thank you for allowing me to serve as your Stated Clerk. It is an honor to serve as a synodical functionary.

The following matters are brought as **recommendations** to Synod 2014:

1. That synod retain the language adopted by Synod 2012 with regard to the duties of the webmaster.
2. That synod adopted the proposed updates to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Bradd L. Nymeyer
Stated Clerk, URCNA

Attachment to Stated Clerk's Report
Recommended updates to the Regulations for Synodical Procedure.

4.5.2 Term of the Stated Clerk

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Ground:

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

4.6.2 Term of the Treasurers of the Board of Directors

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Ground:

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

5.2.2 Advisory Committee Reports

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Ground:

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

5.2.4 Advisory Committee Recommendations

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Ground:

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

5.3.2.a Standing Committee Description

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Ground:

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

5.3.2.c Standing Committee Terms

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Grounds:

1. The synod does not necessarily convene every three years. This language will reflect that reality.
2. Several standing committees (CERCU, Psalter Hymnal, WOC, Missions) have members appointed by each of the classes, not only by the synod. This language will reflect that reality.

6.2.4.c All motions may be amended except the following

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Ground:

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

Appendix A. 6. Guidelines for Overtures

Current wording:

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

Recommended wording:

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

Ground:

Synod 2012 adopted “Definitions and Authority of Synodical Actions” (Acts of Synod 2012, Article 45). In doing so, “Judgments” took on a particular meaning. It refers to a decision with regard to an appeal. However, the Church Order article referenced uses the language, “All decisions of a broader assembly”. The recommended language reflects the broader language of the Church Order.

Appendix B.6.b. Guidelines for Appeals

Current wording:

stipulating upon which of its grounds, if any, the appeal has been sustained.

Recommended wording:

stipulating upon which of its grounds, if any, the appeal has been sustained or denied.

Ground:

The current wording pre-supposes that the appeal will be sustained. The recommended wording anticipates that it may be either sustained or denied.

United Reformed Churches in North America

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

March 21, 2014

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 2013. 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 \$41,289 (down slightly from \$43,955 in 2012) and total expenses were \$36,597 which resulted in income in excess of expenses in the amount of \$4,692. As of the date of this report I have received \$2,794 (compared to \$429 in 2012) in deposits subsequent to year end which were for 2013 askings but reported as income in the 1st quarter of 2014 since that is when they were received.

The US Board did have the 2012 year end audited with the auditor reporting all is in good order.

The Pastors and Elders who attended Synod 2012 approved a budget of approximately \$51,408 for the years 2013 and 2014. Askings are increased to \$13.60 per family from the previous amount of \$11.00 per family. For the upcoming calendar year, please continue to plan your Askings accordingly.

OBSERVATIONS

1. By my count, the US has 78 churches. Of those 78 churches
 - a. 10 remain "unorganized" (not member churches)
 - b. none of the "unorganized" churches provided askings
 - c. 61 of the remaining organized churches provided askings.
 - i. This translates to a participation rate of approximately 90%, compared to 93% in 2012
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.

- When seeking reimbursement for work done on a committee, Synod 2012 has implemented that all committee expenses be paid directly by the Joint Venture. Continue to send me the reimbursement form and I will forward it in a timely manner to the Joint Venture treasurer along with the US portion of the expense and Joint Venture will pay the full amount of the expense to the committee member.

STATISTICS

The URC made a conscious decision to avoid assessing quotas to member churches. Instead they came up with the term “Askings”. Many churches have chosen to simply budget an amount or take a special offering instead of using the formula. The following chart is derived from inference in giving and is provided simply to indicate that not all churches follow the Synodical guidelines. Many prefer to provide a budget amount or simply take a special offering. Since the recommended asking amount is no longer an even number, I have deleted the percentage of budgeted verses collections as it is really not feasible to get an accurate percentage. Note the church participation rate decreased slightly from 93% in 2012 to 90% in 2013.

	2013		
Type	Number of Churches	Percentage	
Nothing	7	10%	

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

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

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

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

ASKINGS

URCNA “Askings” equals “Suggested Donation”. Beginning in 2013, the askings donation has increased to \$13.60 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. Please inform your deacons and have last year’s treasurer remind this year’s treasure about “Askings”.

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

PSALTER HYMNAL FUND

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

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

WEB SITE FUND

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

ENCLOSURES

Synod 2012 developed a budget for 2013 through 2014 in order to provide information on the ongoing activities.

The following pages contain the unaudited End-Of-Year Report for 2013. 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 2014, is currently **56.0** cents per mile. 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
 Financial Report for 4th Quarter Ended December 31, 2013 (not audited)

	<u>Avg. Annual Budget – US</u>	<u>4th Qrt Actual</u>	<u>YTD Actual</u>
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE – 1/1/13 (General Fund)			\$37,898.64
INCOME			
Contributions/Askings		\$21,858.16	\$40,777.66
Contributions/Asking (2012)			\$429.00
Interest		<u>\$19.30</u>	<u>\$82.26</u>
Total Income		<u>\$21,877.46</u>	<u>\$41,288.92</u>
EXPENSES			
Accounting/Gov't Filing	\$32.50		
Bank Fees	\$16.25		
CECCA (1)	\$8,450.00	\$1,932.23	\$10,252.08
CERCU (2)	\$4,225.00	\$3,361.67	\$3,361.67
Clerk	\$2,600.00	\$1,300.00	\$2,600.00
Doctrinal Study Committee			
Dues			
NAPARC	\$325.00	\$300.00	\$300.00
ICRC	\$1,170.00		\$1,131.63
PRJC (dues) (3)	\$325.00		
ICRC Travel	\$1,950.00		
Mission Committee	\$4,550.00	\$1,776.98	\$2,595.48
PRJC (Chaplains travel)	\$325.00	\$325.00	\$325.00
Postage/Supplies	\$260.00	\$74.81	\$144.03
Acts of Synod (25) plus shipping	\$162.50		\$1,256.82
Joint Church Order Committee	\$3,900.00		
Song Book Committee	\$7,442.50		\$2,091.20
Liturgical Forms Committee	\$3,900.00		\$1,413.77
Emeritation Committee	\$2,600.00		
Synod (functionaries to attend)	\$1,300.00		
Legal (6)			\$3,250.00
Treasurer – US	\$3,000.00	\$750.00	\$3,000.00
Treasurer – Joint Venture	\$1,950.00	\$975.00	\$1,950.00
Webmaster Honorarium	<u>\$2,925.00</u>	<u>\$1,462.50</u>	<u>\$2,925.00</u>
Total Expenses	<u>\$51,408.75</u>	<u>\$12,258.19</u>	<u>\$36,596.68</u>
TOTAL INCOME OVER EXPENSES		<u>\$9,619.27</u>	<u>\$4,692.24</u>
ENDING CASH BALANCE – 12/31/13 (General Fund)			<u>\$42,590.88</u> (5)

	4 th Qrt <u>Actual</u>	YTD <u>Actual</u>
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE – 1/1/13 (Hymnal Fund)		\$34,097.03
Contributions/Askings	\$667.00	\$1,699.42
Interest	<u>\$25.32</u>	<u>\$109.80</u>
ENDING CASH BALANCE – 12/31/13 (Hymnal Fund)		<u>\$35,906.25</u> (11)
BEGINNING CASH BALANCE – 1/1/13 (Web Fund)		\$6,756.66
Contributions/Askings		\$300.00
Web Maintenance	\$491.40	\$900.78
Interest		<u> </u>
ENDING CASH BALANCE – 12/31/13 (Web Fund)		<u>\$6,155.88</u>
TOTAL CASH BALANCE – 12/31/13 (All Funds)		<u>\$84,653.01</u> (12)

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. \$4,189.89 is in reserve from income and expenses relative to the URCNA directory, includes some a/r for acts of synod
6. The URCNA has been named in a lawsuit and legal counsel has been obtained. The amount represents the advance for legal fees sent to lawyer in trust. Lawsuit has been dismissed as of 3rd qtr 2013
7. MNA is the Dues paid, set by the number of URCNA Chaplains, as part of PRJC
8. Synod London established Honorariums for the Treasurers and the Web Master. US and Canadian treasurer's are paid fully by their respective countries and the JVA Treasurer and Web Master are paid jointly based on the 65/35 split.
10. \$15,000 of the general fund balance has been invested in a short-term cd and has earned interest of \$82.26 over the past year
11. \$25,000 of the hymnal fund balance has been invested in a short-term cd and has earned interest of \$109.80 over the past year
12. Total cash amount includes balance of \$195.45 yet to be collected from churches for copies of the Acts of the 2012 Synod

URCNA - Canada

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

2012 End of Year Report (not audited)

April 4, 2013

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 2012 askings from 34 (2011 – 36) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 5 (2011 – 7) Canadian churches. Both classes provided the \$200 US for the web fund.

Overall, 2012 was a positive year with 89% of churches participating and remitting askings. The decline from the prior year, is in part to the discovery that 2 churches had remitted their askings 1 year in advance. 2012 is a transition year as their asking remittances are now reported in the year that they apply. The number of churches contributing to the Psalter Hymnal fund continues to decline from the “high” in 2009 (when it was circulated that the contribution was a per family amount).

The per family asking was set at Synod in June 2012. The asking for 2013 is set **\$13.27 per family**. Thank you to many of the churches who made their remittances early in the year.

I have also attached a report for the joint venture activities from January to December 2012. This report is in US dollars.

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

Serving the Lord together.

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

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

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

2013 End of Year Report (not audited)

March 31, 2014

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 2013 askings from 35 (2012 – 34) of the Canadian churches. In addition, I received contributions to the Psalter Hymnal Fund from 8 (2012 – 5) Canadian churches. Two classis (2012 – 2) provided the \$100 US for the web fund.

Overall, 2013 was a positive year with 88% of churches participating and remitting askings. The number of churches contributing to the Psalter Hymnal fund has increased in 2013,

The per family asking was set at Synod in June 2012. The asking for 2014 is set **\$13.27 per family**. Thank you to many of the churches who made their remittances early in the year.

I have also attached a report for the joint venture activities from January to December 2013. This report is in US dollars.

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

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E-Mail: kphessels@bellnet.ca

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

2012 End of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund	Budget	Actual
INCOME		
Askings	24,471	23,684.00
Donation		3,000.00
Reimbursed expenses ¹		1,720.55
Joint Venture Causes ²		37,167.85
TOTAL INCOME	24,471	65,572.40
EXPENSES		
Accounting	2,729	2,125.98
CECCA3 ⁴	3,932	5,171.55
CERCU ⁴	2,247	3,141.83
Church Order Committee	2,809	
Doctrinal Commitment	2,996	
Dues (NAPARC, ICRC, MNA)	1,048	632.07
Government filing fee		30.00
Hymnal Committee	3,745	1,969.63
Joint Venture Advances ⁵	2,943	2,879.85
Joint Venture Causes ²		37,167.85
Miscellaneous ²		1,577.74
Mission Committee	749	0.00
Postage	150	28.10
PRJC (Chaplains)	262	0.00
Synod travel	187	508.00
Telephone	674	0.00
TOTAL EXPENSES	24,471	55,232.60
NET TOTAL		10,339.80
Balance Sheet		
Bank ⁶		37,056.17
Accounts Receivable ⁷		2,661.33
Accounts Payable		355.15
Deferred Contribution ⁸		1,181.03
General Fund Balance		38,181.32

NOTES

1. Represents the reimbursement from the URCNA-US for committee expenses.
2. Represents the amount received for the various JVA causes including the amounts transferred back from the US\$ account. The JV Cause Expense represents the money returned to the various donating churches and redirected to other causes (as expressed by donating individuals). Due to the transfer of money from the Canadian account to the US\$ account and back, there was an exchange loss (represented as Miscellaneous).
3. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
4. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
5. Represents the Canadian portion for the webmaster, clerk and JV treasurer stipends and expenses. These stipends and expenses are paid via the “joint venture” since they are paid to individuals outside of Canada.
6. The bank balance is being provided for information purposes at the end of each quarter.
7. Represents the refundable portion of GST (goods & services tax) to be received from Canada Revenue Agency
8. Represents contribution for 2013 askings, received and deposited in 2012

Hymnal Fund

INCOME	
Collections	2,225.53
TOTAL INCOME	2,225.53
EXPENSES	
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	2,225.53
Bank balance at Dec-31-12 ¹	23,242.14

NOTES

1. During the year, \$20,000 of the accumulated funds designated for the Hymnal Fund was invested in a short term GIC. The term is 18 months with 2.2% interest.

Web Fund¹

INCOME	
Classis	200.00
“Askings” ²	50.00
TOTAL INCOME	250.00
EXPENSES	
Annual fee	351.40
Upgrades to website	131.45
TOTAL EXPENSES	482.85
NET TOTAL	(232.85)
Bank balance at Dec-31-12	3,228.46

NOTES

2. As established by Synod 2007, each Classis must provide the Treasurer with \$200 US each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA. Synod 2010 reduced this amount to \$100 US each year.
3. Various churches have submitted a \$0.15 per family “asking” that is not budgeted or requested by Synod – the website is to be funded by Classis

URCNA - Canada
Pam Hessels, Canadian URCNA Treasurer

2013 End of Year Report (not audited)

General Fund	Budget	Actual
INCOME		
Askings		27,666.61
Acts of Synod ¹		2,241.75
 TOTAL INCOME		 29,908.36
 EXPENSES		
Joint Venture Advances		
Acts of Synod	88	1,986.75
Bank charges and supplies	9	27.16
Committee expenses		
CECCA ²	4,550	4,520.91
CERCU ³	2,275	2,547.17
Liturgical Forms	2,100	1,394.45
Mission	2,450	1,050.21
Songbook	4,008	1,166.25
Dues		
ICRC	630	603.92
MNA	175	185.25
Stipends	4,025	4,235.46
Government filing fee	18	30.00
Postage	140	19.32
Treasurer	3,000	3,247.84
 TOTAL EXPENSES	 23,468	 21,014.69
 NET TOTAL		 8,893.67
 Balance Sheet		
 Bank⁴		 37,261.74
Prepaid⁵		2,418.84
Accounts Receivable⁶		7,399.24
 Accounts Payable		 4.83
General Fund Balance		47,074.99

NOTES

1. Represents the amount billed to the Canadian churches for the printing and shipping of the Acts of Synod. The printing costs were paid by an advance to the Joint Venture; postage costs are included in the postage expense.
2. CECCA = Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad
3. CERCU = Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
4. The bank balance is being provided for information purposes at the end of each quarter.
5. Represents an advance made to the URCNA JVA to assist with payment of bills plus unspent legal fees advanced to the JVA.
6. Represents the refundable portion of GST (goods & services tax) to be received from Canada Revenue Agency plus accrued 2013 askings received in early January

Hymnal Fund

INCOME	
Collections	3,899.14
Interest	440.00
TOTAL INCOME	4,339.14
EXPENSES	
TOTAL EXPENSES	0.00
NET TOTAL	4,339.14
Bank balance at Dec-31-13 ¹	27,581.28

NOTES

1. In 2012, \$20,000 of the accumulated funds designated for the Hymnal Fund was invested in a short term GIC. The term is 18 months with 2.2% interest.

Web Fund¹

INCOME	
Classis	200.00
“Askings” ²	59.15
TOTAL INCOME	259.15
EXPENSES	
Annual fee	505.16
TOTAL EXPENSES	505.16
NET TOTAL	(246.01)
Bank balance at Dec-31-13	2,982.45

NOTES

2. As established by Synod 2007, each Classis must provide the Treasurer with \$200 US each year in order to fund the cost of maintaining a Web Site for URCNA. Synod 2010 reduced this amount to \$100 US each year.
3. Various churches have submitted a \$0.15 per family “asking” that is not budgeted or requested by Synod – the website is to be funded by Classis

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

2012 End of Year Report (not audited)
In US\$

General Fund

INCOME

URCNA - Canada ¹	3,798.73
URCNA – United States ²	7,054.97
Interest	13.27

TOTAL INCOME 10,866.97

EXPENSES

Clerk Expenses	
Supplies	58.33
Committee Expenses	
CECCA	699.60
Dues	
ICRC	1,740.97
Stipends	
Clerk	2,000.00
Treasurer	2,000.00
Web Master	3,000.00
Bank service charges	15.00
Postage	25.02
Web Master Expenses	1,328.05

TOTAL EXPENSES 10,866.97

NET TOTAL 0.00

Balance Sheet

Bank	542.50
Accounts Payable³	542.50
General Fund Balance	0.00

NOTES

1. Represents the Canadian share (35%) of expenses for the period of January to December, 2012
2. Represents the US share (65%) of expenses for January to December, 2012
3. Represents advances from URCNA – US to cover 2013 expenses

URCNA - Joint

Pam Hessels, Joint URCNA Treasurer

**2013 End of Year Report (not audited)
In US\$**

	Budget	Actual
General Fund		
INCOME		
URCNA - Canada ¹	24,299	17,319.07
URCNA – United States ²	45,126	32,164.00
Interest		2.50
TOTAL INCOME	69,425	49,485.57
EXPENSES		
Acts of Synod	250	4,715.62
Committee Expenses		
CECCA	13,000	12,477.44
CERCU	6,500	6,836.07
Emeritation	4,000	-
Joint Church Order	6,000	-
Liturgical Forms	6,000	3,959.08
Missions Committee	7,000	2,955.66
PRJC (Chaplains travel)	500	-
Psalter Hymnal	11,450	3,217.21
Dues		
ICRC	1,800	1,740.97
MNA	500	500.00
NAPARC	500	-
Stipends		
Clerk	4,000	4,000.00
Treasurer	3,000	3,118.20
Web Master	4,500	4,500.00
Bank service charges	25	30.95
Postage	400	48.55
Web Master Expenses		1,385.82
TOTAL EXPENSES	69,425	49,485.57
NET TOTAL		0.00

Balance Sheet

Bank	1,267.95
Accounts Receivable	329.77
Prepays³	5,000.00
Accounts Payable⁴	1,597.72
Deferred Revenue³	5,000.00
General Fund Balance	0.00

NOTES

1. Represents the Canadian share (35%) of expenses for the period of January to December, 2013
2. Represents the US share (65%) of expenses for January to December, 2013
3. The URCNA has been named in a lawsuit and legal counsel has been obtained. The amount represents the advance on legal fees sent to the lawyer in trust.
4. Represents advances from URCNA – US to cover 2014 expenses

Overture #1

OVERTURE TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014 TO EDITORIALY REVISE CLASSIS CREDENTIALS

BACKGROUND:

In the spirit of the Apostle Paul's admonition to "Let all things be done decently and in good order" (1 Cor. 14:40), our Church Order and the practice of our broader assemblies ought to be consistent with each other. However, it has come to our attention that this is not the case in at least one instance.

Church Order Art. 26 stipulates: "A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose Consistories delegate two of their members with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis meeting, within the next twelve months." This is consistent with the instructions of Church Order Art. 28, which stipulates: "The churches shall meet as a synod at least once every three years. Each Consistory shall delegate two of its members to this meeting."

It is the responsibility of the Consistory, then, to delegate men to participate in classis and synod. This has been accurately reflected on credentials used by the churches for recent synods.

However, Synod St. Catharines 1997 approved a classical credential for use by the churches which reads, in part:

"The council of _____, member congregation of the United Reformed Churches in North America, has appointed brothers _____ and _____ as delegates to represent said church at the meeting of the classis."

The form concludes:

"By order of the council,
Done in council on _____ (date)
_____, Chairman
_____, Clerk

The council and the Consistory, of course, are distinct, since the council includes not only the elders and ministers, but also the deacons (Church Order Art. 23).

We have agreed that "All decisions of a broader assembly are to be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order" (CO Art. 29). However, for 17 years, we have employed a form which conflicts with the Church Order. It is time to remedy that situation, that we might be consistent in our practice.

OVERTURE:

Classis Central US overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to editorially revise the classical credentials of the URCNA by replacing the term "council" with the term "Consistory" throughout the form.

GROUNDS:

1. Church Order Art. 26 specifies that it is the Consistory that must delegate two of its members with proper credentials to classis. Our credential forms should accurately reflect this practice.
2. The wording of the currently approved classical credential conflicts with Church Order Art. 26, thereby violating the “settled and binding” provision of Church Order Art. 29.
3. Our synodical credentials properly reflect the parallel stipulation of Church Order Art. 28, which specifies that the Consistory must delegate two of its members with proper credentials to synod. Our classical credentials should do likewise.
4. This revision would appropriately reflect the Biblical principle that the church is governed by elders (the Consistory), as we correctly recognize in Point 5 of our Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government.
5. This revision would improve the “good order” which we strive to cultivate, in obedience to God’s Word (1 Cor. 14:40).

Overture #2

OVERTURE TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014 TO CLARIFY THE STATUS OF OUR THREE FORMS OF UNITY

BACKGROUND:

In November of 1995, delegates from 36 churches meeting in Lynwood, Ill., unanimously resolved to form a new federation of churches. This federation – which would become the United Reformed Churches in North America – was to be “based on God’s Holy Word as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order of 1934,”¹ the latter of which in time was replaced by a Church Order unique to the URCNA.

So important was the confessional foundation of this new federation that the Agenda for its First Synod stated emphatically: “This action [of federating] was taken in the firm belief that it was done in obedience to God’s inspired, infallible and inerrant Word, and in full agreement with the Three Forms of Unity, namely, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort.” Given this early emphasis on the Three Forms of Unity as the solid ground on which the churches stand, it is not surprising to note that the acts of each URCNA synod have recorded that the delegates to the assembly publicly indicated their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity.²

In subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity, the churches and office-bearers of the URCNA arguably have had in view a particular translation of these Reformation-era confessions. Unless all churches and all office-bearers subscribed to the same translation of the confessions, the unity and agreement to which they were assenting would be weak at best, allowing each office-bearer to select an idiomatic translation of the Three Forms of Unity which arguably could sever the churches’ unity.

It is difficult to imagine that the office-bearers attending assemblies of the URCNA could have suspected they were subscribing to any translation of the Three Forms of Unity other than that which is found in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal of the CRCNA. This, after all, has without exception been the songbook from which our synodical delegates have been called to sing. It is the book which Synod St. Catharines 1997 acknowledged to be in use by the majority of our churches (Art. 62.C.). Synod Lynwood 1996 formally adopted the liturgical forms printed in this book – explicitly including the Form of Subscription – as those which are to be used in our churches (Art. 24.L.). And when Synod Schererville 2007 tasked the Website Oversight Committee with posting our confessional documents on the urcna.org website, it specified that the committee should post “the Three Forms of Unity, with their introductions and footnotes, as found in the 1976 version of the Psalter Hymnal” (Art. 51.7.c).

¹ Art. 7, Minutes of the Meeting of the Independent Reformed Churches Held November 15-16, 1995, at the Christian Reformed Church (Independent), Lynwood, Illinois.

² This is found in Art. 4 in the Acts of Synod Lynwood 1996; Art. 4 in the Acts of Synod St. Catharines 1997; Art. 4 in the Acts of Synod Hudsonville 1999; Art. 4 in the Acts of Synod Escondido 2001; Art. 3 in the Acts of Synod Calgary 2004; Art. 3 in the Acts of Synod Schererville 2007; Art. 6 in the Acts of Synod London 2010; and Art. 3 in the Acts of Synod Nyack 2012.

Scholars will search in vain, however, for a specific, stand-alone resolution recorded in the minutes and acts of our assemblies for a definitive action specifically adopting a particular translation of the Three Forms of Unity as those to which we subscribe. Rather, the delegates were sufficiently united in their belief concerning which version of the Three Forms of Unity was in view when office-bearers express their subscription, rendering a formal declaration unnecessary.

However, we now find ourselves needing to make explicit what has long been believed, as is reflected in a number of our official actions.

In recent years, public writings by ministers in the URCNA have called into question whether our office-bearers have an obligation to any particular translation of the Three Forms of Unity.³ Specific citation is made to one divided study committee's report (which subsequently was not adopted or approved by the synod) which expressed a lack of clarity concerning the version of the Three Forms of Unity to which we subscribe.⁴

As a result of this confusion, debates have arisen concerning what specific truths our office-bearers have affirmed. A recent example has focused on Article 36 of the Belgic Confession of Faith. Although commentaries written by URC ministers have recognized that the amendments adopted by the CRCNA in 1958 and included as a footnote in the 1976 version constitute part of the official text of the article⁵, other URC ministers⁶ and licentiates⁷ have publicly questioned the confessional status of this portion of Art. 36.

Meanwhile, a search of websites for URC congregations reveals use of a variety of translations of the Three Forms of Unity – although most refer to the translations found in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal.

It is imperative that we explicitly clarify the edition of the Three Forms of Unity to which we subscribe. God's Word calls us to do all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40) and to speak with the utmost care when we make vows before the Lord (Num. 30:2; Ps. 15:2,4; Eccl. 5:2-5; Matt. 5:37). But we cannot expect men to hold faithfully to their vow to diligently teach and defend the doctrine of the Three Forms of Unity unless we specify the edition to which that subscription is tied.

³ E.g., R. Scott Clark, "Surrounded by Constantinians," <http://heidelblog.net/2013/06/surrounded-by-constantinians/>, accessed on 17 June 2013.

⁴ Acts of Synod London 2010, p.693. Note that the URCNA did not adopt this study committee report, meaning that this statement reflects the opinion of one committee, but not of the synod which received the report.

⁵ P.Y. De Jong, *The Church's Witness to the World*, Vol. 2, p. 408.; Daniel Hyde, *With Heart and Mouth*, p. 478.

⁶ R. Scott Clark, "The Revision of Belgic Confession Article 36 on Church and State (2)," <http://heidelblog.net/2013/05/the-revision-of-belgic-confession-article-36-on-church-and-state-2/>, accessed on 17 June 2013.

⁷ Matthew Tuininga, "Please Don't Distort the URC's Confession of Faith," <http://matthewtuininga.wordpress.com/2013/06/06/please-dont-distort-the-urcs-confession-of-faith/>, accessed 17 June 2013.

OVERTURE:

Classis Central US overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to adopt the following two affirmations.

AFFIRMATION 1:

That the United Reformed Churches in North America have accepted as confessionally binding the English-language translations of the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession of Faith, and Canons of Dort which are included in the 1976 version of the Psalter Hymnal.

GROUNDS:

1. This affirmation is consistent with actions of URCNA synods which indicate that the translations of the Three Forms of Unity included in the 1976 version of the Psalter Hymnal book already officially function as the federation's translations. These actions include:
 - a. An action by Synod Lynwood 1996 opening its meeting with a reading of the "Public Declaration of Agreement with the Forms of Unity."
 - b. A contemporaneous action by the same Synod Lynwood 1996 to "adopt the liturgical forms and the Form of Subscription printed in the Psalter Hymnal, Centennial Edition (1976) for use among the churches" (Art. 25.L.);
 - c. An action by Synod Hudsonville 1999 to approve a republication of the 1976 edition of the Psalter Hymnal (Art. 41.a.), which action was supported by the committee's grounds that "the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal is known among us and satisfactory" (Acts of Synod Hudsonville 1999, p.93); and
 - d. An action by Synod Schererville 2007 to direct the Website Oversight Committee to post "the Three Forms of Unity, with their introductions and footnotes, as found in the 1976 version of the Psalter Hymnal" (Acts 51.7.c.).
2. This affirmation is consistent with the precedent set by our synods of using the 1976 Psalter Hymnal translation of the Three Forms of Unity in their reports. Examples include:
 - a. A URCNA-OPC Study Committee Report received and referred to the churches for study by Synod Escondido 2001, in which the confessional standards of the URCNA and the OPC are compared (Acts pp. 77-ff.).
 - b. Pastoral advice, adopted without dissent by Synod London 2010 in repudiation of Federal Vision teachings, which cited lengthy portions of the Three Forms of Unity, using the translation found in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal.
3. This affirmation will settle for the churches a vexing uncertainty that could cause unrest and dissention within our federation.

AFFIRMATION 2:

That the United Reformed Churches in North America recognize the 1958 revision of Belgic Confession Article 36, including the "substitute statement" placed in a footnote, as part of its confessional binding.

FOUNDATIONS:

1. This affirmation must logically be assumed by those who have subscribed to the translation of the Belgic Confession included in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal.
 - a. The footnote to Art. 36 in the Psalter Hymnal, after noting the original text of the amended sentence, provides a substitute statement which was approved by the CRCNA Synod of 1958. This is characterized as a “substitute statement” which was synodically approved.
 - b. Art. 72 of the Acts of Synod 1958 of the CRCNA makes it clear that this amended sentence was adopted “as the official translation” of Belgic Confession Article 36. It was placed in a footnote, however, evidently to indicate that feedback from other Reformed churches had been solicited but had not yet been received.
 - c. When the URCNA was formed, this officially adopted substitute statement was part of the text of the Belgic Confession Article 36 in use among the CRCNA.
 - d. Although CRCNA synodical decisions are not automatically binding upon the URCNA, most of our churches do have their origins in the CRCNA; and we have by no means repudiated our entire ecclesiastical history. The synodical record with regard to the translation of the Belgic Confession of Faith as printed in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal is relevant to clarifying the precise wording of this translation.
 - e. That the amendment included in the footnote was intended as part of the full and official translation of Article 36 is evident from the fact that the revised sentence was included in the Belgic Confession of Faith as printed in the 1987 Psalter Hymnal, without any further synodical action in this respect.

2. This affirmation is consistent with the subscription to which the URCNA’s founding office-bearers upheld.
 - a. Every minister, elder and deacon who signed the Form of Subscription in CRCNA after 1958 was confessionally bound to the substitute statement found in the footnote of Article 36 of the Belgic Confession as it appears in the 1976 edition of the Psalter Hymnal.
 - b. The substitute statement found in the footnote of Article 36 in the 1976 Psalter Hymnal had by 1987 been incorporated into the confessionally binding text of Article 36, as reflected in the 1987 Psalter Hymnal.
 - c. None of those office-bearers who later became founding members and office-bearers in the URCNA ever made public claim to have left the CRCNA in order to escape being bound to that substitute statement. Nor did any of them publicly express the opinion that, with the founding of the URCNA, the amendment of Article 36 had been rescinded and rendered extra-confessional. On the contrary, those founding office-bearers of the URC recognized that the Form of Subscription in the URC bound them to the same version of the Three Forms of Unity as they had previously affirmed and upheld in the CRC since 1958 – which is one reason there was never any explicit, stand-alone action to adopt a particular version of the confessions.
 - d. Those who left the CRC and established the URC did not leave out of dissatisfaction with the confessions held in the CRC at the time of our departure, but because those confessions were not being faithfully upheld and honored.

3. This affirmation is consistent with the common understanding reflected in commentaries widely respected in the URCNA, such as those written by Daniel Hyde and Peter Y. De Jong.

Overture #3

OVERTURE TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014 TO STUDY THE MATTER OF RESIGNATION

BACKGROUND:

Classis Central US has repeatedly wrestled with the question of how to handle members of our churches who, in the midst of a disagreement or church discipline, seek to resign their church membership.

In addressing these situations, two distinct approaches have been advocated.

Some have based their response on the recognition reflected in Belgic Confession Art. 28, which says the church is the assembly of those who are saved, from which no one *ought* to withdraw. This would seem to imply that one *could* withdraw, as a means of “self-exclusion” from the church. By tendering their resignation from the church, these individuals are essentially declaring that they have no part in Christ. This school of thought holds that a Consistory ought to acquiesce to a member’s resignation, after ensuring that the member understands the significance of what he or she is doing. This act then should be announced to the congregation in terms of what we confess in Belgic Confession Art. 28 – as an act of withdrawing from the assembly of those who are saved.

Others, however, have pointed out that Christ entrusted the keys of the kingdom not to individual members, but to the church, through its elders. Members therefore have no right to withdraw on their own authority, thereby short-circuiting the church discipline process which Christ instituted for their good and for the well-being of the church. Those advocating this view have urged that membership resignations be rejected, with the Consistory continuing the process of church discipline despite the attempted resignation.

Classis Central US has not always been of one mind concerning how the church ought to handle this matter. Each time the issue arises in requests for pastoral advice, the same arguments are rehearsed and the same sense of dissatisfaction is expressed with regard to the unsettled nature of the debate. Practically speaking, we have repeatedly broken our precedents. For example, in 2010, Classis Central US upheld an individual’s appeal, thereby indicating that a Consistory had erred in not acquiescing to the resignation of a member. The next year, Classis Central US advised a Consistory that it *should not* proceed with the discipline of a member who indicated his desire to resign his membership. Rather than continuing discipline, the Consistory was advised, it should acquiesce to the individual’s request, cease the discipline process, and announce that the individual had withdrawn from the Body of Christ. However, in 2013 Classis Central US advised a Consistory that it *should* proceed with the discipline of a member who had resigned. Since discipline belongs to the church, the Consistory was advised, an individual should not be allowed to avoid church discipline by resigning.

Because church discipline is a matter central to the calling of the church and essential to its faithfulness, it seems crucial that we study this matter together, seeking to come to unanimity in the light of Scripture and the Reformed Confessions concerning how we regard and handle those who seek to resign their membership in the church of Christ.

OVERTURE:

Classis Central US overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to establish a study committee to evaluate the practice of resigning one's church membership. We ask that this committee be called to develop and recommend pastoral advice to the churches concerning the following points:

1. How, according to Scripture and the testimony of our Reformed Confessions, we should regard the practice of resigning, or attempting to resign, one's membership in the church;
2. How, according to Scripture and the testimony of our Reformed confessions, we should regard an individual who attempts to engage in this practice of resigning church membership; and
3. How the churches should respond when a member attempts to resign from the membership of the church, paying special attention to these questions:
 - a. Under what circumstances, if any, should a Consistory ever *acquiesce* to a member's desire to resign his or her membership in the church?
 - b. Under what circumstances, if any, should the Consistory ever *refuse to acquiesce* to a member's desire to resign his or her membership in the church?
 - c. Should church discipline continue to be exercised in the case of a member who, in the midst of the discipline process, expresses the desire to resign from the church?

GROUNDS:

1. In Art. 28 of the Belgic Confession of Faith, we confess to believe concerning the church "that, since this holy assembly and congregation is the gathering of those who are saved and there is no salvation apart from it, no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, regardless of his status or condition. But all people are obliged to join and unite with it, keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline. ... And so, all who withdraw from the church or do not join it act contrary to God's ordinance." By this confession we acknowledge that separation from the church involves a separation from the body to which all who are saved belong. The result of this action looks like "self-excommunication," if such a thing were possible. Since church discipline is entrusted to the church through its elders, it behooves the churches to study this matter and agree together how withdrawal relates to the church discipline which Christ has entrusted to His faithful elders.
2. Because these questions concern how we regard the members of any given congregation, the churches need to consider this question together, that we might properly regard those from congregations other than our own.
3. Since we have agreed together concerning the means by which people are able to join the church, we ought to agree together on how men are permitted to depart from the church.
4. As a matter of fairness and justice, the churches ought to develop together a unified understanding of and response toward those who commit this offense against Christ, which too often is the outcome of a faithfully begun process of discipline.

Overture #4

OVERTURE TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014 TO EMPANEL A STUDY COMMITTEE RELATED TO DESERTION OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM:

One of the more challenging pastoral issues with which to deal is the desertion of a member. Often such desertion comes as a response to actions of church discipline, complicating the avenue of communication with the member who has deserted and frustrating the remedial aspect of the discipline itself. Given the portability and ease of movement in our day desertion of membership is a challenge beginning to occur more frequently and one likely to become more prevalent in the future. Conversely, since it was the case that our forefathers largely lived in a situation of geographical permanence in communities where everyone knew his neighbor, the history on this problem is rather recent. Therefore, a search of resources usually referenced to guide our deliberation reveals rather little help. We need to apply biblical, confessional, and historical material to this current problem.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF THE PROBLEM:

Regularly our classis meetings include a time when the delegates consider discipline matters brought to it from the local congregations. Some of those discipline cases involve members who have, it seems, decided to stop communicating with the consistory. The choice by these erring members has the effect of making it nearly impossible for the consistory to answer certain practical questions presented to it at the meeting of classis. Those questions are of the nature of discovery – “Is the brother attending a different church?”, “has the brother given evidence of repentance?”, “is the consistory convinced that, given time, a good result is possible?” and usually the answer given by the consistory to such questions is, “we don’t know.” Classis is left uncertain as to how to proceed given the choice taken by the member to desert his office of member.

OVERTURE:

Classis Central US overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to empanel a study committee to give pastoral advice on the issue of desertion of church membership, as well as suggest appropriate changes to the church order.

The following should be addressed in the study committee report:

1. What are the parameters which, when met, would constitute an individual seeking to desert his church membership?
2. What options should be available to a consistory once a person has deserted his membership?
3. What changes/additions to the church order should codify an understanding of desertion of church membership?

4. What changes/additions to the church order should codify our agreement about an appropriate response or responses to desertion?

5. Whether there are any legal ramifications that should be considered by consistories.

GROUNDS:

1. The issue of desertion of membership occurs in our churches.
2. Our church order does not directly and specifically address the issue of deserting membership.
3. The event of deserting membership elicits a variety of opinions and convictions within the consistories and classes of the federation - and sometimes those opinions and convictions are of such contrariness as to cause difficulties within a consistory or classis
4. The principle of employing a multitude of counselors to arrive at biblical harmony is already richly evidenced in our ecclesiastical life as the church order reveals. We should strive for harmony on how to respond to desertion. (Article 57 give credence to the desire for harmony as expressed in this ground.)
5. The shepherding care of the consistory for the member should not be automatically curtailed by a lack of response from that member.

Overture #5

To Synod Visalia of the United Reformed Churches in North America June 2-6 from Classis Michigan

Overture to Revise Guidelines for Missions Coordinator

I. Background

Synod Nyack 2012 approved the position of a Missions Coordinator (Acts of Synod Nyack, Article 81) as well policies governing that position (Acts of Synod Nyack, Article 85). Part of the requirements is that the man be an ordained minister.

While it would be useful for the Missions Coordinator to be an ordained minister, there is no scriptural requirement for this to be the case and practical considerations suggest the possibility also of an elder/qualified godly man filling the position. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has an elder ably filling a similar role with their Committee on Foreign Missions (General Secretary, Mr. Mark Bube).

II. Overture

Classis Michigan overtures Synod 2014 to change the missions policies (as printed in the Agenda for Synod Nyack, pages 376-379) as follows:

1. Change in b.3.f. (“Functions and Tasks of the Synodical Missions Committee,” “Chairman-Coordinator”), from “He shall visit missionaries periodically for encouragement, exhortation, and preaching/teaching/counseling, in order to assist the calling churches and missionaries as requested by either party” to “He shall visit missionaries periodically for encouragement, exhortation, and teaching/counseling, in order to assist the calling churches and missionaries as requested by either party.”
2. Change in c.2.a. (“Qualifications for Synodical Missions Committee Members,” “Chairman-Coordinator”), from “The Chairman-coordinator must be an ordained minister of Word” to “The coordinator must be an ordained minister of the Word or a qualified godly man recommended by his consistory.”
3. Change in c.2.c., from “The Chairman-coordinator should show strength in both pastoral ministry and administrative skills” to “The coordinator should show strength in administrative skills as well as in pastoral ministry (if an ordained minister).”
4. Change in d.2.a., (“Appointment of Members,” “Chairman of committee”) from “Each classis is encouraged to nominate a minister of the Word for the position of Chairman-coordinator of the Synodical Missions Committee.” to “Each classis is encouraged to nominate a minister of the Word or a qualified godly man for the position of Missions Coordinator.”

III. *Grounds*

1. It is not necessary for the Missions Coordinator to be an ordained minister. Consideration should also be given to a qualified godly candidate.

Done in the Classis Michigan March 11, 2014

Rev. Greg Lubbers, Stated Clerk

Overture #6

OVERTURE FROM CLASSIS ONTARIO - EAST TO OVERTURE SYNOD VISALIA 2014 TO RETAIN THE DOXOLOGICAL ENDING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER FOR LITURGICAL USE

BACKGROUND:

The *Lord's Prayer* is a standard feature in the liturgical life of the church. In many of the liturgical forms that have been used for centuries among the Reformed Churches, the *Lord's Prayer* is also included, in many cases it is even recited by the worshippers in unison. In the latest submissions of the Liturgical Forms Committee, the version of the Lord's Prayer presented lacks the traditional doxological ending. This reflects the committee's decision to use the *English Standard Version* wherever Scripture is quoted.

We have no interest in debating the *textual* issue. The point of our concern is not textual, but liturgical and pastoral. Whether or not the traditional ending is part of Jesus' instruction from the Sermon on the Mount, it is certainly the traditional, expected usage among God's people liturgically.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario-East overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to retain the longer, doxological ending (namely *For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.*) in every instance where the Lord's Prayer is included in our Liturgical Forms.

FOUNDATIONS:

1. Pastorally, making so drastic a change to what is familiar, as the committee has proposed, will have a very unnecessary, unsettling effect on God's people.
2. The Lord's Prayer, with the doxological ending, enjoys standard usage throughout the world and is standard fare across denominational lines.
3. The extended ending is treated in the Heidelberg Catechism, being included in the quotation of the prayer in A 119 and reflected on in A 128. If these words are worthy of our reflection and confession in the Catechism to which we subscribe as churches, then certainly they remain worthy of our liturgical use.
4. Its usage in the liturgy of the church need not be seen narrowly as a quotation of Scripture, but more broadly as part of the liturgical tradition of the church.

Done in Classis on March 20, 2014

Overture #7

OVERTURE FROM CLASSIS ONTARIO - EAST TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014 FOR ENHANCEMENT OF THE WORK ON THE PROPOSED FORM FOR BAPTISM

BACKGROUND:

The *Liturgical Forms Committee*, as it came into being by being distinguished from the Psalter Hymnal Committee by a decision of Synod Calgary (*Acts* 2004, Art. 96.3), has nevertheless, been functioning fruitfully with the rather broad mandate established by Synod Hudsonville 1999, namely: “[The] recommendation of other materials (liturgical forms, the 3 forms of Unity, Creeds, Prayers, etc.) to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal.” (*Acts* 1999, Art 41.c.(b).). Along the way, the Committee has helpfully articulated something of its *modus operandi* in stating that: “Continuity with current forms is very important, although shortening and modernization of language may be in order in certain cases.” (See *Acts of Synod Schererville* 2007, p. 298).

We are in hearty agreement with the Committee’s expressed two-pronged goal of seeking vigorously to maintain both historical continuity with the standard forms used in the Reformed churches throughout the years and contemporary usefulness of our forms for generations to come in terms of the need for beauty and accessibility of language. It is a challenging goal that gives rise to some tensions.

In the Committee’s work on *Baptism of Infants: Form 1*, updates have been proposed to Form 1 for the Baptism of Infants as published in the 1976 edition of the Blue *Psalter Hymnal*. This is effectively the historic form, the English translation was approved for use in the CRC in 1912, and is based on the Dutch translation work of Petrus Dathenus, dating back to 1566. His work was an abbreviation and translation of the German form used in Heidelberg and rooting in the work of John Calvin. The Great Synod of Dort was instrumental in codifying the use of these liturgical forms and, as a result, the forms approved there have been the standard among Reformed churches throughout the world ever since.

Our Liturgical Forms Committee’s work on this Form 1 for baptism to date has done an excellent job with the important task of maintaining continuity with the historic form. Where the work, to this point at least, suffers is in regards to contemporary usefulness. The sentence structure, sentence and paragraph length, and basic style of the resultant work carries with it some uncomfortable stiltedness that makes the proposed revision less attractive for today’s ears. This is a particular problem in terms of the clumsiness of the present rendition of the prayers included in the form.

In 1976, with the publication of a new edition of the Blue *Psalter Hymnal*, the CRC released an updated translation of the same historic form (known as *Baptism of Children, Form 2* in the Blue PH). In terms of style and readability this form was and is a marked improvement over the 1912

version of Form 1. In terms of precision and faithfulness to the historic language, however, the 1976 form fell short in a few minor respects.

In what is being proposed by means of this overture, the intent is to seek to maintain the best of both worlds in terms of theological, historical continuity together with a somewhat more appealing contemporary style.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario-East overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to adopt provisionally the attached proposed enhancement of the form for the “*Baptism of Infants: Form I*” for continued refinement by the *Liturgical Forms Committee*. Classis correspondingly overtures Synod to instruct the Committee to bring those components of the forms for *Adult Baptism, Reception of Families* and *Household Baptism* that overlap with the basic baptismal form into conformity with one another, as appropriate.

GROUNDS:

1. The proposed form is faithful in maintaining historic, theological continuity with the traditional, historic Reformed form for baptism.
2. By profiting from the more recent 1976 translation, the resulting proposal is much clearer, less wooden and clumsy, and more appealing and understandable than the present proposal.
3. The combination of both goals and grounds above will result in greater blessing for the ability of the next generation to continue to be instructed by and profit from their regular exposure to the Bible’s teaching concerning baptism.
4. Consistency between the standard form for the *Baptism of Infants* and the forms for *Adult Baptism, Household Baptism* and the *Reception of Families* that build from it, has always been maintained. Such consistency is important in terms of the mutual confession of all of the baptized, regardless of the manner in which the Lord has brought them to that point.
5. The arguments for greater clarity in the standard form apply in the very same way to each of the forms that build from it.

Done in Classis March 20, 2014

Attached: Baptism Form Proposal Comparison

BAPTISM OF CHILDREN	BAPTISM OF INFANTS	BAPTISM OF INFANTS
<p align="center">Form Number 2 1976</p>	<p align="center">Proposed Form Number 1 (Overture to Synod Visalia 2014)</p>	<p align="center">Revised Form Number 1 (Forms Committee Proposal, 2012)</p>
<p><i>Form 2 from the Blue Psalter Hymnal, is a new translation of the historic form adopted by the CRC Synod of 1976.</i></p>	<p><i>This is the proposal of the overture to Synod, seeking to maintain the precision of the committee's work with the historic form, as well as the more pleasing style of the 1976 translation.</i></p>	<p><i>The revised Form 1 provisionally adopted for use by URCNA Synod London 2010 and slightly updated by the Liturgical Forms Committee in its report to Synod Nyack 2012.</i></p>
<p>Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ: What the Lord has revealed to us in his Word about holy baptism can be summarized in this way:</p>	<p>Beloved Congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ: What the Lord has revealed to us in his Word about holy baptism can be summarized in this way:</p>	<p>Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ: There are three principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism.</p>
<p><i>First:</i> Baptism teaches that we and our children are sinful from the time of conception and birth. This means that we are all under the judgment of God and for that reason cannot be members of his kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. Therefore, we ought to be displeased with ourselves, humble ourselves, and turn to God for our salvation.</p>	<p><i>First:</i> Baptism teaches that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. This means that we are by nature children of wrath, and for that reason cannot be members of his kingdom unless we are born again. Baptism, whether by immersion or sprinkling, teaches that sin has made us so impure that we must undergo a cleansing which only God can accomplish. Therefore, we are urged to detest ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and turn to God for our cleansing and salvation.</p>	<p><i>First:</i> That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, unless we are born again. This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.</p>
<p><i>Second:</i> Baptism is a sign and seal that our sins are washed away through Jesus Christ. For this reason we are baptized into the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p><i>Second:</i> Baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. For this reason we are baptized into the name of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.</p>	<p><i>Second:</i> Holy baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us</p>
<p>Our baptism into the name of God the Father is his assurance to us that he makes an everlasting covenant of grace with us and adopts us as his</p>	<p>When we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father testifies and seals to us that he makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and</p>	

children and heirs. Therefore, he surrounds us with his goodness and protects us from evil or turns it to our profit.

When we are baptized into the name of the Son, we are assured by Christ himself that he washes us in his blood from all our sins. Christ joins us to himself so that we share in his death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ we are liberated from our sins and regarded as righteous before God.

Baptism into the name of the Holy Spirit is the assurance that the Spirit of God will make his home within us. While living within us, the Spirit will continually work to strengthen and deepen our union with Christ. He will make real in our lives Christ's work of washing away our sins. He will also help us each day to live the new life we have in Christ. As a result of his work within us, we shall one day be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Because all covenants have two sides, baptism also places us under obligation to live in obedience to God. We must cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must trust him and love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must abandon the sinful way of life, put to death our old nature, and show by our lives that we belong to God. If we through weakness should fall into sin, we must not despair of God's grace, nor use our weakness as an excuse to keep sinning. Baptism is a seal and totally reliable witness that God is always faithful to his covenant.

adopts us as his children and heirs. Therefore, he promises to provide everything good and protect us from all evil or turn it to our profit.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Son, God the Son promises and seals to us that he washes us in his blood from all our sins. Christ joins us to himself so that we share in his death and resurrection. Through this union with Christ we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God.

When we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that he will make his home within us. He will sanctify us to make us living members of Christ. He will make real in our lives what we are promised in Christ, namely, the washing away our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. As a result of his work within us, we shall finally be presented without the stain of sin among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants have two parts, a promise and an obligation, through baptism, God calls us and places us under obligation to live in new obedience to Him. This means, we must cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We must trust in him and love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must abandon the sinful, worldly way of life. We must put to death our old nature, and show by our lives that we belong to God. If we through weakness should fall into sin, we must not despair of God's mercy, nor use our weakness as an excuse to keep sinning. Baptism is a seal and totally reliable witness that

with every good thing and turn aside all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, until we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants contain two parts, therefore we are by God, through baptism, admonished and obliged to live in new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. And if through weakness, we sometimes fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God. And although our children do not

<p>Our children should not be denied the sacrament of baptism because of their inability to understand its meaning. Without their knowledge, our children not only share in Adam's condemnation but are also received into God's favor in Christ. God's gracious attitude toward us and our children is revealed in what he said to Abraham, the father of all believers: "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you" (<i>Gen. 17:7</i>). The apostle Peter also testifies to this with these words: "For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." (<i>Acts 2:39</i>). Therefore God formerly commanded that children be circumcised as a seal of the covenant and as a declaration that righteousness comes by faith. Christ also recognized that children are members of the covenant people when he embraced them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (<i>Mark 10:16</i>). Since baptism has replaced circumcision, our children should be baptized as heirs of God's kingdom and of his covenant. As the children mature, their parents are responsible for teaching them the meaning of baptism.</p> <p>Let us turn to God, asking that in this baptism his name may be glorified, we may be comforted, and the church may be edified.</p>	<p>we have an eternal covenant with God.</p> <p>Our children should not be excluded from baptism because of their inability to understand its meaning. Just as without their knowledge they share in Adam's condemnation, so they are, without their knowledge, received to grace in Christ.</p> <p>God's gracious attitude toward us and our children is revealed in what he said to Abraham, the father of all believers: <i>And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you</i> (<i>Gen. 17:7</i>). The apostle Peter also testifies to this with these words: <i>For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself</i> (<i>Acts 2:39</i>). Therefore God formerly commanded that children be circumcised as a seal of the covenant and as a declaration that righteousness comes by faith. Christ also recognized that children are members of the covenant people when he embraced them, laid his hands on them, and blessed them (<i>Mark 10:16</i>). Since baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (<i>Col. 2:11-13</i>), our children should be baptized as heirs of God's kingdom and of his covenant.</p> <p>As the children grow up, their parents are responsible for teaching them the meaning of baptism.</p> <p>In order that we may now administer this holy sacrament of God to His glory, for our comfort, and to the upbuilding of the church, let us call upon His holy Name.</p>	<p>understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since without their knowledge, they are participants in the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received to grace in Christ; as God speaks to Abraham, the father of all believers, and therefore also to us and our children, saying: <i>And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you</i> (<i>Gen. 17:7</i>). Peter also testifies to this with these words: <i>For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself</i> (<i>Acts 2:39</i>). Therefore, God formerly commanded to circumcise them, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; as also Christ embraced them, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them (<i>Mark 10:16</i>). Since, then, baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (<i>Col. 2:11-13</i>), the children should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and as members of His covenant; and as they grow up, the parents shall be bound to give them further instruction in these things.</p> <p>That we, therefore, may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon His holy Name:</p>
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Almighty, eternal God, long ago you severely punished an unbelieving and unrepentant world by sending a flood. But you showed your great mercy when you saved and protected believing Noah and his family. Baptism was again signified when you drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his whole army in the Red Sea and you brought your people Israel through the sea with dry feet.

We pray that in this your boundless mercy you will look upon these your children with favor by bringing them into union with your Son, Jesus Christ, through your Holy Spirit. May they be buried with Christ into death and be raised with him to new life. Give them true faith, firm hope, and ardent love so that they may joyfully bear their cross as they daily follow him.

Give these children the full assurance of your grace so that when they leave this life and its constant struggle against the power of sin they may appear before the judgment seat of Christ without fear. We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parents

People of God, as you have now heard, baptism is given to us by God as proof that he does make a covenant with us and our children. We must, therefore, use the sacrament for the purpose that God intended and not out of custom or superstition. You are asked to give an honest answer to these

Almighty, eternal God, long ago you severely punished an unbelieving and unrepentant world by sending a flood. But in your great mercy you saved and protected believing Noah and his family. Baptism was again signified when you drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his whole army in the Red Sea and you brought your people Israel through the sea on dry ground.

We therefore pray that in your infinite mercy you will graciously look upon these your children and bring them into union with your Son, Jesus Christ, through your Holy Spirit. May they be buried with Christ into death and be raised with him to walk in newness of life. We pray that they may follow Christ day by day, may joyfully bear their cross, and cling to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love.

Comfort them in your grace so that when they leave this life and its constant struggle against the power of sin, they may appear before the judgment seat of Christ your Son without fear. We ask this in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent(s)

Beloved in Christ the Lord, as you have now heard, baptism is given to us by God to seal His covenant to us and our children. We must, therefore, use the sacrament for the purpose that God intended and not out of custom or superstition. That it may be clear that you are doing what God commands, you

O almighty, eternal God, who according to your severe judgment, punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, who according to your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; who drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground—by which you showed us the meaning of baptism—we earnestly pray that you may be pleased of your infinite mercy, graciously to look upon these your children and incorporate them by your Holy Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that they, daily following Him, may joyfully bear their cross, cleaving to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that they, being comforted in you, may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ your Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent(s)

Beloved in Christ the Lord, you have heard that baptism is an institution of God to seal to us and our seed His covenant; therefore it must be used for that end, and not out of custom or superstition. That it may, then, be clear to all that you are in agreement, you are to sincerely answer these questions:

questions as a testimony that you are doing what God commands.

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, who are sinful from the time of conception and birth and therefore subject to the misery which sin brings, even the condemnation of God, are made holy by God in Christ and so as members of his body ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarized in the Apostles' Creed, and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you sincerely promise to do all you can to teach these children, and to have them taught, this doctrine of salvation?

Answer: We do.

_____, I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank you and praise your name for having forgiven our sins through the blood of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. We thank you for uniting us with Christ

are to answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, who are conceived and born in sin, and subject to the misery which sin brings, even the condemnation of God, are sanctified in Christ and so as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge that the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, summarized in the Apostles' Creed, and taught in this Christian church, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you sincerely promise to do all you can to teach these children, and to have them taught, this doctrine of salvation?

¶ *The parents answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).*

¶ *Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:*
_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of your dear Son Jesus Christ. You received us through your

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, even to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you promise and intend to instruct these children, as soon as they are able to understand, in this doctrine, and cause them to be instructed in these things, to the utmost of your power?

¶ *The parents answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).*

¶ *Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:*
_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through your Holy

through your Holy Spirit and adopting us as your children, and we thank you for sealing and confirming these blessings to us and our children in the sacrament of baptism.

We pray, O Lord, that you will always govern these children by your Holy Spirit. May they, through your guidance, be so nurtured in the Christian faith and godliness as to grow and develop in Jesus Christ. Help them see your fatherly goodness and mercy which surrounds us all. Make them champions of righteousness under the direction of Jesus Christ, our only Teacher, King, and High Priest. Give them the courage to fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion. May their lives become an eternal song of praise to you, the one only true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us as your children. You sealed and confirmed this to us by holy baptism.

We earnestly pray, through your beloved Son that you will always govern these children by your Holy Spirit. May they be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness and grow and develop in the Lord Jesus Christ. Grant that they may see your fatherly goodness and mercy which you have shown to them and to us all. May they live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ. Give them the courage to fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion. May they forever praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be your children, and sealed and confirmed the same to us by holy baptism. We earnestly pray, through Him, your beloved Son, always to govern these children by your Holy Spirit, that they may be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that they may acknowledge your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to them and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Overture #8

OVERTURE FROM CLASSIS ONTARIO - EAST TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014 TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF LITURGICAL FORMS

BACKGROUND:

In 1996, when the United Reformed Churches in North America federated at our first synod, the following decision was taken: “That the United Reformed Churches in North America adopt the liturgical forms printed in the Psalter Hymnal, Centennial Edition (1976) for use among the churches.” (*Acts* 1996, Art. 24.L). Subsequently, at our 3rd synod, Synod Hudsonville 1999, a Psalter Hymnal committee was appointed and given as part of its mandate the rather broad assignment, “[The] recommendation of other materials (liturgical forms, the 3 forms of Unity, Creeds, Prayers, etc.) to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal.” (*Acts* 1999, Art 41.c.(b).) At Synod Calgary 2004 the Psalter Hymnal committee was relieved of the responsibility to work on the “non-musical section” that they might devote themselves to Psalms and Hymns. The “non-musical section” of the work was assigned to a newly appointed committee. (*Acts* 2004, Art. 96.3). The mandate for this newly formed committee was not further specified or clarified at that time. This “non-musical section” has, more appropriately, come to be known as the Liturgical Forms Committee.

In spite of the lack of a precise mandate, the committee has been diligent in its work, interacting with the churches, and making reports of its progress. We are grateful for the work that we’ve seen. We are also appreciative of the commitment the committee has articulated, namely that: “Continuity with current forms is very important, although shortening and modernization of language may be in order in certain cases.” (See *Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, p. 298).

In keeping with that conviction, and while appreciative of all of the committee’s work, our present concern is that with the current proposals for a multiplicity of forms there is unnecessary duplication. These concerns have been raised on the floor of Synod (Nyack, 2012) and in subsequent communications with the committee. In each instance, the response of the committee or its representatives has been that such a focusing of the committee mandate could potentially be helpful, but would have to come about via a decision of the churches by means of an overture to synod. (Liturgical Forms Committee Letter of January 15, 2014). Without such a directive from the churches the Committee feels compelled to maintain its present *modus operandi* in terms of approach. We seek with this overture to focus the approach.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario-East overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to limit the production of liturgical forms to one form per liturgical event¹ while maintaining the commitment to continuity with the historic Reformed forms.

GROUNDS:

1. Having this discussion is in keeping with what the Committee has recommended as the procedure required to determine if there is a desire among the churches to have the mandate regarding liturgical forms focused in this manner. It allows for the matter to be discussed among the churches from the narrower to the broader assemblies.
2. Consistency of instruction. One of the benefits of the Reformed commitment to the use of standardized liturgical forms throughout the years has been that God's people have been blessed with consistent and substantial teaching on the sacraments and ordinances of the church. Having one form per liturgical event would help in maintaining that consistency.
3. This allows for an expression of the unity of faith.
 - a. Negatively, divergent forms can and have been the cause for disunity where differences of opinion can arise in terms of preferences.
 - b. Positively, commitment to a single set of forms with basic continuity to the forms used in Reformed churches throughout the years promotes a unity of faith, locally, throughout the federation, between faithful Reformed federations, and historically through the ages.
4. Efficiency. The unnecessary multiplication of forms will tend to make the new song book more unwieldy.

Done in Classis March 20, 2014

¹ One form for each of the following liturgical events: Baptism of Infants, Public Profession of Faith, Baptism of Adults, Reception of Families, Household Baptism, Celebration of the Lord's Supper, Short Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper, Excommunication, Readmission, Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word, Ordination of Elders and Deacons, Solemnization of Marriage.

Overture #9

OVERTURE FROM CLASSIS ONTARIO - EAST TO SYNOD VISALIA 2014 TO REMOVE BAPTISM FORM 2 (Blue PH Form 3) FROM THE COMMITTEE'S PROPOSAL

BACKGROUND:

The *Liturgical Forms Committee*, as it came into being by being distinguished from the Psalter Hymnal Committee by a decision of Synod Calgary (*Acts* 2004, Art. 96.3), has nevertheless, been functioning fruitfully with the rather broad mandate established by Synod Hudsonville 1999, namely: “[The] recommendation of other materials (liturgical forms, the 3 forms of Unity, Creeds, Prayers, etc.) to be included in the new Psalter Hymnal.” (*Acts* 1999, Art 41.c.(b)). Earlier, at our first synod in 1996, the churches had gone on record to “adopt the liturgical forms printed in the Psalter Hymnal, Centennial Edition (1976) for use among the churches.” (*Acts* 1996, Art. 24.L). Over the years the committee has been working with a principle it helpfully expressed in 2007: “Continuity with current forms is very important, although shortening and modernization of language may be in order in certain cases.” (See *Acts of Synod Schererville 2007*, p. 298). Subsequent synods have not further specified or clarified the Committee mandate. As a result, it is our conviction that the inclusion of reworked versions of *all* of the forms extant in the Blue Psalter Hymnal is neither required nor necessary.

The most recent published work of the Committee includes a slightly revised rendition of Form 3 for the Baptism of Children from the Blue *Psalter Hymnal*, which in the Committee’s proposal is designated *Baptism of Children – Form 2*. The pedigree of this particular form is that it is a form that is unique to the CRC, one that was commissioned to be written from scratch in the 1960s and adopted for inclusion in the 1976 edition of the *Psalter Hymnal*. Our own Liturgical Forms Committee has made few editorial changes. One of the exceptions would appear to be the insertion of a note of celebration by adding “As we are here to celebrate holy baptism” as an opening phrase. Another, more helpful substantive editorial addition would be the addition at the end of the last paragraph of “The Instruction” portion. In the original, the paragraph simply ended as follows: “We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God’s own children.” In the new proposal before us the committee has added the following words: “and because of that, they are to repent of their sins and embrace God’s promise of forgiveness in Christ by faith.” We find this to be a very helpful addition and a necessary corrective to the potential for presumption that could result from the wording of the original.

Nevertheless, it is in relation to this, among other matters, that we have concerns. We don’t believe it is proper to introduce substantive additions to an existing form. Is that actually our prerogative with regard to a form of uniquely CRC origin? We are also concerned for the CRC’s proprietary interest in the maintenance of the language of a form uniquely its own.

Our conviction is that the unity we presently enjoy among the confessionally Reformed bodies at NAPARC (CanRC, FRC, HRC) is better expressed in our unified use of the historic form (Form 1). That unity would be hindered by the use of this more recent form of a more narrow denominational provenance.

Furthermore, when judged against the standard of the historic form, the present form is lacking both doctrinally and pastorally. Doctrinally, the CRC-produced form lacks any reference to our being children of wrath, and to the necessity of the new birth, whereas this is where the historic form begins. Pastorally, the sensitivity of the historic form to the possibility of through weakness falling into sin, its warning against continuing in sin, its challenge not do despair of God's mercy and its assurance in this connection that we have an eternal covenant with God, are not articulated in the newer form.

OVERTURE:

Classis Ontario-East overtures Synod Visalia 2014 to instruct the Liturgical Forms Committee to remove *Baptism of Children – Form 2* (which is a slightly updated version of Form 3 in the *Blue Psalter Hymnal*) from the Liturgical Forms being proposed for inclusion in the new *Psalter Hymnal*.

GROUNDS:

1. This will alleviate any proprietary concerns there may be in terms of using a form of recent and uniquely CRC vintage.
2. This will alleviate the concern for a doctrinal weakness in the proposed form as compared with the explicit references in the historic form to our being children of wrath, and to the necessity of the new birth.
3. This will alleviate the concern about pastoral sensitivities present in the historic form (Form 1) but lacking in the more recent form.
4. This will enhance the unity we enjoy in these liturgical matters with the confessionally Reformed federations we are in fellowship with in NAPARC, which unity would be hindered by our use of this more recent form of a more narrow denominational provenance.

Done in Classis on March 20, 2014

Communication #1

Note:

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

Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity
Report to Synod Visalia 2014

I. Introduction

Esteemed Brothers,

Our committee works with 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)

In humble recognition of the need for ongoing patience, and with a prayerful understanding of our continued need to grow together as a federation of churches in the unified pursuit of our ecumenical calling, we continue to pray and work “with a view toward complete church unity” with the conviction that the glory of our Savior is promoted by the visible unity of his church.

Since our beginnings as *United* Reformed Churches, there has always lived among us the recognition of our calling to pursue a broader confessional unity with all of those churches that share with us a like and precious confession. Where such confessional unity is found, we do believe that federations of true churches should continue to strive for a greater and greater degree of visible and organizational unity as providential circumstances allow.

To that end, we also continue to work with the following synodical guidelines.

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

Phase One - Corresponding Relations

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

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

- h. theological education for ministers

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

Phase Two - Ecclesiastical Fellowship

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

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

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

Phase Three - Church Union

The third phase of ecumenicity is one of integration with the intent that the two federations, being *united in true faith*, and where contiguous geography permits, shall proceed to complete church unity, that is, ecclesiastical union.

This phase shall be accomplished in two steps:

Step A – Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union

Having recognized and accepted each other as true and faithful churches, the federations shall make preparation for and a commitment to eventual, integrated federative church unity. They shall construct a plan of ecclesiastical union which shall outline the timing, coordination, and/or integration of the following:

- a. the broader assemblies
- b. the liturgies and liturgical forms
- c. the translations of the Bible and the confessions
- d. the song books for worship
- e. the church polity and order
- f. the missions abroad

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

Step B – Implementation of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union

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

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

II. Committee Membership, Terms and Budget

a. Committee membership and Terms

Synod London 2010 determined that the matter of term limits for *classical representatives* be considered a classical prerogative (Art. 68.4). This has proved to be a good arrangement both for the sake of continuity as well as for the growing engagement of the issues and challenges of ecumenicity at the classical level throughout the federation. The classes are reminded of their continuing responsibility to appoint or reappoint classical representatives (and alternates) to CERCU in the manner the classes deem appropriate.

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

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

Classical representatives:

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

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

Members-at-large:

1. Rev. Peter Vellenga – appointed by Synod 2007
2. Rev. Bill Pols – appointed by Synod 2007
3. Rev. Richard Miller – appointed by Synod 2012; term began July 1, 2013.

Alternate member-at-large: Rev. Brian Vos was appointed to a three year term by Synod 2010. That term expired July 1, 2013. Synod Nyack 2012 did not reappoint him to another three year term as alternate due to our committee's negligence in nominating him or anyone else. He is eligible for reappointment.

The committee recommends that all three members-at-large be reappointed to a three year term. It will be the third term for Rev. Vellenga and Rev. Pols and the second term for Rev. Miller.

b. Budget

The annual budget for CERCU set by Synod Nyack is \$6,500.00. We have continued to make every effort to be stewardly with the finances allotted to us. When delegating fraternal representatives every attempt is made to do so in the most economical way feasible, also making use of local URC pastors in certain circumstances. We also anticipate holding full committee meetings annually each year in connection with the meetings of NAPARC. During these meetings we take opportunity to continue our ecumenical pursuits and discussions with the ecumenicity committees of many of the bodies represented there as a stewardly use of the churches' finances. Your committee requests synod to increase the annual budget allowance for CERCU from \$6,500.00 to \$10,000 US.

III. Reports on Churches in Ecumenical Relations

Your committee engages in ecumenical dialogue and continues to seek to promote greater unity among 11 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. Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
6. 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)

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. They hold to the *Westminster Confession* and catechisms. As of the 2013 meeting of their General Synod, their 10 presbyteries reported a total membership of 34,960 in 294 congregations and missions. They look forward, together with the RPCNA, to holding concurrent general assemblies in 2015 at Bonclarken with joint worship times.

The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church holds to the Westminster Confession of Faith as well as Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Their ordination vows include the this question, "Do you accept the doctrines of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as founded on the Word of God and as the expression of your own faith, and do you resolve to adhere thereto?" They allow scruples if they are approved by the ordaining or receiving presbytery. They allow the ordination of women deacons, although this is an historic practice not linked to feminist movement of the latter half of the twentieth century. They are officially opposed to lodge membership but it is tolerated in a number of their congregations, seemingly without complaint from others.

They are members of NAPARC and the World Reformed Fellowship. They have fraternal ties with most of the NAPARC churches. In 2011 they withdrew from the International Conference of Reformed Churches for stewardship reasons and ended fraternal relations with the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The ARP hosted NAPARC in November 2013 and our committee had a brief meeting during a Noon meal. They informed us that there is a growing diversity of worship styles in their churches, especially among church plants. A few of their congregations may still practice exclusive psalmody but most use the Trinity Hymnal or other hymnals on an approved list. Practice varies regarding the frequency of the Lord's Supper including, weekly, monthly and bi-monthly. They do not have a lot of discipline cases. They tend to be slow and forbearing rather than quick to discipline. They are working on a new Book of Discipline.

2. Free Reformed Churches (FRC)

The FRC are a small federation of churches consisting of 19 congregations with a total membership in 2012 of 4,400. 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 Congregations in the operation of the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. They are also involved with other Reformed denominations through Word and Deed and in Redemption Prison Ministries. Rev. K. Gangar is engaged in a ministry of translation of Reformed literature into the five languages of India, for use in India and among Indian immigrants in North America.

At the sub-committee level, we had two fruitful meetings with the FRC, the first on February 7, 2013 and the second on September 9, 2013, both in Ontario. We also met with their delegation to NAPARC both in 2012 and 2013. Much of these discussions have centered on the view of the congregation, the need for experiential preaching and on how our understanding of the covenant and of baptism impact our ministry among the congregations. These matters in particular are matters of concern for the FRC brethren, and are areas where perceptions and potentially misperceptions exist between us.

In the course of our discussions, the FRC brothers inquired as to the standing of the *Conclusions of Utrecht* in the URC. At our September 9, 2013 meeting we had a thorough discussion of these matters together. We made use of the conclusions of the *Synod of Utrecht 1905*, and material prepared by Dr. Mark Beach reflecting upon Dr. Herman Bavinck's contribution to the discussion in those days. <http://www.midamerica.edu/resources/journal/19/beach19.pdf> (*The Conclusions of Utrecht* are also included for your reference in Appendix 1 of this CERCU report).

After the September 9, 2013 meeting our CERCU sub-committee responded with the attached report in an effort to summarize the profitable discussion we enjoyed. The paper should not formally be considered a "Statement of Agreement", as the level of Contact at which the FRCs presently relate to the URCNA does not allow for their Interchurch Relations Committee to produce such statements. That being understood, the IRC of the FRC do acknowledge the report as a faithful summary of our discussion; they have also expressed their general agreement with it.

We are presenting this material here in our synodical report as part of our Phase One dialogue with the FRC, particularly regarding "significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology." Our hope is that by means of our reflection on this report the churches of both federations can receive from one another an expression of what lives in the thinking and practice of our respective churches. To that end, your committee is asking for synodical approval of this work of the committees in this report as a faithful depiction of life in the URCNA, without making any binding pronouncements. We also welcome any expressions of concern in this regard. See recommendation 9. (Please note that the standard recommendation (Recommendation 15) to Synod to approve the work of CERCU includes the caveat "without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.")

Report of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity in Dialogue with the Interchurch Relations Committee of the FRCs

Some Reflections on the Conclusions of Utrecht

In 1905 the Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands adopted a testimony concerning 4 doctrinal issues: the order within God's eternal decree (infralapsarianism and supralapsarianism), eternal justification, immediate regeneration, and presumed regeneration. (The *Conclusions* of the 1905 Synod are appended.)

Why would the committees of our respective Synods spend time discussing a statement that was adopted by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands more than a century ago? It is important for our churches to understand that these issues explain, in large measure, the underlying cause for the existence of the Free Reformed Churches in North America today. The issues that led to the adoption of the *Conclusions* in 1905 also play a large role in our history as United Reformed Churches via our roots in the Christian Reformed Church in North America. In 1892, two groups of secession churches in the Netherlands – the 1834 “Afscheiding” or Secession churches and the 1886 “Doleantie” churches – joined together to form the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (GKN) or the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. As a prominent leader in the Doleantie churches, Abraham Kuyper had a strong hand in the ecclesiastical union of 1892. Many among the Afscheiding folk were very concerned about some of Kuyper's doctrinal emphases such as presumed (or assumed) regeneration and justification from eternity. Some of them did not join the church union of 1892, continuing as the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (CGKN). The Free Reformed Churches in North America trace their roots to this denomination of churches. The major doctrinal differences which separated the CGKN from Abraham Kuyper and his followers resurfaced 13 years later at the Synod of Utrecht where the followers and opponents of Kuyper's distinctive views within the GKN adopted a series of statements which we call the Conclusions of Utrecht.

Because of our historical connections as federations to the issues raised in the *Conclusions*, we agreed as ecumenical committees it would be helpful for the further development of our fraternal relationship as Free Reformed and United Reformed Churches to discuss these matters and present to the churches of both federations our united reflections.

We also ask our respective synods for their approval of the work of the committees in these matters as giving helpful expression to each other as federation of what lives in our churches, with the acknowledgement that we are in no way making binding pronouncements.

Infra- or Supralapsarianism

When God decreed everyone's destiny before the creation of the world, did God first plan man's election or reprobation and then his creation and fall into sin (the supralapsarian position), or did He first plan man's creation and fall, and then his election or reprobation (the infralapsarian position)? The Synod of Utrecht stated that while the Canons of Dort favour the infralapsarian position, both views are acceptable according to Scripture and confession. The Synod added that such profound doctrines which are far beyond the understanding of the common people should be discussed as little as possible in the pulpit.

As committees we would want to add that such profound doctrines are also far beyond the understanding of theologians. We should be careful not to pry into areas of the divine decree which God's Word does not open to us. For this reason the Synod of Dort made no pronouncement on this disputed point. Whatever destiny God has appointed for man, He earnestly and truly declares that all who hear the Gospel of Christ should come to the Christ Whom God has freely and unfeignedly offered to them. In the same way and on His behalf, God calls His Church declare to all persons without distinction the glad tidings of salvation in Jesus Christ to whomever believes. (CD.II.5; III/IV.8-9)

Eternal Justification

Were all the elect justified before the creation of the world when God chose them in Christ, or are they justified by God when they believe in His Son? The Synod of Utrecht concluded that neither Scripture nor our confessions speak of eternal justification. In the Eternal Counsel of Peace Christ undertook to provide for His people the satisfaction, righteousness and holiness required for their justification. Nevertheless, the Synod said, *it must be maintained with equal firmness that we personally become partakers of this benefit only by a sincere faith.*

As committees we accept this conclusion as Scriptural and confessional. We reject any notion that the elect were justified before the world began, and that by faith they simply become *aware* of their already justified state. This stands opposed to Scripture which teaches that we are the enemies of God and objects of His wrath until through faith in His Son He justifies us. *Having been justified by faith, we have peace with our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Rom. 5:1). God imputes the righteousness, satisfaction and holiness of Christ to us when we believe in Him. Christ's righteousness becomes ours *in no other way* than by faith *alone.* (HC.60,61) Election, Christ's resurrection, and the sacrament of baptism all have something to say about justification, but none of them accomplish it. Thus, in preaching, we call sinners to believe in Jesus Christ and be justified by God.

Immediate or Mediate Regeneration?

In the work of regeneration, does the Holy Spirit always work *mediately*, that is, through the mediation of the Word of God, or does He also on occasion work *immediately*, that is, apart from the Word? It was mainly in relation to the regeneration of infants and the possibility of the salvation of heathen who have

never heard the Gospel that the Synod of Utrecht addressed this matter. The Synod judged, in part, that *this regenerating operation of the Holy Spirit should not be in such a way divorced from the preaching of the Word as if these two were separate from each other*. At the same time, the Synod acknowledged the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit as the only Agent of regeneration; the Word and sacraments do not have the power to accomplish this supernatural work.

In our discussion on this point the committees agreed that according to Scripture God is pleased to open the hearts of sinners unto faith by the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit working through and with His Word, both in the Law and the Gospel. On the Day of Pentecost the Spirit pierced many hearts unto salvation through the preaching of the Word. (Acts 2) As Paul preached the Gospel to Lydia the Lord opened her heart to receive God's Word. (Acts 16:14-15) The Apostle Peter says that we are *born again of incorruptible seed through the living and enduring Word of God...This is the Word that was preached to you*. (I Peter 1:23-25) Our Confessions echo this doctrine of mediate regeneration when we say that Christ effectually calls sinners and draws them into communion with Himself by His Word and Spirit. (CD. I.7; cf. H.C. 54). True faith is wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit (BC.24, HC 21). Thus, *this supernatural operation of God whereby we are regenerated in no wise excludes or subverts the use of the Gospel which the most wise God has ordained to be the seed of regeneration and food of the soul...Let us not presume to tempt God by separating what He of His good pleasure has intimately joined together*. (CD.III/IV.17) Even the salvation of infants occurs *by virtue of the covenant of grace* (CD.I.17), that is, in connection with the Word of His promise, though the manner is beyond our comprehension. Thus, according to Scripture, hope for regeneration and salvation is found within the context of the presence of God's covenant Word, not beyond.

Presumptive Regeneration

Should we hold that all the children of the covenant are born again and sanctified in Christ until they prove the opposite when they grow up? And should we baptize the children of believers on the grounds that they are already (presumably) regenerated? In answer to the first question, the Synod of Utrecht stated that all children of the covenant *must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ* until they grow up and prove the contrary in doctrine or life. This does not imply that each child is actually born again since Scripture reveals that they are not all Israel who are of Israel (Rom. 9:6-7); it is a judgment of charity made by the Church. Nor does it mean that the time of their rebirth is necessarily prior to their baptism since God fulfills His promise in His own time. Nevertheless, said the Synod, *the sacrament of baptism signifies and seals the washing away of our sins by the blood and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, the justification and the renewal by the Holy Spirit as benefits which God has bestowed upon our seed*.

In the second matter the Synod declared that *it is less correct to say that baptism is to be administered on the ground of their presumed regeneration, since the ground of baptism is found in the command and promise of God.*

In the Free Reformed Churches this particular teaching seems to be the one that engenders greatest concern in their relationship with the United Reformed Churches. Does it live in the midst of the United Reformed Churches in *practice* even though not by *pronouncement*?

As committees we agree that this doctrine goes beyond the bounds of Scripture and therefore does not find a home within our confessions, nor should it find a home in our churches.

First, regarding the *second* matter, we believe that it is *not at all correct* to say that baptism is to be administered on the ground of presumed regeneration, for the Scripture clearly gives us the reason for baptism when it says: *For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off.* (Acts 2:38) We echo this teaching when we confess that infants are to be baptized because to them no less than adults are promised the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. (HC 74) By virtue of possessing these promises they are set apart from the world, incorporated into the church, and regarded as covenantally holy, that is, sanctified in Christ. (cf. I Cor. 7:14; HC 74) Again, in the Belgic Confession of Faith we speak of circumcision and baptism being administered *upon the same promises.* (Article 34)

Second, as to the *first* matter, we do not agree that children must be held to be regenerated until they prove otherwise. Scripture teaches that the Holy Spirit can and does at times regenerate infants even in the womb. David trusted the Lord already in his mother's womb (Psalm 71:6; cf. 22:9) and John knew the joy of the Lord before he was born (Luke 1:44). But to say that this is the Holy Spirit's normal operation and that they *must* be held to be regenerate is going beyond Scripture. Such presumption tempts churches and families to neglect the spiritual care of their children in calling them to repent of their sin and to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ in faith. In baptism the Lord seals to us and to our children the promises of forgiveness and eternal life. All the gifts of salvation in Jesus Christ are granted to them in promise. The children must then be led to the Lord through diligent instruction and called to take hold of what has been promised to them in Christ. As they, by the power of the Spirit, embrace Christ in true faith, the Holy Spirit will impart to them what they have in Christ, namely, the washing away of sins and newness of life. Through faith they will demonstrate the new life in the way of putting off sin and putting on Christ. (cf. Form for the Baptism of Infants)

Some of our churches presently have opportunity to express unity with the FRC through our joint involvement with them in such ministries at Word and Deed, Redemption Prison Ministries, and the support of the translation work of Rev. Kuldip Gangar.

3. Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)

The HRC consists of nine organized congregations, and two preaching stations, ranging in size from one congregation of 700+ members to a congregation of 11 members. As of 2013, the total membership consists of about 2,200 members. Their ministers may subscribe to either the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster standards. They operate the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, which has an enrolment of about 150 students from 20 different countries and 30 denominations.

We have continued bilateral meetings with the representatives of the HRC at NAPARC in November 2012 and 2013. 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 plan to further these discussions through email contact, and with follow up meetings in conjunction with NAPARC.

4. Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC)

Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC). The KAPC was established in 1978 and as of 2013, consists of 30 presbyteries (including some overseas) and 650 local churches, ministered to by 1,200 ordained ministers. Their communicant membership is about 72,000. Most of their congregations are Korean speaking but as an immigrant church they are slowly transitioning to English among the younger generations. They adhere to the Westminster standards. They have commissioned 99 missionary units through World Missionary Society, a sending agency commissioned by their General Assembly. Also 24 men are currently serving as chaplains in the US military at home and abroad.

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

5. **Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)**

The PCA was founded in 1972, arising out of debates in the PCUSA regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. It is by far the largest member of NAPARC. As of December 31, 2012, it consisted of 1,777 churches and missions and a total membership of 364,019. Last year 42 new PCA's mission congregations were started. They hold to the Westminster standards.

Our contact with the PCA has been restricted to informal contacts at NAPARC. We have not begun our Phase One dialogue with them, although, because of our mutual membership in NAPARC, they consider us to be a sister church in what we would refer to as a Phase Two relationship. We encourage classes and congregation to pursue contact at the local level, where possible, to gain greater awareness and familiarity with the PCA.

6. **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 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 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)**

Desiring to Move Forward

In light of our committee mandate to work "toward complete church unity," and pursuant to synod's decision "to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URC" (*Acts 2012*, Art. 59.8), CERCUC has continued to pursue unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches. It is understandable that most of the progress has been made where our respective churches are in close geographical proximity to one another. Growing love, mutual knowledge and trust, as well as increased cooperation in such things as education, evangelism, youth activities, conferences, joint services, and pulpit exchanges have marked the past number of years. We hope that in such places where such interaction is less feasible, there may nevertheless be real appreciation for the experience of those churches where this is a reality. It is significant that the closer and more frequent the interaction has been, the greater is the interest and openness

toward progressing onward in this endeavor. One third of the URC has discovered that the Canadian Reformed are dear brothers and sisters in the faith. That two thirds of the URC has not had the opportunity to discover this truth firsthand continues to present real challenges, but we pray that the two thirds will accept the testimony and witness born by the one third.

At our November 2013 committee meeting much of our time was focused on the issue of an eventual merger with the CanRC. Rev. Willem Den Hollander of the CanRC met with us and summarized how he has now visited with each of the five US URC classes to help these classes become better acquainted with the Canadian Reformed Churches also in an effort to work through any concerns churches in these classes may have had. The meetings were all described as congenial, brotherly and somewhat helpful in addressing outstanding concerns, and yet, it also appears that significant ambivalence remains concerning the whole process among the US classes of the URC.

In our discussions together as CERCU we observe that three types of concerns remain regarding the unity process. One is theological. We need to be convinced as churches that the doctrine of the covenant taught in our respective churches can live healthily side by side in one federation within the bounds of our confessions. The second is church political. Given our negative past experiences, there are continued fears concerning perceived hierarchical tendencies in the Proposed Joint Church Order. The third has to do with the will to ecumenism generally; some are not convinced that churches that share a confession are required to seek organizational unity. As a committee we are of a mind that if the first two types of objections can be addressed to our mutual satisfaction, the hesitations with regards to the third will also be alleviated.

According to its mandate, and the ongoing encouragement of synodical decisions, CERCU remains committed to pursuing unity with these sister churches. Since November 2012, CERCU has communicated by way of press releases and reports to classes, that it decided that we announce to Synod 2014 our intention to propose at Synod 2016 entering Step A – *Development of the Plan of Ecclesiastical Union* (of Phase Three Church Union). Our *Guidelines* describe this step as follows (see the beginning of this report for a full copy of the *Guidelines*):

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.

Phase Three, Step A entails the commitment of our churches to work through six areas (a-f) that need to be addressed in preparing a plan for full federative unity. Each of these areas will require careful work and the wisdom of many. Your committee has already begun to give thought to the content of such a plan and welcomes input from the churches regarding it.

In this connection, the committee also seeks the assistance of the PJCO Committee. It is believed that the experience and ability of this committee's members will be of valuable service to the churches in this effort. Recommendation #12 seeks the permission of the synod for CERCUC to work with the PJCO Committee in formulating ideas for a plan of union.

Dealing with the Challenges

As we seek to move forward, we are at the same time realistic about setbacks, disappointments, and remaining obstacles in the path of union. It is the committee's judgment that there are two main areas of concern. First, there is dissatisfaction with certain features of the Proposed Joint Church Order (PJCO), particularly about the makeup and working of broader assemblies, and more classical and synodical involvement regulating our pulpits, songs for worship, and other liturgical matters. In relation to matters of church polity, some mutually satisfactory resolution to the question of Theological Education would likely still need to be achieved as well. Secondly, there remain concerns over differences, whether real or perceived, of doctrinal teaching or emphasis, particularly with regard to the covenant(s).

The committee takes these concerns seriously. They must not be dismissed or overlooked in a blind push forward. Our ideas regarding the development of a plan for union, as well as the recommendations of this report seek to provide ways to continue to address them specifically.

Regarding theological concerns, serious efforts have already been made at the classical and synodical level to deal openly with them. Brothers from the Canadian Reformed Churches have come to our assemblies to answer specific questions. Many have found this helpful and many concerns have been alleviated.

To continue to promote better understanding of one another, we are also proposing a one hour colloquium be held at this synod between two respected leaders from each of our federations. We have invited Dr. Robert Godfrey and Dr. Cornel Venema from the URC and Dr. Jason Van Vliet and Dr. Ted Van Raalte of the CanRC. We have asked each group to prepare a paper dealing with the theological concerns that are between us, and then for each group to write a response to the other's paper. Those papers will be available, Lord willing before synod and then at synod the four men will present their conclusions and with each other in a public "colloquium" during an hour we are proposing be set aside during the meeting of synod. By allowing representatives of our churches to dialogue publicly over points of critical interest and importance, it is hoped that greater confidence in our mutual adherence to our Confessions may be promoted. Our Recommendation #2 seeks to implement this colloquium.

With regard to church order and polity, it is true that for many of our congregations, geographically distant from Canadian Reformed churches, this is the area most directly affected by a union, and that, primarily in the observance of changes on the classical and synodical level. The actual life, worship and discipline of congregations will be largely unaffected as far as practice.

We trust that it is generally agreed that there is a distinction between minor details of church order which we can live and work with in spite of dislikes and disagreements, and major issues that fundamentally effect the way we work together as churches. Submitting to one another in lesser issues is crucial for unity among ourselves as well as with others. In the first years of our life together as URC churches, we rather easily, by God's grace, adopted a church order which was neither tested nor minutely examined. We have learned to work with it and grow with it, despite its weaknesses and imperfections. Various changes have been made over time. The same trust and humble optimism about being able to work together will be necessary for adjusting to, and working with a different church order with significant changes. It is our opinion there is no principle or practice in the PJCO that does not have a long pedigree in Reformed tradition, and which has not served various Reformed federations well. Not everything may be to the liking of everyone, but the same can be said at anytime concerning our present church order, yet for the sake of unity we humbly submit to one another and press on together. However we recognize that some consistories may view one or more provision of the PJCO too great a change even as a temporary or provisional basis for church union.

With that in mind, Recommendation #11 is requesting clear and specific communication from our churches as to which, if any of the articles of the PJCO are viewed as serious road blocks to union. Other things may be changed over time as decided by a united federation, but if some matters are now judged as needing to be changed before such union, we want the churches to decide that together. This also requires a level of engagement with the PJCO worthy of the seriousness of our ecumenical calling and pursuit.

The Lord's Work

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

The committee has pursued its mandate to seek unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches with the belief that such union would be according to God's Word, and thus pleasing to Him. But such belief alone neither accomplishes anything nor proves it to be the will of God. This is why we have included a recommendation that synod urge the churches to regularly pray for the Lord's guidance and grace that we may know and do His will, and that He might do “exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think . . . to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

2. **Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)**

The OPC was born in the crucible of the corruption, by modernism, of the boards and agencies of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America during the 1930's. The OPC holds to the Westminster standards. During 2012, the OPC experienced a growth of 1.155% bringing membership to a total of 30,555 souls gathered in 319 particular and mission congregations, and served by 517 ministers. The median size of an OPC congregation is 81 members with 67 attending worship. Their congregations are found primarily in the US with a few in Canada. Foreign mission work is conducted in Asia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Japan, Quebec, Ukraine, Uganda, and Uruguay. A new Christian School has been started in Karamoja, Uganda. They are working with our Psalter Hymnal Committee on jointly publishing a Psalter Hymnal.

We do not anticipate a move to Phase Three, *Church Union*, with the OPC in the near future since uniting with churches that share the same confessional basis (the Three Forms of Unity) should take priority, unless a synod should decide otherwise for a particular federation or denomination. Because the confessional basis and church polity of the OPC are different than ours, the prospect of working out an acceptable plan of union is more distant."

Nevertheless, we encourage those 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.

3. **Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)**

The RCUS makes the claim to being the oldest, continuous Reformed denomination in North America. Statistically they have 3,767 members, a number that has been in a slow decline for many years. In the past year, four mission congregations graduated from that mission status and were received as fully organized congregations. New missions works have begun in Omaha, NE and Casper, WY, along with continuing work in Norwest AR; Dickinson, ND, Eden Prairie, MN, and La Habra, CA. In foreign missions work is being done in the Congo, Kenya, the Philippines, Pakistan, and a French radio ministry in Africa and Europe.

We do not anticipate recommending moving forward to Phase Three, *Church Union*, any time in the foreseeable because of an antipathy toward merger with any federation among many of their members and leaders, even though they have a position paper endorsing the idea of merger if it can be accomplished without any compromise in faith or practice.

We encourage those classes and congregations in geographic proximity with RCUS classes and congregations to continue the exchange of fraternal delegates, and to engage in other ecumenical activities that may be available.

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

The Reformed Church of Quebec is a little band of five fledgling faithful Reformed congregations seeking to maintain a witness for the gospel in the midst of a traditionally French Roman Catholic culture that has become severely secularized, post-modern and hedonistic. They adhere to the

Westminster Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. They are closely associated with the Farel Reformed Theological Seminary in Montreal, although an independent board governs that institution. As of December 31, 2012 there were 340 members, ten ministers (2 chaplains and one retired) six elders and seven deacons total for the five congregations. They are working on translating Reformed literature into the French language. The churches are now wrestling with whether to permit any views regarding the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 other than creation in six real days of ordinary duration. They celebrated the 25th anniversary of their federation this year.

We do not anticipate recommending moving forward to Phase Three, *Church Union*, anytime in the foreseeable future for two reasons. First, the ERQ is a French speaking federation in a French speaking culture (Quebec). The ERQ has no intention of transitioning to the English language because their outreach is to a French speaking culture. Language barriers are a natural boundary which hinders the kind of close cooperation and contact needed to function together well in one federation. Secondly, their representative at NAPARC 2011 explained that the majority of their leaders and members have no desire for merger with anyone for fear that they would lose their unique identity. They do not want to become “but a drop in the ocean of Reformed churches.”

We encourage those classes and congregations in geographic proximity with ERQ classes and congregations to continue the exchange of fraternal delegates, and to engage in other ecumenical activities that may be available.

5. Reformed Presbyterian Church In North American (RPCNA)

The RPCNA has its roots in Scottish Presbyterianism. It was organized in North America in 1798. In 2009, they celebrated 200 years since the meeting of its first Synod in 1809. In 2010, they observed the 200th anniversary of their theological school, the Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, in Pittsburgh, PA. 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, PA, which is now 165 years old.

Synod Nyack 2012 voted to enter into Phase Two, *Ecclesiastical Fellowship*, with the RPCNA and the matter was confirmed by a majority of the consistories according to CO Art. 36. We rejoice that we are able to accord to one another the honor sister churches, recognizing one another as true churches of Christ. We pray that together we may promote the cause of Christ in the world, giving united witness to the Reformed faith.

C. North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC)

NAPARC held its 39th annual meeting November 19-20 in Flat Rock, North Carolina at Bonclarken, a Christian conference and retreat center owned by the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, which hosted the meeting. Rev. Peter Holtvluwer, of the Canadian Reformed Churches, chaired the meeting. The Canadian Reformed are scheduled to host the 2014 meeting in Hamilton, Ontario, November 11-13.

The URCNA is presently in Phase One – *Corresponding Relations* with all of the Churches of NAPARC except for those five federations with whom we have a Phase Two – *Ecclesiastical Fellowship* relationship, namely the CanRC, ERQ, the OPC, the RCUS, and the RPCNA.

The Basis of NAPARC states:

Confessing Jesus Christ as 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 Dordt, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. That the adopted basis of fellowship be regarded as warrant for the establishment of a formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the constituent churches 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.

The stated Purpose and Function of NAPARC is:

1. *Facilitate discussion and consultation between member bodies on those issues and problems, which divide them as well as on those, which they face in common and by the sharing of insights "communicate advantages to one another" (Institutes IV, 2, 1).*
2. *Promote the appointment of joint committees to study matters of common interest and concern.*
3. *Exercise mutual concern in the perpetuation, retention, and propagation of the Reformed faith.*
4. *Promote cooperation wherever possible and feasible on the local and denominational level in such areas as missions, relief efforts, Christian schools, and church education.*

<http://www.naparc.org/documents/cb/>

NAPARC is a fellowship of likeminded, confessionally faithful, Reformed and Presbyterian churches which commit to “advise, counsel, and cooperate” with one another and “hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union.” NAPARC itself is not a church and has no authority to enforce any kind of unity. Its meetings do, however provide opportunity for building, maintaining and advancing relationships that serve to promote greater expressions of unity in as many ways as possible. There are twelve member federations or denominations usually referred to as “member churches”. The majority of the time at the plenary sessions is spent hearing reports from each member church followed by questions and prayer for each church after its report is given.

At this meeting, NAPARC approved minor editorial updates to the Basis statement of its constitution and added two new Purpose statements. These changes need to be ratified by member denominations at their general assemblies or synods before they become official. The new purposes include operating a web site and encouraging member churches to pursue closer ties

among themselves. To that end, NAPARC changed its by-laws to extend the meeting by a day to allow six, two-hour slots of time for bi-lateral meetings between delegations from the member churches. Changes in the by-laws do not need ratification but became effective at the close of the meeting where they are adopted. A second change to the by-laws calls for a “devotional service” on the first night of the annual meeting. The service is to be under the supervision of a local congregation of the host denomination. The next meeting is scheduled for November 11-14, 2014 with the Canadian Reformed Churches serving as host. See Appendix 2 of this report for a copy of the new constitutional changes of NAPARC which need to be ratified by each member federation. See recommendation 3.

One highlight of our time together was a speech at the evening Banquet given by Dr. Mark Ross of the host denomination for this year’s event, the ARP. In a fascinating and engaging presentation with a commanding use of the Scriptures, Dr. Ross demonstrated from John 17:21 that *the* proof and defense before the world for the glorious existence of the Triune God *is* the church, and specifically, the *visible* unity of the church. The unity that we enjoy and express is already an organic unity in the Spirit, and may not always reach an organized unity of church government, but that unity needs to be more and more visibly expressed before the world. One challenge we must also continue to face, is that though we speak well of our commitment to unity in contexts like NAPARC, and very much enjoy the tastes of it we experience there, the actual fruit of such unity needs to come to expression in and between our local churches. As our delegate, Rev. William Boekestein challenged NAPARC; we must not merely wear our membership in NAPARC as a badge of honour and recognition, but as a mechanism to enable unity to come to expression locally.

NAPARC 2012 nominated the Korean Presbyterian Church in America - Kosin (KPCA) for membership in NAPARC. A majority of the twelve member federations must vote at their respective synods or general assemblies to confirm that membership within three years before KPCA can be officially received into membership. So far there have been three positive votes to approve their membership. The other nine members have yet to vote. The KPCA was established in 1984. It adheres to the Westminster standards. It now has 130 churches with 200 ministers and about 10,000 members. They have seventeen missionaries in 13 countries and six chaplains. CERCU is recommending the ratification of the KPCA application for membership in NAPARC, see recommendation 4. See Appendix 3 of this report for more background information on the KPCA.

Much of the work toward unity is accomplished not in the full meetings of NAPARC itself but in the bi-lateral meetings we have with several of the other member churches of NAPARC before, during and after the meetings of NAPARC. This year we sought to engage and advance our relationships through eight additional meetings with representatives of the ARP, CanRC, ERQ, FRC, HRC, OPC, RCUS and the RPCNA.

It is a great privilege to be involved in this important work. It is not easy and it is not, indeed must not be approached superficially. But the fellowship we enjoyed in our meetings is a great encouragement and gives hope that greater and greater unity may one day be achieved. May we indeed pray and work to that end; that the world may know.

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 allow for a one hour Colloquium between two representatives of the URCNA and two representatives of the CanRC as arranged by CERCU.
 3. That synod ratify the changes to the Constitution of NAPARC as found in Appendix 2 below.
 4. That synod ratify the membership of the Korean Presbyterian Church in America - Kosin (KPCA) in NAPARC. See Appendix 3 for a report on the KPCA.
 5. That Synod appoint or re-appoint three members-at-large. Rev. Richard Miller, Rev. Bill Pols and Rev. Peter Vellenga are eligible for reappointment.
 6. That synod appoint an alternate member-at-large. There is no current alternate. Rev. Brian Vos, who last served in that position before it became vacant is eligible for reappointment.
 7. That Synod set the budget for CERCU at \$10,000 US per annum.
 8. That Synod remind the churches of our mutual responsibility to engage one another in our ecumenical task through prayer, classical dialogue, local efforts and the expression of concerns.
 9. That Synod approve the work of the committee in it's reporting of our interaction with the Interchurch relations committee of the Free Reformed Churches on the *Conclusions of Utrecht*, that without binding ourselves to any formulations beyond our Confessions, the report gives faithful expression to what lives in the thinking and practice of our churches. The committee welcomes any additional feedback from the churches.
 10. That Synod receive for information the announcement of CERCU that it plans to recommend to Synod 2016 that we proceed to Phase Three A of church unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches that, should the churches approve of this recommendation in 2016, we would begin the *Development of a Plan of Union*
 11. That Synod urge the churches to seriously consider which, if any specific articles or stipulations of the PJCO they believe should be changed before it can be adopted for a united federation, and seek to bring such concerns to Synod 2016 by way of overture to their classis.
 12. That Synod approve the cooperation of the PJCO Committee with CERCU for the working on as yet unresolved difficulties that will be encountered in formulating a plan of union.
 13. That Synod continue to encourage each classis and consistory to continue to engage the issue of an eventual merger between the CanRC and the URCNA by inviting Canadian Reformed ministers to fill our pulpits, inviting Canadian Reformed representatives to our classis meetings, seeking open dialogue with Canadian Reformed brothers regarding any outstanding areas of concern, organizing joint events with Canadian Reformed congregations, attending joint conferences, and writing columns to foster our mutual understanding and affection
- Grounds:
- a. Those who have been involved in the process of facilitating greater unity have been profoundly impacted with the spirit of unity. Throughout the process, further dialogue has consistently resulted in warm and cordial relationships and misconceptions have been dispelled.

- b. This would be an encouragement to the Canadian Reformed Churches who through their synodical communications have expressed their willingness to continue working through the challenges involved in seeking unity.
 - c. Our own unity as emerging URCNA churches was formed through much of these kinds of relations and interactions before our own official start together.
14. That the classes be reminded of their continuing responsibility to appoint or reappoint classical representatives (and alternates) to CERCU in the manner the classes deem appropriate.
 15. That Synod approve the work of the committee without adopting every formulation in its dialogue.

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

Appendix 1 *The Conclusions of Utrecht 1905*

Appendix 2 NAPARC Constitutional Changes

Appendix 3 Background Information on KPCA

Appendix 1

THE CONCLUSIONS OF UTRECHT, 1905

Translated by Dr. J. Mark Beach

As for the first point, which has to do with *infra-* and *supralapsarianism*, Synod declares

- that, certainly with respect to the doctrine of election, our Confessional standards follow the infralapsarian presentation, but, as is evident both from the wording of Head I, Article 7, of the *Canons of Dort* and from the deliberations at the Synod of Dort, it is by no means intended that the supralapsarian interpretation is thereby excluded or condemned;
- that, accordingly, on the one hand, it is not right to present the supralapsarian view as being properly *the* doctrine of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, nor on the other hand to harass anyone who has accepted the supralapsarian interpretation for himself, since the Synod of Dort did not make a decision regarding this disputed point.

To this the Synod adds the warning

- that such profound doctrines (which are beyond the comprehension of common people) should be brought to the pulpit as little as possible, and that one should adhere to the presentation given in our Confessional standards in the preaching of the Word and in catechetical instruction.

Concerning the second point, *eternal justification*, Synod declares

- that this expression itself does not occur in our Confessions, but that on that account it may not be disapproved, any more than the expression “covenant of works,” and such like, which are simply theological terms;
- that it is incorrect to say that our Confessions know only of a justification by and through faith, seeing that both the Word of God in Romans 4:25 and our Confession in Article 20 emphatically speak of an objective justification sealed in the resurrection of Christ, which, in temporal sequence, precedes subjective justification;
- that, as far as the matter itself is concerned, all our churches heartily believe and confess that Christ from eternity, in the counsel of peace, has given himself as surety for his people, and has taken their guilt upon himself, just as afterward, through his suffering and death on Calvary, he actually paid the ransom for us and reconciled us to God while we were yet enemies, but that it must be maintained just as definitely, on the basis of the Word of God and in agreement with our Confessional standards, that we personally become partakers of this benefit only by true faith.

For which reason the Synod earnestly warns against

- any presentation of the matter which detracts from either the eternal suretyship of Christ for his elect or the demand of true faith to be justified before the righteousness of God in the tribunal of conscience.

In regard to the third point, that of *immediate regeneration*, Synod declares

- that this expression can be used in a good sense, insofar as our churches have always confessed, over against the Lutherans and the Roman Catholic church, that regeneration is not effected through the Word or the Sacraments as such, but through the almighty and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit;
- that this regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, however, may not in that sense be divorced from the preaching of the Word, as if both were separated from each other; for, although our Confession teaches that we need not be in doubt respecting the salvation of our children who die in infancy though they have not heard the preaching of the gospel, and our Confessional standards nowhere express themselves as to the manner in which regeneration is effected in the case of these and other children—yet, on the other hand, it is certain that the gospel is a power of God unto salvation for every one who believes, and that in the case of adults the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit accompanies the preaching of the gospel.

Although Synod does not doubt that God is also powerfully able, even among the heathen, to regenerate those whom he wills without the preaching of the Word, yet Synod judges on the basis of God's Word

- that we can make no pronouncement regarding the question whether this actually happens, and that therefore we must adhere to the rule that the revealed Word gives to us, and leave the hidden things to the Lord our God.

Finally, regarding the fourth point, that of *assumed regeneration (onderstelde wedergeboorte)*, Synod declares

- that, according to the Confession of our churches, the seed of the covenant must, in virtue of the promise of God, be regarded as regenerated and sanctified in Christ, until, as they grow up, the contrary is evident from their life or doctrine;
- that, however, it is less correct to say that baptism is administered to believers' children on the ground of their assumed (*onderstelde*) regeneration, for the ground of baptism is the command and promise of God;
- that furthermore, the judgment of charity, whereby the church regards the seed of the covenant as regenerated, does not therefore in any way imply that every child is truly regenerated, since God's Word teaches us that not all are Israel who are from Israel, and regarding Isaac it is said: "in him shall your seed be named" (Rom. 9:6, 7), so that in preaching, serious self-examination shall be urged continually, inasmuch as only those who believe and are baptized shall be saved.

Furthermore Synod maintains, together with our Confession,

- that the sacraments "are not empty and hollow signs to deceive us," but "are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible, by means of which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Article 33), and that in particular baptism is

called “the washing of regeneration” and “the washing away of sins” because God wants “to assure us by this divine pledge and sign that we are as truly cleansed from our sins spiritually as we are physically washed with water”; for which reason, in the prayer after baptism, our church thanks and praises God that he has forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of his beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through the his Holy Spirit to be his children, and sealed and confirmed this to us by holy baptism; so that our Confessional standards clearly teach that the sacrament of baptism signifies and seals the washing away of sins by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, justification and renewal by the Holy Spirit as benefits that God has bestowed upon our seed.

Meanwhile Synod is of the opinion that the representation that every elect child is therefore already in fact regenerated before being baptized, cannot be proved either on the basis of Scripture or on the basis of the Confession, since God sovereignly fulfills his promise in his own time, whether before, during, or after baptism, so that one is required to exercise caution in this regard and not want to be wise above what God has revealed to us.

From the *Acts of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands*, held at Utrecht (1905), Art. 158.

Appendix 2
NAPARC Constitution Changes to Be Approved

CONSTITUTION and BYLAWS
of the
NORTH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED COUNCIL

CONSTITUTION

[As amended by the 3rd (1977) and 22nd (1996) Meetings of the Council]

I. NAME

The name of the Council ("the Council") shall be The North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council ("NAPARC").

II. BASIS OF THE COUNCIL

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.

III. PURPOSE

~~We regard this~~ ~~That the adopted~~ basis of fellowship ~~be regarded~~ as warrant for the establishment of a formal relationship of the nature of a council, that is, a fellowship that enables the Member constituent Churches to advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another, and to hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.

III.IV. PURPOSE AND FUNCTION

1. Facilitate discussion, ~~and~~ consultation, ~~and the sharing of insights among between member~~ Member Churches ~~bodies~~ on those issues and problems which divide them as well as on those which they face in common ~~and by the sharing of insights "communicate advantages to one another" (Institutes IV, 2, 1).~~
2. ~~Encourage the Member Churches to pursue closer ecclesiastical relations, as appropriate, among the regional and major assemblies.~~
- 2-3. ~~Promote the appointment of joint~~ committees to study matters of common interest and concern ~~and, when appropriate, make recommendations to the Council with respect to them.~~
- 3-4. Exercise mutual concern in the perpetuation, retention, and propagation of the Reformed faith.
5. ~~Promote local, regional, and general assembly/synodical-wide~~ cooperation wherever possible and feasible ~~on the local and denominational level~~ in such areas as missions, relief efforts, training of men for the ministry, Christian schools, activities for young people, and church education ~~and publications.~~
- 4-6. ~~Operate a website to facilitate the exchange of information and to foster increased cooperation and fellowship among the Member Churches.~~

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a.V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

It is understood that ~~the Council is not a synodical, classical, or presbyterial assembly, and therefore~~ all actions and decisions of the Council, other than those with respect to a church's membership in the Council (*Constitution, VI.4*), ~~taken~~ are advisory in character and ~~may~~ in no way curtail, ~~or restrict, or intrude into the exercise of the jurisdiction~~ or authority given to the governing assemblies of the Member Churches by Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, ~~the autonomy of the member bodies.~~

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IV.VI. MEMBERSHIP

1. The Council was duly constituted on October 31, 1975, by the delegates from the five founding Member Churches, having been previously authorized to do so by their major assemblies. A list of past and present members of the Council shall be maintained among the Council's documents. ~~For the purposes of the initiation of the Council those of the following churches which are officially represented in these organization meetings whose assemblies give their approval be the founding churches of the Council: namely, Christian Reformed Church; Orthodox Presbyterian Church; Presbyterian Church in America; Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America.~~

2. ~~Those~~ Churches shall be eligible for membership ~~are those~~ which profess and maintain the basis for fellowship (*Constitution, expressed in II*) and ~~which that~~ maintain the marks of the true church (~~the~~ pure preaching of the gospel, the Scriptural administration of the sacraments, ~~and~~ the faithful exercise of discipline).

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3. A major assembly's application for membership must be sponsored by the major assemblies of at least two Member Churches and shall include copies (either paper or digital) of the applicant's confessional standards, declaratory acts (if applicable), form of government, and form(s) of subscription, together with a brief overview of their history, ecclesiastical relationships, memberships in ecumenical organizations, missions activities, and the theological education of their ministers.

4. Admission to, suspension from, restoration to (after suspension), and termination of membership shall be proposed by the Council to the ~~member churches~~ Member Churches by two-thirds of the ballots cast by unit vote; this proposal must then be approved within three years by two-thirds of the major assemblies of the ~~member churches~~ Member Churches eligible to vote. A proposal to suspend or terminate the membership of a ~~M~~member Church may be initiated only by a major assembly of a ~~M~~member Church eligible to vote. A suspended church may send ~~delegate~~ Delegates to meetings of the Council but they shall not vote nor may that church be represented on the Interim Committee.

b.VII. AMENDMENTS

This *Constitution* may be amended by recommendation of the Council by two-thirds of the ballots cast by unit vote of the Member Churches' Delegates, and this recommendation must then be adopted within three years by two-thirds of the major assemblies of the ~~member churches~~ Member Churches eligible to vote. The amendment as recommended to the ~~member churches~~ Member Churches is ~~not un~~amendable.

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Appendix 3

Some background information on the
Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin)
in relation to this body's application for membership in NAPARC

History of the denomination.

The Presbyterian Church in Korea ("Kosin") is a federation of true churches of Jesus Christ, founded on God's Holy Word, and holds to the Reformed Faith. Since the coming of Protestant missionaries to Korea in 1884, the Korean church has had an astonishing development unparalleled in mission annals. The Presbyterian Theological Seminary was founded in 1901 in Pyongyang, and by 1912, a General Assembly was organized.

For about half a century from the first entry of the Gospel, the Korean church grew steadily. But under Japan's imperialistic domination the church underwent many difficulties. In this period two kinds of problems afflicted the Korean church: First, the infiltration of theological liberalism, and second, the Japanese Shinto shrine worship issue.

Finally, on September 10, 1938, the yet undivided Korean Presbyterian Church, at its 27th General Assembly meeting at the Pyongyang Westgate Church, broke down under this repression, and approved Shinto shrine worship. Both before and after this tragic decision, ministers, elders, deacons, and believers, who merely wished to live according to the Bible and so refused Shinto shrine worship, were arrested in large numbers by Japanese government officials. Eventually about fifty of them became martyrs of their faith under this terrible persecution.

On August 15, 1945, Japan was defeated, Korea was liberated, and on August 17, those who had been imprisoned for their opposition to Shinto shrine observance were released. Two among them, Rev. Joo Nam-Sun and Rev. Han Sang-Dong, suggested that the Church should repent for Shinto shrine worship, but were refused. The group who suggested the repentance was estranged from the majority because most pastors joined Shinto shrine worship. Those who refused Shinto shrine worship, including Rev. Joo Nam-Sun and Rev. Han Sang-Dong, founded Korea Theological Seminary a year later in Pusan on September 20, 1946, to train church leaders in order to reform the erring Korean church. This action began anew the training of church leaders in the historic Presbyterian tradition. However, the still undivided Korean Presbyterian church, at its General Assembly, would not recognize the new Korea Theological Seminary. The delegates from the Kyungnam Buptong (legal) Presbytery supporting the new Korea Theological Seminary spent three years trying in vain to normalize their relationship with the General Assembly. But the seminary continued not to be recognized and also the delegates from the Kyungnam Buptong(legal) Presbytery were refused membership. Accordingly, on September 11, 1952, organizing its own General Assembly, the "Korea Pa (group)" or "Kosin" church was instituted. Kosin Church is reformed and one of the most conservative Churches, and plays a spiritual leadership role in Korea now.

The role of the “Kwansa”

In the early Korean traditional cultures, a boy and a girl were not permitted to sit together after they have reached the age of seven. Men and women were not allowed to sit together outside their family.

For several decades since the Gospel was first preached to the Korean Peninsular 129 years ago, the early Korean Church buildings had the two separate main entrances: one for men and the other for women. There was a curtain at the center of the sanctuary, which separated the men from the women. A pastor could look at both sides when he preached but each side of the congregation was not able to look at the other group at all.

We no longer practice this custom of segregation in the church but it sometimes is considered inappropriate for pastors or elders to contact female church members in person. Male church officers experienced limitations in taking care of the female church members, and so the Korean Church needed female members who could take care of the women in need efficiently. This is why most Korean Churches have Kwansa.

Principles and Standards

At the 26th General Assembly in 1976 the church's principles were recorded as follows: “We believe in, preach, and live by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament and the original Presbyterian standards (The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and the Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Government, the Manual of Discipline and the Directory of Worship) following Reformed Theology.” Our church's doctrinal standards are the Westminster Confession of Faith, with the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism. With the addition of the 1903 American Presbyterian chapters on “The Holy Spirit” and “The Mission of the Church” to the 17th century Westminster Confession of Faith, our confession now numbers 35 chapters. Also, as administrative standards we have the Form of Government, the Manual of Discipline, and the Directory of Worship. These standards have been published (in Korean) in a book entitled “The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in Korea.” We may summarize our Church principles as: first, a reformed theology; second, integrity in martyr’s spirit; third, world evangelism.

International Relations

Our Church earnestly seeks to maintain close relationships with other churches and organizations taking a Reformed stance around the world, for the sake of more fruitful ministries worldwide. As a member of the International Conference of the Reformed Churches (ICRC), we maintain a sister or fraternal relationship with most member churches of the ICRC, including the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and Presbyterian Church in America, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated), the Reformed Church in Japan, the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Christian Reformed Churches in Netherlands, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. We want to extend relationships with other member churches of the ICRC in Asia. Most notably we exchange conferences every year with the Reformed Church in Japan.

Relationship between Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) and Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Kosin).

We have the same doctrine and principles. We are not just sister churches, but we enjoy pastoral exchange between the two Churches without limitation. Both Churches recognize each other and transfer pastors' records between two Churches when needed.

For more information: <http://new.kosin.org/> , <http://www.kosinusa.org/>

In Christ,

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Report of the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee to Synod Visalia 2014

Synod Nyack 2012 reappointed the Proposed Joint Church Order Committee with the following mandate:

...To process information brought forward regarding the Proposed Synodical Regulations for use in a joint federation. The mandate should also include assisting with matters brought to the committee by the Church Order Sub-Committee of the Canadian Reformed Churches in North America.

Since the last synod, no information was brought forward by United Reformed Churches regarding the Proposed Synodical Regulations for use in a joint federation. Given this lack of feedback to the committee from the churches, and uncertainty about how to proceed in cooperation with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the committee did not meet since last synod. The PJCO Committee understands that the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU) is proposing a specific recommendation to Synod Visalia for the PJCO's continued work toward unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

If it pleases synod to continue our committee to perfect the PJCO, Synodical Regulations and related documents previously assigned to us, we recommend the appointment of an alternate member who can familiarize himself with our work, be kept up to date on our work, and be ready to step in should one of our members no longer be able to serve.

We await further direction from Synod 2014.

Respectfully submitted,

William Pols
Ralph Pontier
Raymond J. Sikkema
Mark Vander Pol

**Report of the
Psalter Hymnal Committee
of the
United Reformed Churches in North America
To Synod 2014 (Visalia, CA)**

Introduction

The mandate given to our committee from Synod Nyack is to work with the OPC Psalter Hymnal Special Committee to produce a psalter hymnal for use in our churches. Since then we have worked diligently with them and are presenting to this Synod a Psalm Proposal for approval. If this occurs, our intention is to bring a Hymn Proposal to Synod 2016 for approval. Following that, we will begin production of the songbook. (**See Recommendations 7**).

It is no small task to evaluate, plan and produce a book that will contain songs for the worship of God's people. You have entrusted our committee with this important responsibility and we are truly thankful for being given this opportunity. With this report we seek to provide you with an update of our work and seek your direction in various matters. The report includes history and mandates, a summary of our progress, an explanation of our committee makeup, and finally recommendations for your consideration.

I. History and Mandates

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

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

(Minutes of Synod, October 1997, Article LXII.C. [pp.33-34])

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

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

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

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

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

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

The decisions of Synod Schererville included:

1. Acceding to Overture 17 in order to clarify these three phrases of the Synod Escondido decision as follows:
 - a) "*work together with*" includes both consultation with and careful consideration of views advanced by the Canadian Reformed "Book of Praise Committee" but only insofar as such work does not hinder, delay, or divert the Psalter Hymnal Committee from fulfilling its purpose as originally adopted;
 - b) "*to consider for inclusion*" neither implies nor necessitates inclusion of any or all metrical psalmody;
 - c) "*this song book*" refers to a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal that will serve the churches of our federation alone, whether or not we are in ecclesiastical fellowship with any number of denominations / federations. (Minutes, Article 63.6)

2. “That Synod 2007 continue the Songbook Committee’s mandate given by previous synods (Article 78.1)
3. “That Synod 2007 maintain the goal for production and use of a Common Song Book, but establish that the production and use of a Common Song Book is not a condition for federative unity with the Canadian Reformed Churches.” (Article 78.10)
4. “That Synod 2007 provide direction to the committee, regarding whether the inclusion of all 150 Anglo-Genevan Psalms would be detrimental for the churches to accept the Common Song Book, by mandating the URCNA Songbook Committee to contact the churches of the URCNA for their input on this question.” (Article 78.11)

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

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

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

II. Summary of Progress

Following Synod 2012, our committee has worked with the OPC Psalter Hymnal Special Committee to fulfill the mandates given us. Our primary work these past 2 years has been on the Psalms, but progress has been made on the hymn collection as well.

A. Psalms

Our committee is recommending that Synod 2014 adopt the following Psalm Proposal, which will make up the “psalter” section of the new songbook. (**See Recommendation 4**) The same proposal will be before this year’s OPC General Assembly for their approval. This list represents a modification to what had previously been made available on the website. In July 2013 we sent a notice to every URC that the psalm collection was available on the website and solicited comments and reaction from all interested parties. After receiving many comments, our 2 committees made several changes and are proposing the following Psalm Proposal.

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

Username: psalter

Password: hymnal

We intend to have a hard copy of this Psalm collection available to all delegates when they arrive at Synod Visalia.

While adopting this psalm proposal means that this is synod’s final approval, it must be understood that the committees may need to make certain minor changes prior to production. We may find editorial mistakes or “typos” that need correction. We are also continuing to work on some textual revisions to improve inflection and language flow. These will be updated on the website as changes are made. Further, the committee may run into unforeseen copyright problems and may need to make whatever changes are required in order to bring the particular song into copyright compliance, or to remove the song from the collection should the necessary changes or cost prove to be excessive.

Psalm Proposal:

<u>Psalm</u>	<u>Tune</u>	<u>Text</u>
Psalm 1A	Meditation	The Psalter, 1912
Psalm 1B	St. Petersburg	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 2A	Monsey Chapel	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 2B	Hintze	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 3	Detroit	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 4	Dunfermline	Sing Psalms 2003; alt.
Psalm 5	Aberystwyth	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 6	Olive’s Brow	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 7	Song 24	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973, and Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 8A	Clinton	st. 1-4, 6-7, Scottish Psalter, 1615, and st.5, Sing Psalms, 2003.
Psalm 8B	Amsterdam	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 8C	Evening Praise	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 9A	Halifax	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 9B	St. Denio (Joanna)	Various sources, 2004
Psalm 10	Halifax	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 11A	Bourbon	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 11B	Protection	Sing to the Lord, 2008
Psalm 12	Genevan 12/Donne Secours	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 13	Meditation	Hemmetts Coral Bok, alt.
Psalm 14	Southwell	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 15A	Herr Jesu Christ	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 15B	Helen	Psalter Hymnal, 1957 (paraphrase)
Psalm 16A	Leominster	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 16B	Sterling	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 17	Llanglofflan	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 18A	Jordan	Sing Psalms, 2003 and Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 18B	Mendon	vv. 1 – 6, 16 – 20, 27 – 28 from various sources (partial)
Psalm 19A	Arthur’s Seat	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 19B	Columbia	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 20	Leighton (alt. Tallis Canon with musical score; alt. Canonbury)	Trinity Psalter, 2000; alt. 2004

Psalm 21A	Exultation	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 21B	All Saints New	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009.
Psalm 22A	Kingsfold	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 22B	Park Street	vv. vv. 23 – 26, 31 from The Psalter, 1912; alt. 1990 (partial)
Psalm 22C	Bovina	vv. 22 – 28 from Psalter Hymnal, 1957 (partial)
Psalm 23A	Crimond	Scottish Psalter, 1650
Psalm 23B	Evan	Scottish Psalter, 1650
Psalm 23C	Tarwathie	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 24A	Lansing	The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing, 1991
Psalm 24B	St. Denio (Joanna)	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 25A	Genevan 25	W. Helder, 2009; adapted from S. Brondsema, 1931.
Psalm 25B	Everlasting Love	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 25C	Seymour	vv. 1-7, 10 from The Psalter, 1912 (partial)
Psalm 26	Massachusetts	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 27A	Bethlehem	Sing Psalms, 2003; v. 11-12 alt.
Psalm 27B	Millennium	vv. 1–5 Psalter Hymnal, 1957, and vv. 6–10 Book of Worship 1990,
Psalm 28	Tallis' Canon	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 29A	Arles	The Psalter, 1912 (st.1); Book of Psalms, 1871 alt (st. 2), 2004
Psalm 29B	Willow Grove	The Psalter, 1912 (st.1); Book of Psalms, 1871 alt (st. 2), 2004
Psalm 30A	Noel	The Psalter, 1912; alt./mod 1990; alt.
Psalm 30B	Hartford	The Psalter, 1912, alt./mod 1990; alt.
Psalm 31A	Before the Throne	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 31B	In You O Lord	vv. 1 – 4, 14 -15 Anon. (partial)
Psalm 32A	Rutherford	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 32B	Fountain	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2003
Psalm 33	Ash Grove	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 34A	Euphemia	Sing Psalms, 2003, alt.
Psalm 34B	Unde et Memores	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 34 C	Downs	Tate and Brady's New Version, 1696, 1698 (paraphrase)
Psalm 35	Kingsfold	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 36A	Walsall	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 36B	Caddo	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 37	Wieland	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 38	Llef	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 39	Longwood	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 40A	Ancyra (alt. Resignation)	The Psalter, 1912 alt/mod 1990, alt.
Psalm 40B	Fingal	Book of Psalms for Worship 40a and 40b, 2009
Psalm 41	Morecambe	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 42A	Genevan 42	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 42B	O Waly Waly	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 42C	Baca	The Psalter, 1912
Psalm 43A	Arcadia	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 43B	Amara	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 44	Maldwyn	Complete Book of Psalms for Singing, 1991.
Psalm 45A	Oliva Speciosa	The Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 45B	Leominster	vv. 1 – 10, The Psalter, 1912; alt. 1990 (partial)
Psalm 46A	Ein Feste Burg	The Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 46B	Noel	The Psalter, 1912, alt.
Psalm 47A	Truro	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 47B	Genevan 47	W. Helder, 2010
Psalm 48A	Diademata	st. 1–2 Psalter Hymnal, 1987, alt; st. 3, Sing to the Lord, 2008, st. 4–6 Psalter, 1887; alt.
Psalm 48B	Forest Green (alt. Ellacombe)	Sing Psalms, 2003

Psalm 49	Eifionydd	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 50	Leicester (alt. St. Petersburg)	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 51A	Genevan 51	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 51B	Ottawa	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 51C	Ajalon/Redhead	The Psalter, 1912; alt. (paraphrase)
Psalm 52	Genevan 77	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 53	Southwell	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 54	Ebenezer	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 55	Donnelly	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 56	Invitation	st. 1–4 Psalter Hymnal, 1957, alt., st. 5, Sing to the Lord, 2008
Psalm 57	Ain	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 58	Shepherd’s Pipes	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 59	Donnelly	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 60	Katushka	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 61A	Colwyn Bay	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 61B	Belmont	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 62A	Seraph (Bethlehem)	Psalter Hymnal, 1957
Psalm 62B	Wieberg	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 63A	Puer Nobis	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 63B	The Green Hill	Book of Psalms for Worship 63A and 63B, 2009 (paraphrase)
Psalm 64	Schmucke Dich	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 65A	Nyland	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 65B	Genevan 65	Psalm 65, Standing Committee for the Book of Praise, 2010
Psalm 65C	Mendebras	The Psalter Hymnal, 1957, 114 and 115 George Webb
Psalm 66A	Wie Shon Leuchtet	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 66B	Adowa	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 67A	Meirionydd (alt. Aurelia)	The Psalter, 1912; alt. 1990.
Psalm 67B	Thaxted	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 68A	Genevan 68	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 68B	Missionary Hymn	L. Mason, 1828 (paraphrase)
Psalm 69A	Xavier	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 69B	Ellers (alt. Eventide)	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 70	Munich	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 71	St. Christopher	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 72A	Ostend	Reformed Presbyterian Book of Psalms, 1940; alt. 1990; alt.
Psalm 72B	Es Flog Ein Kleins Waldvoegelein	CRC Pub., J. Montgomery, 1822; alt. B. Polman, 1985 (paraphrase)
Psalm 73A	Full Circle	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 73B	Vater Unser	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 73C	St. Flavian (alt. Prayer)	vv. 23 – 28 from The Psalter, 1912 (partial)
Psalm 74	Epiphany (Wesley)	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 75	Carlisle	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 76	Neander	Trinity Psalter; alt.
Psalm 77	Resignation	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 78	Lux Prima	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 79A	O Mein Jesu	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 79B	Gorton	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 80	Caritas (alt. St. Denio (Joanna))	Assoc. Ref. Presbyterian Psalter, 1931
Psalm 81A	Beach Spring	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 81B	Genevan 81	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 82	Stuttgart	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 83	Eifionydd	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 84A	Tours	Assoc. Ref. Presbyterian Psalter, 1931; alt. 1961; alt.

Psalm 84B	Llangloffan	Assoc. Ref. Presbyterian Psalter, 1931; alt. 1961; alt.
Psalm 84C	St. Edith (St. Hilda)	Psalter Hymnal, 1957
Psalm 85	Rustington	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 86A	Llef	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 86B	Mason	Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt. B. Polman, 1983
Psalm 87A	Caersalem	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 87B	Zion	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 88	Ottery St. Mary	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 89A	Genevan 89	Standing Committee for the Book of Praise, 2010
Psalm 89B	Maryton	vv. 1 – 4, 28 -29, 32 from The Psalter, 1912; alt. (partial)
Psalm 90A	St. Catherine (alt. St. Chrysostom)	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 90B	Suilven	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 91A	Woodlands	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 91B	Hyfrydol	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 92A	Darwall	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009.
Psalm 92B	Ellesdie	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 92C	St. Petersburg	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 93	Festal Song	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 94A	Aspinwall	Psalter Hymnal, 1957
Psalm 94B	Blaenhafren	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 95A	St. Petersburg	Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt.
Psalm 95B	Hanover (Croft)	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 95C	Beecher	The Psalter, 1912 (paraphrase)
Psalm 96	Wesley (Mason)	The Psalter, 1912; alt. 1990
Psalm 97A	Genevan 97	Standing Committee for the Book of Praise, 2010
Psalm 97B	Uxbridge	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 98A	Lyngham	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973
Psalm 98B	Genevan 98	Standing Committee for the Book of Praise, 2010
Psalm 98C	Austrian Hymn	John Newton, 1779; alt.
Psalm 99A	Leoni	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 99B	Neumark	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 99C	Ellacombe	s.1, s.3 Psalter Hymnal, 1987; s.2 Psalter Hymnal, 1957 (paraphrase)
Psalm 100A	Old 100 th /Genevan 34	W. Kethe, 1561; alt.
Psalm 100B	Diademata	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 101A	Downs	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 101B	Genevan 101	W. Helder, 2010
Psalm 102	Holy Communion (alt. Jerusalem)	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 103A	Before the Throne	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 103B	Beecher	Sing Psalms, 2003; Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009; OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 103C	Tidings	The Psalter, 1912; alt. 1961 (paraphrase)
Psalm 103D	Avondale	Psalter Hymnal, 1957 (partial)
Psalm 104A	Ode to Joy	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 104B	Lyons	Trinity Psalter, 2000
Psalm 105A	Bucklebury	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 105B	Genevan 105	Standing Committee for the Book of Praise, 2010
Psalm 105C	Seraph (Bethlehem)	vv. 1-4, 12 Psalter Hymnal, 1957 (partial)
Psalm 106	Chesed	The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing, 1991; alt.
Psalm 107A	Goshen	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 107B	Halle	vv. 1 – 5, 19 – 20 from Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt. (partial)
Psalm 108	St. Thomas	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 109	Blaenhafren	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 110A	St. Thomas (Williams)	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 110B	All Saints New	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 111A	Les Commandements De Dieu	Sing Psalms, 2003

Psalm 111B	Germany	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 112	Hetherton	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 113A	Monkland	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 113B	Andre	Psalter Hymnal, 1957
Psalm 114	Winchester New	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 115A	Aberystwyth	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 115B	Gairney Bridge	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 116A	Eventide (Monk)	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 116B	Genevan 116	Cantus Christi
Psalm 117A	In Babilone	Psalter Hymnal, 1976; alt.
Psalm 117B	Regent Square	H. Thomas Smart
Psalm 117C	St. Oswald	United Presbyterian Book of Psalms, 1871
Psalm 118A	Geneva 66	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt. 2004
Psalm 118B	Zerah	vv. 19 – 23, 26, 29 from The Psalter, 1912 (partial)
Psalm 119A	Genevan 119/Rendez a Dieu	W. Helder, 2010
Psalm 119B	Duane Street	The Psalter, 1912, Psalm 119:9-16, alt.
Psalm 119C	Wareham	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 119D	Olive's Brow	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119E	Bishop	The Psalter, 1912; alt. 1990
Psalm 119F	Mulchaich	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119G	Perfect Love	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119H	Bowersburn	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119I	Trewen	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119J	Contentment	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119K	Suilven	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119L	Melita	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119M	Toulon	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119N	Canonbury	Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt.
Psalm 119O	Das Walt Gott	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119P	Robinson	Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt.
Psalm 119Q	St. Crispin	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119R	Winchester New	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119S	Genevan 110	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 119T	Sandon	Sing to the Lord, 2008.
Psalm 119U	Deus Tourum Militum	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 119V	Federal Street	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 120	Cadboll Street	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 121A	Dundee	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 121B	Guide	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 122A	CWM Rhondda	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 122B	Morecambe	Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt. (paraphrase)
Psalm 123	Fillmore	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 124	Genevan 124	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 125	Quam Dilecta	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 126	Arthur's Seat	The Psalter, 1912; alt.
Psalm 127A	Illa	Psalter Hymnal, 1957
Psalm 127B	Deus Turorum	Based on The Psalter, 1912
Psalm 128A	McKee	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 128B	Galilee (Jude)	Psalter Hymnal, 1957
Psalm 129	Saxony	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 130A	St. Columba	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 130B	Sandon	Psalter Hymnal, 1957
Psalm 131A	Lobt Gott	Book of Psalms for Singing, 1973; alt.
Psalm 131B	Trentham	Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt.
Psalm 132	Blaenwern	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt. 2004
Psalm 133A	St. Stephen (alt. Manoah)	Sings Psalms, 2003
Psalm 133B	Pressly	Psalter Hymnal, 1957 (paraphrase)

Psalm 134	Old 100 th /Genevan 34	L. J. Lamberts, 1928
Psalm 135	Creation	The Psalter, 1912; The Complete Book of Psalms for Singing, 1991; alt.
Psalm 136	Constance	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009; alt.
Psalm 137	Brynteg	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 138A	St. Petersburg	Various sources, 2004
Psalm 138B	Solid Rock	Psalter Hymnal, 1957; alt.
Psalm 139A	St. Matthew	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 139B	Woodworth	Psalter Hymnal 288 and 289, 1957, 288 and 289, alt.
Psalm 140	Leicester	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 141	Southwell	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 142	Rockingham Old	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 143A	Love Unknown	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 143B	Dolgelly	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 144A	Rhosymedre	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 144B	St. Denio (Joanna)	H. Mayer, 1940, Psalter Hymnal, 1957, alt.
Psalm 145A	Yorkshire	OPC/URCNA (2016)
Psalm 145B	Duke St.	Book of Psalms for Worship Psalm 145A and 145B, 2009
Psalm 145C	Stuttgart	R. Mant, 1824; alt. 1990 (paraphrase)
Psalm 145D	Noel	vv. 1 – 8 from The Psalter, 1912; alt. (partial)
Psalm 146	Ripley	Various Sources, 2004; alt.
Psalm 147A	Petersham	Sing Psalms, 2003
Psalm 147B	Minerva	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 148A	St. Catherines	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 148B	Praise Jehovah	Bible Songs Hymnal, 1927; alt. (partial)
Psalm 149A	Hanover	The Psalter, 1912; alt. Rowland Ward, 1991; alt.
Psalm 149B	Laudate Dominum	The Psalter, 1912 Rev. by Rowland Ward, 1991; alt.
Psalm 150A	Genevan 150	W. Helder, 2010
Psalm 150B	Wycliff	Sing Psalms, 2003; alt.
Psalm 150C	Helmsley	Book of Psalms for Worship, 2009
Psalm 150D	Lasst Uns Erfreuen	D. Hyde, 2001

B. Hymns

Our committees have also begun working together on hymns, following a 3 stage process: a) review and selection of hymns from the Revised Trinity Hymnal, b) review and selection of hymns from the *Hymn Proposal* of the United Reformed Churches, and c) review and selection of hymns from other sources. We intend to update the churches periodically regarding hymns that have been agreed upon by both committees. Lord willing, a completed Hymn Proposal will be brought to Synod 2016 for approval.

C. Structure and Language of Psalter Hymnal

The committees have agreed to arrange the Psalter according to Psalm number beginning with the complete text(s) of a psalm, followed by partial text(s), followed by paraphrased versions. A hymn that is clearly based on a psalm will be identified as such in the hymn section. Together with the OPC committee we have also agreed that pronouns referring to the Deity will be capitalized for the sake of clarity. The beginning of new lines will not be capitalized unless a new sentence begins. Regarding the usage of gender specific language in the psalms, we are following the text of the English Standard Version. We intend to leave unchanged the name ‘Jehovah’ and archaic language in hymns considered classics.

We intend to publish two versions of the songbook when we are ready for printing. Both will have identical song sections, but the information in the back of the book will differ. The OPC will have their version, and the URC theirs. The URC version will include the liturgical forms, creeds, confessions, prayers, etc. that will have been approved by a URC synod. **(See Recommendation 6)**

III. Committee Membership

Following Synod 2012 it was necessary for two members to resign from our committee for work-related reasons. These are Dr. Scott Finch (Classis Western Canada) and Mr. Dan Zylstra (Classis Central US) who served our committee diligently and well. To replace these, Classis Central US appointed Mr. Dave Buursma to our committee and Classis Western Canada appointed Rev. Brian Cochran.

Synod 2012 also formed a new classis, Classis Southwestern Ontario, which appointed Rev. Harry Zekveld as its representative to our committee.

Regarding these membership matters, please **see recommendations 3.**

IV. Recommendations

- 1. That synod receive the work of the committee to date.**
- 2. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to members of the URC Psalter Hymnal Committee when this report is being discussed.**
- 3. That synod express the churches' appreciation and gratitude for the faithful service of Dr. Scott Finch and Mr. Daniel Zylstra.**
- 4. That synod adopt the submitted Psalm Proposal to be the psalter portion of the new songbook.**

Grounds:

- a. Synod 1999 mandated the Psalter Hymnal committee to provide “a recommendation of songs to be included in the new psalter hymnal.” (Art. XLI.c.(a))**
 - b. This Psalm Proposal will be presented to this year’s OPC General Assembly for its approval as an entire collection.**
 - c. Synod 2012 accepted the OPC’s invitation “to work together to produce a Psalter Hymnal for use in a wide range of confessional Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.” To adopt the psalm proposal would be a significant step toward this goal and a substantial expression of our ecumenical unity.**
- 5. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to the OPC member(s) serving on their Psalter Hymnal Special Committee when recommendation 4 is being discussed.**

- 6. That synod mandate the Liturgical Forms Committee to determine what liturgical forms, confessions, prayers, etc. ought to be included in the songbook, and submit these to Synod 2016 for approval.**

Grounds:

- a. The Liturgical Forms Committee was appointed in 2004 to do this very thing (2004 Acts of Synod, Article 96.3-5)**
 - b. The goal is to begin production following the URC Synod and OPC General Assembly of 2016.**
- 7. That synod appoint a person or persons with authority to sign contractual agreements with the OPC regarding this project.**

Grounds:

- a. The Psalter Hymnal Committee is not mandated to sign such agreements or to commit funds;**
- b. The Psalter Hymnal Committee has no expertise in these matters.**

Conclusion

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

Respectfully submitted,

Mr. David Buursma (Classis Central US)
Rev. Brian Cochran (Classis Western Canada)
Rev. Christopher Folkerts (Classis Pacific Northwest)
Rev. Rand Lankheet (Classis Ontario East)
Mrs. Denise Marcusse (Classis Michigan)
Mr. Joel Pearce (Classis Eastern US)
Mrs. Angeline Vanderboom (Recorder, Member at large)
Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen, Chairman (Classis Southwest US)
Rev. Harry Zekveld (Classis Southwestern Ontario)

Report of the Liturgical Forms and Confessions Committee Synod 2014

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

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

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

2. Report of the work of the Committee: (All committee work has been carried by way of Skype meetings and a face to face meeting during the dates of August 13-15, 2013). The committee presents the following for comment, editions etc along with the edited versions of the liturgical forms and prayers.

- 2.1 **The Lord’s Prayer:** The committee decided to use the Lord’s Prayer that will be found in the agreed upon version of the Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 45 QA 119 be used in all the form prayers in order that the doxology provided by said Lord’s Prayer will be included.

- 2.2 **The Apostles’ Creed.** The committee presents the 1976 version of the Apostles’ Creed with minor editions and notes. An introduction is being prepared and will be presented at a later date. (See appendix 1)

- 2.3 **The Nicene Creed:** the committee presents the 1976 Blue Psalter Hymnal version with minor editions and notes. An introduction is being prepared and will be presented at a later date. (See appendix 1)

- 2.4 **The Athanasian Creed** the committee presents the 1988 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal with editions and notes. An introduction is forthcoming. (See appendix 1)

- 2.5 **The Belgic Confession** The committee has decided to present the 1985 CRC Psalter Hymnal edition of the Belgic Confession including the footnoted Scripture references which is also found in Pelikan and Hotchkiss, *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (vol.2:405-426) go to:
http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Belgic%20Confession_old.pdf: with the following emendations:

- a. Art. 30: substitute the word “persons” (“... when such persons are elected...”; French: “... quand tels *personnages* seront esleuz...”; Dutch:

- “...wanneer zulke *personen* verkoren worden...”) with “men” (Latin: “...cum *vir* fideles eligentur...”).
- b. We will put the original wording of the footnote regarding “detesting” into the body of the confession and add a footnote explaining what we mean by the word to detest in regards to heresy as opposed to persons.
 - c. If Synod 2014 decides in favor of the above, the committee will look into receiving permission from CRC Publications.
 - d. The committee will present an introduction to the churches in due time.

Grounds:

1. This translation of the Belgic Confession is the most accurate among current translations extent in the English language.
2. This translation is based on the original French language of the text that was revised and adopted by the Synod of Dort. It also accurately conveys the Dutch and Latin texts as well. (The Dutch translation commissioned at Dort was officially adopted while the Latin wasn't finished when the Synod concluded).
3. This translation has already been rendered in a form that has good eye-appeal and is conducive to understanding its contents.

2.6 **The Canons of Dort.** The committee present the 1986 CRC Psalter hymnal edition of the Canons of Dort that is found in Pelikan and Hotchikiss, *Creeeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*(vol. 2:569-600). Go to: http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/Canons%20of%20Dort_old.pdf

Grounds:

1. This translation of the Canons is the most accurate among current translations extent in the English language.
2. This translation is prepared from the only extant Latin manuscript among those who signed at the Synod of Dort.
3. The biblical quotations are translations from the original Latin and reflect the original document, and therefore accurately convey the theological understanding of the Canons.
4. The subheadings offered in this translation aid the reader in discerning the contents and argument of the Canons.
5. This translation is eminently readable for a tightly argued theological document.

2.7 **The Heidelberg Catechism:** The committee is still working on finding the best version and translation to be presented. An introduction will also be forth coming.

2.8 **Prayers and forms:** The committee received correspondence form a number of churches which offered many editions, suggestions and advice for the forms. The committee regrets that it could not respond directly to all of the letters and suggestions and found the job of offering reasons for every change too cumbersome. In appendix one the edited forms are there for the church churches' perusal.

3. Action for Synod 2014:
 - 3.1 To allow Rev. Al Bezuyen and Rev. Dr. Brian Lee to report on behalf of the committee as needed.
 - 3.2 To encourage the churches to review the Forms and prayers, ecumenical creeds and versions of the Belgic Confession and Canons of Sort with emendation and encourage communication with concerns to the committee by way of the Chairman Rev. Danny Hyde: pastor@oceansideurc.org or secretary Rev. Al Bezuyen at aabezuyen@gmail.com.
 - 3.3 To keep the committee as presently constituted.
 - 3.4 To set aside \$6,000.00 USD for a face to face meetings (this was approximate cost of the last meeting).

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Daniel R. Hyde (chair)
Rev. Al Bezuyen (clerk)
Dr. J. Mark Beach
Rev. William Van der Woerd
Dr. Brian Lee

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The Apostles' Creed (introduction forth coming)

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell;¹ the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit; a holy catholic² Church, the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

¹ This phrase has been understood in the Reformed Churches as meaning two things: as to the body of Jesus Christ, he descended into the state of death; as to the soul of Jesus Christ, he suffered the agonies of hell (Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Q&A 66, 67, 70; Westminster Confession of Faith 8.4; Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 50; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 44).

² "Catholic" means universal, that is, that there is one Church across all times, places, and peoples (Belgic Confession, art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54).

The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic¹ and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

¹ "Catholic" means universal, that is, that there is one Church across all times, places, and peoples (Belgic Confession, art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54).

The Athanasian Creed

Whoever desires to be saved should above all hold to the catholic¹ faith.
Anyone who does not keep it whole and unbroken will doubtless perish eternally.

Now this is the catholic faith:

GOD IS THREE IN ONE

That we worship one God in trinity and the trinity in unity,
neither confounding their persons
nor dividing the essence.

For the person of the Father is a distinct person,
the person of the Son is another,
and that of the Holy Spirit still another.
But the divinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one,
the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.

Such as the Father is, such is the Son and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father is uncreated,
the Son is uncreated,
the Holy Spirit is uncreated.
The Father is immeasurable,
the Son is immeasurable,
the Holy Spirit is immeasurable.
The Father is eternal,
the Son is eternal,
the Holy Spirit is eternal.

And yet there are not three eternal beings;
there is but one eternal being.

So too there are not three uncreated or immeasurable beings;
there is but one uncreated and immeasurable being.

Similarly, the Father is almighty,
the Son is almighty,
the Holy Spirit is almighty.

Yet there are not three almighty beings;
there is but one almighty being.

Thus the Father is God,
the Son is God,
the Holy Spirit is God.

Yet there are not three gods; there is but one God.

Thus the Father is Lord,
the Son is Lord,
the Holy Spirit is Lord.

Yet there are not three lords; there is but one Lord.

Just as Christian truth compels us
to confess each person³ individually
as both God and Lord,
so catholic religion forbids us
to say that there are three gods or lords.

The Father was neither made nor created nor begotten from anyone.
The Son was neither made nor created;
he was begotten from the Father alone.

The Holy Spirit was neither made nor created nor begotten;
he proceeds from the Father and the Son.

Accordingly there is one Father, not three fathers;
there is one Son, not three sons;
there is one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits.

Nothing in this trinity is before or after,
nothing is greater or smaller;
in their entirety the three persons
are coeternal and coequal with each other.

So in everything, as was said earlier,
the unity in trinity

And the trinity is to be worshipped
Anyone then who desires to be saved
should think thus about the trinity.

JESUS CHRIST IS TRUE GOD AND TRUE MAN

But it is necessary for eternal salvation
that one also believe in the incarnation
of our Lord Jesus Christ faithfully.

Now this is the true faith:
That we believe and confess
that our Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son,
is both God and man, equally.

He is God from the essence of the Father,
begotten before time;
and he is man from the essence of his mother,
born in time;
completely God, completely man,

with a rational soul and man flesh;
equal to the Father as regards divinity,
less than the Father as regards humanity.

Although he is God and man,
yet Christ is not two, but one.
He is one, however,
not by his divinity being turned into flesh,
but by God's taking humanity to himself.

He is one,
certainly not by the blending of his essence,
but by the unity of his person.

For just as one man is both rational soul and flesh,
so too the one Christ is both God and man.

He suffered for our salvation;
he descended to hell²;
he arose from the dead on the third day;
he ascended to heaven;
he is seated at the Father's right hand;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

At his coming all people will arise bodily
and give an accounting of their own deeds.

Those who have done good will enter eternal life,
and those who have done evil will enter eternal fire.

This is the catholic faith:
one cannot be saved without believing it firmly and faithfully.

¹ “Catholic” means universal, that is, that there is one Church across all times, places, and peoples (Belgic Confession, art. 27; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54).

² This phrase has been understood in the Reformed Churches as meaning two things: as to the body of Jesus Christ, he descended into the state of death; as to the soul of Jesus Christ, he suffered the agonies of hell (Catechism of the Church of Geneva, Q&A 66, 67, 70; Westminster Confession of Faith 8.4; Westminster Larger Catechism, Q&A 50; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 44).

Form of Subscription

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

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

We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned Synod, but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these and to exert ourselves in keeping the Church free from such errors. And if hereafter any difficulties or different sentiments respecting the aforesaid doctrines should arise in our minds, we promise that we will neither publicly nor privately propose or defend the same, either by preaching, teaching, or writing, until we have first revealed such sentiments to the Consistory, Classis, or Synod, that the same may there be examined, being ready always cheerfully to submit to the judgment of the Consistory, Classis, or Synod, under the penalty, in case of refusal, of being by that very fact suspended from our office.

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

Baptism of Infants: Form 1

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ: There are three principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism.

First: That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, unless we are born again. This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and turn aside all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, until we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants contain two parts, therefore we are by God, through baptism, admonished and obliged to live in new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. And if through weakness, we sometimes fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God. And although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since without their knowledge, they are participants in the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received to grace in Christ; as God speaks to Abraham, the father of all believers, and therefore also to us and our children, saying: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you* (Gen. 17:7). Peter also testifies to this with these words: *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore, God formerly commanded to circumcise them, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; as also Christ embraced them, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since, then, baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Col. 2:11–13), the children should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and as members of His covenant; and as they grow up, the parents shall be bound to give them further instruction in these things.

That we, therefore, may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, who according to your severe judgment, punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, who according to your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; who drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground—by which you showed us the meaning of baptism—we earnestly pray that you may be pleased of your infinite mercy, graciously to look upon these your children and incorporate them by your Holy Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that they, daily following Him, may joyfully bear their cross, cleaving to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that they, being comforted in you, may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ your Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent(s)

Beloved in Christ the Lord, you have heard that baptism is an institution of God to seal to us and our seed His covenant; therefore it must be used for that end, and not out of custom or superstition. That it may, then, be clear to all that you are in agreement, you are to sincerely answer these questions:

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, even to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you acknowledge the doctrine which is contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and which is taught here in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation?

Third: Do you promise and intend to instruct these children, as soon as they are able to understand, in this doctrine, and cause them to be instructed in these things, to the utmost of your power?

¶ *The parents answer: We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).*

¶ *Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:*

_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be your children, and sealed and confirmed the same to us by holy baptism. We earnestly pray, through Him, your beloved Son, always to govern these children by your Holy Spirit, that they may be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that they may acknowledge your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to them and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ;

and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Baptism of Children: Form 2

The Institution

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

As we are here to celebrate holy baptism, let us first hear our Lord Jesus Christ's institution of this sacrament. After he had risen victorious from the grave, Jesus said to his disciples:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18–20).

In obedience to this command the church has always baptized believers and their children.

The Promises

Let us hear the promises of God which are confirmed in baptism. The Lord made this great promise to Abraham: *"I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you"* (Gen. 17:7).

Generations later, though Israel was unfaithful to God's covenant with them, God renewed his promise through the prophet: *"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people...I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"* (Jer. 31:33, 34).

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son" (Gal. 4:4), our Lord Jesus Christ, to give pardon and peace through the blood of the cross, the *"blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matt. 26:28).

After Jesus had risen from the dead, the apostles proclaimed: *"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself"* (Acts 2:38–39).

Anticipating the fulfillment of God's promises, Paul assures us, *"If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him...if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself"* (2 Tim. 2:11b–12a, 13).

These are the unfailing promises of our Lord to those who are baptized.

The Instruction

Hear also the teaching of Scripture concerning the sacrament of baptism.

The water of baptism signifies the washing away of our sin by the blood of Christ and the renewal of our lives by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). It also signifies that we are buried with Christ (Rom. 6:4). From this we learn that our sin has been condemned by God, that we are to hate it, and consider ourselves as having died to it. Moreover, the water of baptism signifies that we are raised with Christ (Col. 2:12). From this we learn that we are to walk with Christ in newness of life. All this tells us that God has adopted us as his children, *"and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ"* (Rom. 8:17).

Thus in baptism God seals the promises he gave when he made his covenant with us, calling us and our children to put our trust for life and death in Christ our Savior, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him in obedience and love.

God also graciously includes our children in his covenant, and all his promises are for them as well as us (Gen. 17:7, Acts 2:39). Jesus demonstrated this when he embraced little children, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). The apostle Paul said that children of believers are holy (1 Cor. 7:14). So, just as the children of the old covenant received the sign of circumcision, our children in the new covenant are given the sign of baptism (Col. 2:11–12). We are therefore always to teach our little ones that they have been set apart by baptism as God’s own children, and because of that, they are to repent of their sins and embrace God’s promise of forgiveness in Christ by faith.

The Prayer of Preparation

Let us pray:

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you will never destroy us in our sin as you once did with the flood upon the world, but save us as believing Noah and his family, and spare us as the Israelites who walked safely through the Sea. We pray that Jesus Christ, who went down into the Jordan River and came up to receive the Holy Spirit, who sank deep into death and was raised up Lord of life, will always keep us and our little ones in the grip of his hand. We pray, O holy Father, that your Spirit will separate us from sin and openly mark us with a faith that can stand the light of day and endure the dark of night. Prepare us now, O Lord, to respond with glad hope to your promises so that we, and all entrusted to our care, may drink deeply from the well of living water. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Vows

¶ The minister then addresses the parents:

Since you, _____, have presented this child for holy baptism, you are asked to answer the following questions sincerely before God and his people:

First, do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, accept the promises of God made to you in your baptism, and affirm the truth of the Christian faith that is proclaimed in the Bible and confessed in this Christian church?

Second, do you believe that your child, though sinful by nature, is received by God in Christ as a member of his covenant, and therefore ought to be baptized?

Third, do you promise, in reliance on the Holy Spirit and with the help of the Christian community, to do all in your power to instruct this child in the Christian faith and to lead him by your example into the life of Christian discipleship?

¶ The parents respond: We do, God helping us.

¶ The minister addresses the congregation: Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive this child in love, pray for him, help care for his instruction in the faith, and encourage and sustain him in the fellowship of believers?

¶ The congregation responds: We do, God helping us.

The Sacrament

Our Lord said: “*Let the children come to me; do not hinder them for to such belongs the kingdom of God*” (Mark 10:14).

_____, I baptize you to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

A Triumphant Hymn

The Baptismal Prayer

O Lord our gracious God, forever faithful to your promises, we thank you for assuring us again that you will forgive us and receive us as children in Christ. Grant wisdom and love to the parents and to us all as we carry out the vows just made. We pray that you will guide our little ones throughout their lives. Enable all of them to respond in faith to the gospel. Fill them with your Spirit and make their lives fruitful. Uphold them in their hour of trial, and when Christ returns let them celebrate with all the people of God your greatness and goodness forever in the joy of your new creation. Amen.

Profession of Faith: Form 1

We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. We praise him for working faith in your heart so that you now desire publicly to profess your faith in the presence of God and his holy church, and enter into the privileges of full communion with the people of God.

Vows

_____, you are now requested to answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you despise and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

¶ *Each individual then answers:* I do.

Charge

I charge you, then, beloved, that you, by the diligent use of the means of grace and with the assistance of your God, continue in the profession which you have just made. In the Name of Christ Jesus our Lord, I now welcome you to full communion with the people of God. Rest assured that all the privileges of such communion are now yours. *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen* (1 Peter 5:10–11).

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have from the beginning embraced in your covenant the children together with their parents. We thank you that you from the first did include these your servants in the Christian Church, and did grant them all the manifold blessings of Christian culture. We praise you that in their case you did add the special grace of your Holy Spirit, so that of their own will they come here today to profess your truth and to consecrate their lives to your service. We earnestly pray that you will continue to carry on the good work you have begun in them until the day of complete redemption. Increase in them daily the manifold gifts of your

grace, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord. Grant them the happiness of promoting the glory of their Lord and the edification of His people. Deliver them in the temptations of this life and in the final trial of death. And in that day when you make up your jewels, set also these your servants in your crown, that they may shine as stars, to your praise, for ever and ever. Amen.

Public Profession of Faith: Form 2

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

We thank the Lord our God for the grace given us by adopting us to be his children and receiving us into his covenant. We acknowledge His love and power, by which He instills in his children the desire to publicly profess their faith in him in the presence of his holy church and thereby receive all the responsibilities as well as the privileges of communion with the people of God.

Today we are privileged to welcome into the full life of the church's fellowship those who wish to confess their faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. When they were baptized God made clear His claim on them as his own and they were received into the church. Now they wish to share fully in the life of this congregation and of the whole church of God. And so today they will publicly accept and confirm what was sealed in their baptism, confess their faith in the Lord Jesus, and commit themselves to God as his willing servants. We thank God for having given them this desire and pray that as we now hear their confession, he will favor us with the presence and guidance of his Holy Spirit.

Vows

_____, will you now stand, and in the presence of God and his people answer sincerely the following questions:

First: Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and the New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you despise and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves, but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve Him according to His Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

¶ *Each individual then answers:* I do.

Reception

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I now welcome you to all the privileges of full communion. I welcome you to full participation in the life of the church. I welcome you to its responsibilities, its joys and its sufferings. May you, by the diligent use of the means of grace and with the

assistance of your God, continue in the profession which you have just made. *“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good, that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen”* (Heb. 13:20-21).

¶ The minister asks the congregation to rise, and says: Let us together confess what we believe:

¶ Congregation:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe a holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer

Lord, our God, we thank you for your Word and Spirit through which we know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. May those who confessed your name today never cease to wonder at what you have done for them. Help them to continue firmly in the faith, to bear witness to your love, and to let the Holy Spirit shape their lives. Take them, good Shepherd, into your care that they may loyally endure opposition in serving you. May we, with all your children, live together in the joy and power of your Holy Spirit. We ask this, Lord Jesus, in the hope of your coming. Amen.

Baptism of Adults: Form 1

¶ When adults who have not been baptized desire to receive baptism, they shall first be thoroughly instructed in the doctrines of the Christian religion. And when they have made a good profession in the presence of the consistory, they shall be permitted to make public profession and receive holy baptism; in the administration of which the following form shall be used.

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ:

There are three principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism.

First: That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, unless we are born again. This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and turn aside all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, until we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants contain two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished and obliged to live in new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. And if through weakness, we sometimes fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God. And although the children of Christians, despite their inability to understand these things, must be baptized by virtue of the covenant, yet it is not lawful to baptize adults, unless they first confess and repent of their sins, and make a profession of their faith in Christ. For this reason, according to the command of God, John the Baptist preached a baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4, 5 and Luke 3:3), but also our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt. 28:19). This promise is confirmed by Paul: *Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name* (Acts 22:16). According to this rule as we see in the book of Acts, the apostles baptized no other adults but those who confessed and repented of their sins and who made a profession of faith. Therefore it is not lawful now to baptize any other adults than those who have learned and understand, from

the preaching of the holy gospel, the mysteries of holy baptism, and are able to give an account of their faith and profess that faith publicly.

That we therefore may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call on His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, who according to your severe judgment, punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, who according to your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; who drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground—by which you showed us the meaning of baptism—we earnestly pray that you may be pleased of your infinite mercy, graciously to look upon this brother (sister) and incorporate him (her) by your Holy Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ, that he (she) may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that he (she), daily following Him, may joyfully bear his (her) cross, cleaving to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that he (she), being comforted in you, may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ your Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Person to be Baptized

_____, since, then, you desire to receive holy baptism, that it may be to you a seal of your incorporation in the Church of God and that it may now appear that you not only accept the Christian religion, in which you have been instructed by us, and of which you have made profession before us, but also that you intend to direct your life accordingly, you are to answer these questions sincerely before God and His church:

First: Do you believe in the only true God, distinct in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who of nothing has made heaven and earth and all that is in them, and still upholds and governs them, so that nothing comes to pass, either in heaven or on earth, without His divine will?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Second: Do you believe that you are conceived and born in sin and therefore a child of wrath, by nature totally incapable of doing any good and prone to all evil; and that you, in thought, word, and deed, have frequently transgressed the commandments of the Lord; and do you sincerely repent of these your sins?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Third: Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who is both true and eternal God and very man, who assumed His human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, is given you of God as a Savior; and that you by this faith receive remission of sins in His blood, and that you by the power of the Holy Spirit became a member of Jesus Christ and of His Church:

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Fourth: Do you assent to all the articles of the Christian religion, as they are taught here in this Christian church from the Word of God, and are you determined to continue in the same doctrine to the end of your life; and do you also reject all heresies and errors conflicting with this doctrine, and promise that you will persevere in the fellowship of this Christian church, not only in the hearing of the divine Word, but also in the use of the holy supper?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Fifth: Do you firmly resolve always to lead a Christian life, to forsake the world and its evil lusts, as is becoming to the members of Christ and of His Church, and to submit cheerfully to all Christian admonitions?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

The good and great God mercifully grant you His grace and blessing in this your holy purpose, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

¶ *Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say:*

_____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be your children, and sealed and confirmed the same to us by holy baptism. We earnestly pray, through Him, your beloved Son, always to govern this brother (sister) by your Holy Spirit, that he (she) may lead a Christian and godly life, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that he (she) may acknowledge your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to him (her) and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that he (she) may eternally praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Baptism of Adults: Form 2

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Just as the angels in heaven rejoice when one sinner repents (Luke 15:7, 10), so too it is our joy as a congregation to receive new believers into our fellowship. At our last consistory meeting _____, declared their faith in Christ and expressed their desire to receive the sacrament of baptism. Today we are happy that they will confess their faith before us all and receive the sacrament of holy baptism.

The Vows

_____, will you stand now, and in the presence of God and His people respond to the following questions:

First: Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God sent to redeem the world, do you love and trust Him as the One who saves you from your sin, and do you with repentance and joy embrace Him as Lord of your life?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Second: Do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God revealing Christ and His redemption, and that the confessions of this church faithfully reflect this revelation?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Third: Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honoring and submitting to its authority; and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord everywhere?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

(The response may be asked after the last question only).

The Institution

Let us first hear our Lord's command concerning the sacrament of holy baptism. After he had risen victorious from the grave, Jesus said to His disciples:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Promises

Now listen to the promises of God which are confirmed in baptism.

The Lord made this great promise to Abraham: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.* (Genesis 17:7).

Generations later, though Israel was unfaithful to this covenant, the Lord renewed His promise through the prophet: *This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* (Jeremiah 31:33, 34)

When the fullness of time had come (Gal. 4:4) God came to earth in Jesus Christ to give pardon and peace through the blood of the cross, the *blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Matthew 26:28)

After Jesus had risen from the dead, the apostles proclaimed: *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.* (Acts 2:38–39)

Anticipating the fulfillment of all God’s promises, Paul assures us, *If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him*” (2 Timothy 2:11–12).

These are the unfailing promises of our Lord to those who are baptized.

The Instruction

Finally, recall the teaching of Holy Scripture concerning the sacrament of baptism.

The water of baptism signifies the washing away of our sin by the blood of Christ and the renewal of our lives by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). It also signifies that we are buried with Christ (Romans 6:4). From this we learn that our sin has been condemned by God, that we are to hate it and consider ourselves as having died to it. Moreover, the water of baptism signifies that we are raised with Christ (Colossians 2:12). From this we learn that we are to walk with Christ in newness of life. All this tells us that God has adopted us as his children, *“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”* (Romans 8:17).

Thus in baptism God seals the promises He gave when He made His covenant of grace with us, calling us and our children to put our trust for life and death in Christ our Savior, deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him in obedience and love.

Prayer of Preparation

Let us pray:

Father in heaven, we pray that you will never destroy us in our sin as with the flood, but save us as believing Noah and his family, and spare us as the Israelites who walked safely through the Sea.

We pray that Christ, who went down into the Jordan and came up to receive the Spirit, who sank deep into death and was raised up Lord of life, will always keep us and our little ones in the grip of His hand.

We pray O holy Father, that your Spirit will separate us from sin and openly mark us with a faith that can stand the light of day and endure the dark of night.

Prepare us now, O Lord, to respond with glad hope to your promises so that we, and all entrusted to our care, may drink deeply from the well of living water. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

The Sacrament

¶ The minister addresses the confessor(s), standing near the water:

Do you now wish to be baptized in the name of the Triune God, and will you receive your baptism as a sign and seal that God accepts you in Christ, forgives all your sins and incorporates you into his church?

¶ I do, with all my heart. (To be said by each confessor, if there are more than one)

¶ The minister addresses the congregation:

Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive _____ into your fellowship as members of the body of Christ, and do you promise to encourage them in the Christian faith and help them in doing the work of the Lord?

¶ Congregation: We do, God helping us.

¶ In administering the sacrament the minister shall say: _____, I baptize you into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I now welcome you to all the privileges of full communion. I welcome you to full participation in the life of the church. I welcome you to its responsibilities, its privileges, its sufferings, and its joys.

¶ A triumphant song may be sung

The Baptismal Prayer

Let us pray:

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for Jesus Christ, for the new life given in Him, and for the one faith, one hope, and one baptism which your people have shared through the ages. We rejoice that _____ are now one with your church and that we may receive them as members of this congregation. Guide them in the Christian way and sustain us all in the fellowship and service of our Lord. Amen.

Reception of Families

¶ This form has been prepared for use on those occasions when an entire family is received into membership, when the parent(s) make profession of faith and there is infant/child baptism.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ:

Concerning the covenant of grace, the Apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed, *The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself* (Acts 2:39). Ever since the days of the apostles, Christ has been pleased to add to his church both individuals and families.

We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. We praise him for working faith in your heart so that you now desire publicly to profess your faith in the presence of God and his holy church, and enter into the privileges of full communion with the people of God, and to present your children for baptism.

Profession of Faith

First: Do you heartily believe the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament, and in the articles of the Christian faith, and taught in this Christian church, to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and do you promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue in this profession?

Second: Do you openly accept God's covenant promise, which has been signified and sealed unto you in your baptism, and do you confess that you despise and humble yourselves before God because of your sins, and that you seek your life not in yourselves but only in Jesus Christ your Savior?

Third: Do you declare that you love the Lord, and that it is your heartfelt desire to serve him according to his Word, to forsake the world, to mortify your old nature, and to lead a godly life?

Fourth: Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?

_____, what is your answer?

¶ Each individual then answers: I do.

Baptism of Infants and Children

Beloved congregation in the Lord Jesus Christ:

There are three principle parts of the doctrine of holy baptism:

First: That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom God, unless we are born again. This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and turn aside all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals to us that he washes us in His blood, from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, until we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants contain two parts, therefore we are by God, through baptism, admonished and obliged to live in new obedience, namely, that we cling to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. And if through weakness, we sometimes fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

And although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since without their knowledge, they are participants in the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received to grace in Christ; as God speaks to Abraham, the father of all believers, and therefore also to us and our children, saying: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you* (Gen. 17:7). Peter also testifies to this with these words: *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore, God formerly commanded to circumcise them, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; as also Christ embraced them, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since, then, baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Col. 2:11–13), the children should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and as members of His covenant; and as they grow up, the parents shall be bound to give them further instruction in these things.

Prayer

That we, therefore, may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call upon His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, who according to your severe judgment, punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, who according to your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; who drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground—by which you showed us the meaning of baptism—we earnestly pray that you may be pleased of your infinite mercy, graciously to look upon these your children and incorporate them by your Holy Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that they, daily following Him, may joyfully bear their cross,

cleaving to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that they, being comforted in you, may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ your Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to Parent/s

Beloved in Christ the Lord, you have heard that baptism is an institution of God to seal to us and our seed His covenant; therefore it must be used for that end, and not out of custom or superstition. That it may, then, be clear to all that you are in agreement, you are to sincerely answer these questions

First: Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, even to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ and therefore as members of His church, ought to be baptized?

Second: Do you promise and intend to instruct these children, as soon as they are able to understand, in the doctrine that you have professed, to the utmost of your power?

¶ *The parents then answer: We do (or in case only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).*

¶ *Then the minister of Word and Sacrament, in baptizing, will say:*

_____, I baptize you into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be your children, and sealed and confirmed the same to us by holy baptism. We earnestly pray, through Him, your beloved Son, always to govern these children by your Holy Spirit, that they may be nurtured in the Christian faith and in godliness, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that they may acknowledge your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to them and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Household Baptism

¶ This form has been prepared for use on those occasions when an entire family is received into membership, when the parents make profession of faith and the entire household is baptized.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Concerning the covenant of grace, the Apostle Peter proclaimed on the day of Pentecost, *The promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore, when converts such as Lydia (Acts 16:15) and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:33) professed faith in Jesus Christ, their whole households were baptized and added to Christ's church. Ever since the days of the apostles, Christ has been pleased to add to his church both individuals and families.

We thank our God concerning you for the grace of God that was given to you in Christ Jesus. We praise him for working faith in your heart so that you now desire publicly to profess your faith in the presence of God and his holy church, and enter into the privileges of full communion with the people of God, and to present your children for baptism.

Instruction

There are three principal parts of the doctrine of holy baptism.

First: That together with our children, we are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, unless we are born again. This, the dipping in or sprinkling with water teaches us, through which the impurity of our souls is signified, that we may be admonished to loathe ourselves, humble ourselves before God, and seek for our purification and salvation apart from ourselves.

Second: Holy baptism witnesses and seals to us the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Therefore we are baptized into the Name of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. For when we are baptized into the Name of the Father, God the Father witnesses and seals to us that He makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for His children and heirs, and therefore will provide us with every good thing and turn aside all evil or turn it to our profit. And when we are baptized into the Name of the Son, the Son seals to us that He washes us in His blood from all our sins, incorporating us into the fellowship of His death and resurrection, so that we are freed from our sins and accounted righteous before God. Likewise, when we are baptized into the Name of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit assures us by this holy sacrament that He will dwell in us, and sanctify us to be members of Christ, imparting to us that which we have in Christ, namely, the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives, until we shall finally be presented without spot among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.

Third: Since all covenants contain two parts, therefore are we by God, through baptism, admonished and obliged to live in new obedience, namely, that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; that we trust in Him, and love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a godly life. And if through weakness, we sometimes fall into sins, we must not therefore despair of God's mercy, nor continue in sin, since baptism is a seal and indisputable testimony that we have an eternal covenant with God.

It is not lawful to baptize adults, unless they first confess and repent of their sins, and make a profession of their faith in Christ. For this reason, according to the command of God, John the Baptist preached a baptism for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4, 5 and Luke 3:3), but also our Lord Jesus Christ commanded His apostles, *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, (Matt. 28:19). This promise is confirmed by Paul. *Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name* (Acts 22:16). According to this rule as we see in the book of Acts, the apostles baptized no other adults but those who confessed and repented of their sins and who made a profession of faith. Therefore it is not lawful now to baptize any other adults than those who have learned and understand, from the preaching of the holy gospel, the mysteries of holy baptism, and are able to give an account of their faith and profess that faith publicly.

And although our children do not understand these things, we may not therefore exclude them from baptism, since without their knowledge, they are participants in the condemnation in Adam, and so again are received to grace in Christ; as God speaks to Abraham, the father of all believers, and therefore also to us and our children, saying: *And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you* (Gen. 17:7). Peter also testifies to this with these words: *For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself* (Acts 2:39). Therefore, God formerly commanded to circumcise them, which was a seal of the covenant and of the righteousness of faith; as also Christ embraced them, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them (Mark 10:16). Since, then, baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign and seal of the covenant (Col. 2:11–13), the children should be baptized as heirs of the kingdom of God and as members of His covenant; and as they grow up, the parents shall be bound to give them further instruction in these things.

Prayer

That we therefore may administer this holy ordinance of God to His glory, to our comfort, and to the edification of the church, let us call on His holy Name:

O almighty, eternal God, who according to your severe judgment, punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, who according to your great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family; who drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea and led your people Israel through the midst of the sea upon dry ground—by which you showed us the meaning of baptism—we earnestly pray that you may be pleased of your infinite mercy, graciously to look upon this family and incorporate them by your Holy Spirit into your Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with Him through baptism into death and be raised with Him in newness of life; that they, daily following Him, may joyfully bear their cross, cleaving to Him in true faith, firm hope, and ardent love; that they, being comforted in you, may leave this life, which is nothing but a constant death, and at the last day may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ your Son, through Him, our Lord Jesus Christ, who with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Address to the Parent/s

_____, you have heard that baptism is an institution of God to seal to us and our seed His covenant; therefore it must be used for that end, and not out of custom or

superstition. Since, then, you desire to receive holy baptism, that it may be to you and to your household a seal of your incorporation in the Church of God—that it may now appear that you not only accept the Christian religion, in which you have been instructed by us, and of which you have made profession before us, but also that you intend to direct your life accordingly, you are to answer these questions sincerely before God and His church:

First: Do you believe in the only true God, distinct in three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who of nothing has made heaven and earth and all that is in them, and still upholds and governs them, so that nothing comes to pass, either in heaven or on earth, without His divine will?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Second: Do you believe that you are conceived and born in sin and therefore a child of wrath, by nature totally incapable of doing any good and prone to all evil; and that you, in thought, word, and deed, have frequently transgressed the commandments of the Lord; and do you sincerely repent of these your sins?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Third: Do you believe that Jesus Christ, who is both true and eternal God and very man, who assumed His human nature from the flesh and blood of the virgin Mary, is given you of God as a Savior; and that you by this faith receive remission of sins in His blood, and that you by the power of the Holy Spirit became a member of Jesus Christ and of His Church:

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Fourth: Do you assent to all the articles of the Christian religion, as they are taught here in this Christian church from the Word of God, and are you determined to continue in the same doctrine to the end of your life; and do you also reject all heresies and errors conflicting with this doctrine, and promise that you will persevere in the fellowship of this Christian church, not only in the hearing of the divine Word, but also in the use of the holy supper?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Fifth: Do you firmly resolve always to lead a Christian life, to forsake the world and its evil lusts, as is becoming to the members of Christ and of His Church, and to submit cheerfully to all Christian admonitions?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Six: Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, even to condemnation itself, are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of His Church ought to be baptized?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

Seventh: Do you promise and intend to instruct these children, as soon as they are able to understand, in the doctrine that you have professed, to the utmost of your power?

¶ *Answer:* We do (or if only one of the parents is a confessing member: I do).

The good and great God mercifully grant you His grace and blessing in this your holy purpose, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

¶ *Then the minister of God's Word, in baptizing, shall say: _____, I baptize you into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Thanksgiving

Almighty God and merciful Father, we thank and praise you, that you have forgiven us and our children all our sins, through the blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, and received us through your Holy Spirit as members of your only begotten Son, and so adopted us to be your children, and sealed and confirmed the same to us by holy baptism. We earnestly pray, through Him, your beloved Son, always to govern this family by your Holy Spirit, that the children may be nurtured in the Christian faith and the adults may lead a Christian and godly life, and grow and increase in the Lord Jesus Christ, in order that they may acknowledge your fatherly goodness and mercy, which you have shown to them and to us all, and live in all righteousness under our only Teacher, King, and High Priest, Jesus Christ; and manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion, to the end that they may eternally praise and magnify you, and your Son Jesus Christ, together with the Holy Spirit, the one only true God. Amen.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper: Form 1

The Institution of the Supper

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us give full attention to the words of the institution of the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, as they are delivered by the Apostle Paul:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself (1 Cor. 11:23–29).

That we may now celebrate the supper of the Lord to our comfort, it is necessary to examine ourselves fully; and further to carefully consider that purpose for which Christ has ordained and instituted this sacrament—namely, his remembrance.

The Call to Self-Examination

The true examination of ourselves consists of three parts:

First: Let every one carefully consider their sins and ungodliness, that they may hate their sins and humble themselves before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great that he, rather than leaving it unpunished, has punished it in his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.

Second: Let every one examine their heart whether they also believe this sure promise of God that all their sins are forgiven them only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the complete righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given them as their own—indeed, so completely as if they personally had satisfied for all their sins and fulfilled all righteousness.

Third: Let every one carefully examine their own conscience to see if they are fully determined to show true thankfulness to God in every area of life, and to walk sincerely before His face; and also whether they, with full sincerity, strive to lay aside all enmity, hatred, and envy, and earnestly resolve from this day forward to live in true love and unity with their neighbor.

All those, then, who are of this mind, God will certainly receive in grace and count as worthy partakers of the table of His Son Jesus Christ. On the contrary, those who do not feel this testimony in their hearts eat and drink judgment upon themselves. According to the command of Christ and the apostle Paul, those who know themselves to be engaging in the following sins without repentance, have no part in the kingdom of Christ and should therefore abstain from coming to the table of the Lord: idolaters; those who call upon deceased saints, angels or any other creature; those who revere images; those who engage in witchcraft, fortune-telling, or occult practices, or other forms of superstition; all those who despise God, his word, and his holy

sacraments; all blasphemers, those who seek to cause discord, factions, and dissension in church or in the state; all perjurers; all who are disobedient to their parents and those in lawful authority; all murderers, contentious people, and those who live in hatred and envy against their neighbors; all adulterers, fornicators, drunkards, thieves, the greedy, robbers, gamblers, covetous people, and all who lead offensive lives. All those who continue in such sins, shall abstain from the Lord's Supper, so that they feel the weight of God's judgment and condemnation.

But this warning is not intended to discourage those believers with contrite hearts, as if no one might come to the Lord's Supper unless they are without sin. We do not come to this supper to testify about our own perfection and righteousness, but, on the contrary, we come seeking life in Jesus Christ apart from ourselves. We come confessing our misery and that we do have many shortcomings and that we do not have perfect faith, that we do not serve God with sufficient zeal, but that we must struggle daily with the weakness of our faith and struggle against the evil lusts of our flesh. However, since the grace of the Holy Spirit makes us sorry for our shortcomings and gives us the desire to fight against unbelief and to live according to God's commandments, therefore we can rest assured that no sin or weakness which still remains in us against our will can prevent us from being received by God's grace and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly food and drink.

Celebrating Our Salvation in Christ

Let us also consider the purpose for which our Lord has instituted his supper: that we should do this in remembrance of him. And this is how we remember him by it:

First, let us be fully persuaded in our hearts that our Lord Jesus Christ, according to the promises made to our forefathers in the Old Testament, was sent by the Father into this world; that he assumed our flesh and blood; that he has taken upon himself for us the wrath of God, under which we should have perished eternally, that from the beginning of his incarnation until the end of his life on earth has fulfilled for us all obedience and righteousness of the divine law. This was especially evident when the weight of our sins and of the wrath of God caused him to sweat drops of blood in the garden, where he was bound that we might be loosed from our sins; and, afterwards, he suffered countless insults that we might never be put to shame. Let us confidently believe that he was innocent, yet put to death that we might be acquitted on the day of judgment; that he even allowed his own blessed body to be nailed to the cross so as to cancel *the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross* (Col. 2:15). In doing so, he took from us the curse and bore it himself that he might fill us with his blessing; and he humbled himself to the very deepest reproach and anguish of hell, in body and soul, on the tree of the cross, when he cried out with a loud voice: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Matt. 27:46)—all so that we might be accepted by God, never to be rejected by him. Indeed with his death and the shedding of his blood, he has confirmed the new and eternal testament, the covenant of grace and of reconciliation, when he said; *It is finished* (John 19:30).

In order that we might firmly believe that we belong to his covenant of grace, during his last supper *Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"* (Matt. 26:26–28). That is, as often as you eat of this bread and

drink of this cup, as a sure reminder and pledge you shall be admonished and assured of my great love and faithfulness toward you, because you otherwise would have suffered eternal death, I give my body and blood for you in my death on the tree of the cross. And as certainly as this bread is broken before you, and this cup is given to you, and with your mouth you eat and drink in remembrance of me, so surely do I nourish and refresh for everlasting life your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood.

From the institution of this holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that he directs our faith to his perfect sacrifice, once offered on the cross, as the only foundation of our salvation, whereby he has become to our hungry and thirsty souls the true food and drink of life eternal. For by his death he has taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, our sin. He has also obtained for us the life-giving Spirit, who dwells in Christ our head and enables us who are his members, to have communion with him and be made partakers of his riches, including eternal life, righteousness, and glory.

Besides, by this same Spirit we are also united as members of one body in true Christian love, as the apostle Paul says: *Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17). As grain is ground to prepare one loaf of bread, and as many grapes are pressed together to produce wine, we who by true faith are incorporated into Christ shall be one body, through Christian love, for the sake of our dear Savior Christ, who has loved us so greatly in order that we might show his love toward one another, not only in words but also in deeds.

May the almighty, merciful God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us in this, through his Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Dependence

That we may obtain all this, let us humble ourselves before God and with true faith implore him for His grace:

Merciful God and Father, we ask that in this supper, in which we cherish the blessed memory of the death and sufferings of your dear Son Jesus Christ, you will so work in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that with true confidence, we might give ourselves up, more and more, unto your Son Jesus Christ. We pray that this might allow our burdened and contrite hearts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to be nourished and refreshed with his true body and blood, with him who is true God and true man, the only heavenly bread. Empower us to no longer live in our sins, knowing that he lives in us, and we in him, that we might truly be partakers of the new and everlasting testament, the covenant of grace, not doubting that you will forever be our gracious Father, who does not impute the guilt of our sins to us, and providing us with all that we need for body and soul, as your dear children and heirs. Grant us also your grace that we may take up our cross cheerfully, deny ourselves, confess our Savior, and in all tribulation—with uplifted head—expect our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, where he will make our mortal bodies like unto his glorified body, and take us to be with him in eternity. Answer us, O God and merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

¶ *Congregation:*

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper

By this holy supper, may we also be strengthened in the catholic, undoubted, Christian faith, of which we make profession with heart and mouth, saying:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe a holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. Amen.

That we may be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not cling with our hearts to external things, like bread and wine, but lift our hearts to heaven, where our advocate, Jesus Christ is, at the right hand of his heavenly Father, where the articles of our Christian faith direct us. Let us not doubt that we shall be nourished and refreshed in our souls, with his body and blood, through the working of the Holy Spirit, as truly as we receive the holy bread and drink in remembrance of him.

¶ *In breaking and distributing the bread, the minister shall say:*

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

¶ *And when he gives the cup:*

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

¶ *During the communion a Psalm shall be sung, or some portion of Scripture shall be read, in remembrance of the passion of Christ; such as Isaiah 53, John 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, or 18.*

The Response of Thanksgiving and Praise

¶ *After the communion the minister shall say:*

Beloved in the Lord, since the Lord has now nourished our souls at his table, let us together praise his holy name with thanksgiving; and let every one say in his heart:

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits,

who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,

who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy . . .

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

*He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;*

as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him (Ps. 103:1–4, 8–13).

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Rom. 8:32)

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Rom. 5:8–10).

Therefore my mouth and heart shall show forth the praise of the Lord from this time forth for evermore. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

O merciful God and Father, we thank you with all our heart that of your boundless mercy you have given us your only begotten Son for a Mediator and sacrifice for our sins, and as our food and drink unto life eternal; and that you give us a true faith, whereby we become partakers of these benefits. You have united us to Christ and to each other in a communion of saints. You have given your Son for us and to us and have proclaimed his saving death to the whole world. Having proclaimed and certified the atoning sacrifice of your Son for us, we ask that you would by your Spirit also make us witnesses to this Good News among our neighbors. Strengthen us in faith to live gratefully in this present age as we await our Savior's return in glory. In whose name we pray. Amen.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper: Form 2

Preparatory Exhortation

¶ *If the Preparatory Exhortation and the communion Formulary are combined for use in the communion service, the following changes should be made:*

"...since we hope next Lord's Day," should be changed to "since it is our privilege this day" The paragraph beginning, "And since it is necessary for us..." should be omitted.

Beloved in Jesus Christ, since we hope next Lord's Day to celebrate the blessed sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are called to prepare our hearts by rightly examining ourselves. For the Apostle Paul has written: *Whoever...eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup* (1 Cor. 11:27–28).

Let each one, then, examine his life and, considering his own sin and the wrath of God on it, be sure that he humbles himself in repentance before God. Let each one examine his heart to be sure that he trusts in Jesus Christ alone for his salvation—believing his sins are forgiven wholly by grace for the sake of our Lord's sacrifice on the cross. Finally, let each one examine his conscience to be sure that he resolves to live in faith and obedience before his Lord, and in love and peace with his neighbor.

Warning & invitation

All those who do not repent, do not put their trust in the Lord Jesus, and have no desire to lead a godly life, are warned, according to the command of God, to keep themselves from the holy sacrament. If anyone of us is living in disobedience to Christ and in enmity with his neighbor, he must repent of his sin and reconcile himself to his neighbor before he comes to the Lord's Table. *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself* (1 Cor. 11:29).

This solemn warning is not designed, however, to discourage penitent sinners from coming to the holy sacrament. We do not come to the Supper as though we were righteous in ourselves, but rather to testify that we are sinners and that we look to Jesus Christ for our salvation. Although we do not have perfect faith, do not serve and love God with all our hearts, and though we do not love our neighbors as we ought, we are confident that the Savior accepts us at His Table when we come in humble faith, with sorrow for our sins, and with a will to follow Him as He commands.

And since it is necessary for us to come to the sacrament in good conscience, I urge any who lack this confidence to seek from the minister or any elder of this church such counsel as may quiet his conscience or lead to the conversion of his life.

All, then, who are truly sorry for their sins, who sincerely believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and who earnestly desire to lead a godly life, ought to accept the invitation now given and come with gladness to the Table of their Lord.

Prayer

Let us pray:

Almighty God, who has given us the gospel of Jesus Christ and provided a most wonderful communion with Him through the mystery of the sacrament, we need your grace to enable us to prepare our hearts for the reception of Holy Communion. To all who sincerely believe in your Son and truly repent of their sins, grant assurance of your gracious readiness to receive and bless them in the Supper of their Lord. To all who have not yet repented and have not put their trust in the Lord Jesus, grant a restraining fear of this Supper, lest their condemnation be greater. But have mercy upon these, and grant them grace to repent of their sins and seek their salvation in your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. We confess, O Father, that we have all offended your majesty and deserved your judgment. We have transgressed in our thoughts, our words, and our deeds. Truly there is no strength in us. Be merciful, O God, and grant us your pardon. And let us come to the sacrament in the joy of your forgiving love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who, with you and the Holy Spirit, one only God, lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Formulary

Beloved, hear now the words of the Apostle Paul concerning the institution of the Holy Supper: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes* (1 Cor. 11:23–26).

When our Lord said, *Do this in remembrance of me*, He ordained this Holy Supper as a constant memorial and visible proclamation of His death. The Apostle Paul also teaches us that *as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup we proclaim the Lord's death*. As we partake, therefore, we bear witness that our Lord Jesus was sent by the Father into the world to take upon Himself our flesh and blood and to bear the wrath of God on the cross for us. We confess that He came to earth to bring us to heaven, that He was condemned to die that we might be pardoned, that He endured the suffering and death of the cross that we might live through Him, and that He was once forsaken by God that we might forever be accepted by Him.

The sacrament thus confirms us in God's abiding love and covenant faithfulness, sealing to our hearts the promises of His gracious covenant and assuring us that we belong to His covenant family. Let us then be persuaded as we eat and drink that God will always love us and accept us as His children for the sake of His Son.

Our Lord also promises that as we *eat this bread and drink the cup*, we are fed with His crucified body and shed blood. To do this He gives us His life-giving Spirit, through whom the body and blood of our Lord become the life-giving nourishment of our souls. Thus He unites us with Himself and so imparts the precious benefits of His sacrifice to all who partake in faith.

As a means of grace, this meal also unites us with one another in the bond of the Spirit as the apostle says: *we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17). Thus, even as He unites us with Himself, He strengthens the bond of communion between us, His children.

Finally, the remembrance of our Lord's death revives in us the hope of His return. Since He commanded us to do this *until He comes*, the Lord assures us that He will come again to take us to Himself. As we commune with Him now under the veil of these earthly elements, we are assured that we shall behold Him face to face and rejoice in the glory of His appearing.

Our Lord Jesus will surely do what He has promised. Let us draw near to His table, then, believing that He will strengthen us in faith, unite us in love, and establish us more firmly in the hope of His coming.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (Rev. 1:5–6)

Prayer

Let us pray:

Almighty God, with one accord we give you thanks for all the blessings of your grace; but most of all we thank you for the unspeakable gift of your Son Jesus Christ. We most humbly thank you that your Son came to us in human form, that He lived a perfect life on earth, that He died for us on the cross, and that He arose victoriously from the dead. We bless you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, for the gospel of reconciliation, for the Church universal, for the ministry and the sacraments of the church, and for the blessed hope of everlasting life. We pray, gracious Father, to grant us your Holy Spirit, that through this sacrament our souls may truly be fed with the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Grant us the full assurance of your grace as we draw near to your holy table, filling our hearts with humble gratitude for your mercies. Unite us more fully with our blessed Lord, and so also with one another. Enable us, in newness of life, to pledge ourselves in service to Christ and all your children. And lift our hearts to you, that in all the troubles and sorrows of this life we may persevere in the living hope of the coming of our Savior in glory. Answer us, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

¶ If the table needs to be prepared, an appropriate hymn may be sung.

Creed

As we draw near to the table of our Lord, let us confess our Christian faith:

¶ Congregation:

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and

sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe a holy catholic Church, the communion of saints; The forgiveness of sins; The resurrection of the body; And the life everlasting. Amen.

Words of Promise

¶ *Having approached the table, the minister shall say:*

Beloved, hear these gracious words of promise spoken by our Lord:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Matt. 11:28, 29).

I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst... whoever comes to me I will never cast out (John 6:35, 37b).

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (Matt. 5:6).

¶ *Then the minister says:*

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us lift up our hearts to the Lord; let us lift them up to the God of our salvation.

¶ *Or:*

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.

Communion

¶ *As he breaks the bread, the minister shall say:*

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Cor. 11:23–24)

¶ *At the eating of the bread, the minister shall say:*

Take, eat, remember and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was given for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

¶ *As he takes the cup, the minister shall say:*

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matt. 26:27–28)

¶ *At the drinking of the wine, the minister shall say:*

Take, drink, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Thanksgiving

¶ The minister and congregation may read the following Psalm responsively:

Minister: Bless the LORD, O my soul,

Congregation: And all that is within me, bless his holy name!

Minister: Bless the LORD, O my soul,

Congregation: And forget not all his benefits,

Minister: Who forgives all your iniquity,

Congregation: Who heals all your diseases,

Minister: Who redeems your life from the pit,

Congregation: Who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,

Minister: Who satisfies you with good

Congregation: So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Minister: Let us pray:

Almighty God, we give you our most humble and hearty thanks that of your great mercy you have given us your Son to be our Savior from sin and to be our constant source of faith, hope, and love. We bless you for permitting us to show forth His death and to receive the communion of His body and blood through the holy sacrament. We praise you for uniting us more fully with the body of Christ, and for assuring us that we are heirs of your heavenly kingdom. Grant that our commemoration of His death may tend to the daily increase of our faith, the establishment of our hope, and the strengthening of our love. Enable us henceforth to live always for our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us. Amen.

Short Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper: 1

Preparation

To all of you who have confessed your sins and affirmed your faith in Christ, the promise of Jesus is sure: *Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink* (John 6:54–55). *For the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me"* (1 Cor. 11:23–25).

While remaining bread and wine, these sacred elements nevertheless become so united to the reality they signify that we do not doubt but joyfully believe that we receive in this meal nothing less than the crucified body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For all who live in rebellion against God and unbelief, this holy food and drink will bring you only further condemnation. If you do not yet confess Jesus Christ and seek to live under his gracious reign, we admonish you to abstain. But all who repent and believe are invited to this sacred meal not because you are worthy in yourself, but because you are clothed in Christ's perfect righteousness. Do not allow the weakness of your faith or your failures in the Christian life to keep you from this table. For it is given to us because of our weakness and because of our failures, in order to increase our faith by feeding us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ. As the Word has promised us God's favor, so also our Heavenly Father has added this confirmation of his unchangeable promise. So come, believing sinners, for the table is ready. *Taste and see that the Lord is good* (Ps. 34:8a).

The Consecration

Let us pray:

Almighty and everlasting God, who by the blood of your only begotten Son has secured for us a new and living way into the Holy of Holies, cleanse our minds and hearts by your Word and Spirit that we, your redeemed people, drawing close to you through this holy sacrament, may enjoy fellowship with the Holy Trinity through the body and blood of Christ our Savior. We know that our Ascended Savior does not live in temples made by hands, but is in heaven where he continues to intercede on our behalf. Through this sacrament, by Your own Word and Spirit, may these common elements be now set apart from ordinary use consecrated by You, so that just as truly as we eat and drink these elements by which our life is sustained, so truly we receive into our souls, for our spiritual life, the true body and true blood of Christ. We receive these by faith, which is the hand and mouth of our souls. Amen.

Apostles' Creed (optional)

¶ *The minister then says:*

Let us now go to our Heavenly Table and receive the gift of God for our souls. By the promise of God this bread and wine are for us the body and blood of Christ.

¶ *Minister:* Lift up your hearts!

¶ *Congregation:* We lift them up to the Lord.

Communion

¶ The elements are distributed, and the minister may use the formula:

The bread which we break is a communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, remember, and believe that the body of our Lord Jesus Christ was broken for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ. Take, drink all of it, remember, and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins.

Thanksgiving Prayer

Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for the blessing of this holy feast. Although we are unworthy to share this meal with you, it is by your invitation and dressed in Christ's righteousness that we have come boldly into the Holy of Holies. Instead of wrath, we have received your pardon; in the place of fear we have been given hope. Our High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant has reconciled us to you and even now intercedes for us at your right hand. Please strengthen us by these gifts so that, relying only on your promise to save sinners who call on Jesus' name, we may, by your Spirit, honor you with our souls and bodies, to the honor and glory of your holy name. Amen.

Short Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper: 2

Exhortation

Beloved in the Lord, you who desire to come to the Holy Communion of the body and blood of our Savior must consider how Paul exhorts us diligently to *examine* ourselves, before we presume to *eat of the bread and drink of the cup* (1 Cor. 11:28). For as the benefit of spiritually eating his flesh and drinking his blood and thereby becoming one with him is great, if we receive the sacrament with a penitent heart and lively faith, so is the danger great, if we receive it *in an unworthy manner* (1 Cor. 11:27). For then we are *guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord* (1 Cor. 11:27), we eat and drink to our own *judgment* (1 Cor. 11:29), and we kindle God's wrath against us (1 Cor. 11:30). *But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged...by the Lord* (1 Cor. 11:31, 32). Therefore truly repent of your sins, place a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Savior, and live in love with all people so that you will be worthy partakers of these holy sacraments.

Above all things you must give most humble and hearty thanks to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, for the redemption of the world by the death and passion of our Savior Christ. Thank him that he who is God became man. Thank him that his Son humbled himself to death upon the cross for us, miserable sinners. Thank him that we, who lie in darkness and the shadow of death, have been made the children of God and exalted to everlasting life. Because of this we should always remember the exceedingly great love of our only Savior, Jesus Christ, and the innumerable benefits which he has obtained for us by his precious blood. This is why he instituted and ordained holy sacraments, as pledges of his love and for a continual remembrance of his death, to our great and endless comfort. To him therefore, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, let us give continual thanks, submitting ourselves completely to his holy will and pleasure, and seeking to serve him in true holiness and righteousness all the days of our life.

To all of you who truly and earnestly repent of your sins, who embrace by faith Jesus as your Savior, and who desire more and more to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, draw near and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort.

Comforting Words

Hear what comforting words our Savior Christ speaks to all that truly turn to him:

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt. 11:28).

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost (1 Tim. 1:15).

If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1–2).

¶ *Then is said:*

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

Congregation: We lift them up to the Lord.

Prayer of Humble Approach

We do not presume to come to this your table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are our merciful and gracious Lord. Grant us, therefore, so to commemorate and celebrate in this breaking of bread the death of your dear Son Jesus Christ, that we may feed on him in our hearts by faith, and that we may be united to him, and he to us; who with you and the Holy Spirit is worthy of eternal thanks and praise. Amen.

Words of Institution

The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:23–25).

Communion

¶ In eating the Bread, the minister says,

The body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

¶ In drinking the wine, the minister says,

The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for you, preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for you, and be thankful.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Almighty and ever-living God, we most heartily thank you. You have fed us who have rightly received these holy sacraments, with the spiritual food of the most precious body and blood of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. You assure us by this bread and wine of your favor and goodness towards us, that we are members of the mystical body of your Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people. You have made us heirs of your everlasting kingdom by the merits of the most precious death and passion of your dear Son. And we most humbly pray, O heavenly Father, to assist us with your grace, that we may continue in that holy fellowship, and do all such good works as you have prepared for us to walk in; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Form for Excommunication

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ:

As you know we have announced to you the great sin committed and the grievous offense given by our fellow-member, N__, to the end that, by your Christian admonitions and prayers, *he might come to his senses*, turn to God, and *escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will* (2 Tim. 2:26).

But to our great sorrow no one has yet appeared before us who has caused us to understand that, by the frequent admonitions given *him* (in private, before witnesses, and in the presence of many), *he has* come to any sorrow for *his* sin or has shown the least evidence of true repentance. Since, then, by *his* stubbornness *he* daily aggravates *his* transgression, which in itself is not small, and since we have made known to you the last time that in case *he* did not repent, after such patience shown *him* by the church, we should be constrained further to grieve for *him* and to come to the extreme remedy, we are therefore at the present time compelled to proceed to *his* excommunication. We do this according to the command and charge given us in God's holy Word. Our purpose is that *he* may be ashamed of *his* sins, that by this corrupt and as yet unrepentant member we may not put the whole body of the church in danger, and that God's Name may not be blasphemed but revered.

Pronouncement of Excommunication

Therefore, we ministers and rulers of the church of God at this place, being assembled in the Name and authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, declare before you all that for the aforesaid reasons we have excommunicated and hereby excommunicate N__ from the Church of the Lord; that, so long as *he* persists obstinately and impenitently in *his* sins, *he is* excluded from the fellowship of Christ, and of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual blessings and benefits which God promises to and bestows upon His Church; and that *he is* to be accounted by you *as a Gentile and a tax collector* (Matt. 18:17), according to the command of Christ, who says of His ministers, *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven* (Matt. 18:18).

Exhortation

Further we exhort you, beloved Christians, *not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of such sin—not even to eat with such a one* (1 Cor. 5:11) to the end that *he* may be ashamed; yet *do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother* (2 Thes. 3:15).

In the meantime let every one take warning by this and similar examples to fear the Lord and diligently to take heed: *let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall* (1 Cor. 10:12); but having true fellowship with the Father and His Son Christ, together with all believing Christians, to remain *firm to the end* (Heb. 3:14), *obtaining the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls* (1 Peter 1:9). You have seen, dear brothers and sisters, in what manner this our excommunicated *brother has* begun to fall and gradually has come to ruin. Learn, then, from *him* how subtle Satan is to bring man to destruction and to draw him away from all salutary means of salvation. Guard yourselves, then, against the least beginnings of evil, and according to the admonition of the apostle, *let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith* (Heb. 12:1–2). *Be sober-minded; be watchful* (1 Peter 5:8); *pray that you may not enter into temptation* (Luke 22:46). *Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your*

hearts (Heb. 4:7), but *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling* (Phil. 2:12); and let every one repent of his sin, lest our God humble us again and we be obliged to mourn for some of you; but may you, with one accord living in godliness, be our crown and joy in the Lord.

But since *it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure* (Phil. 2:13), let us call upon His holy Name with confession of our sins.

Prayer of Confession

O righteous God, merciful Father, before Your high majesty we blame ourselves for our sins and acknowledge that we have justly deserved the sorrow and pain caused us by the excommunication of this our late fellow-member; indeed, if You should enter into judgment with us, we all deserve to be excluded and banished from Your presence on account of our great transgression. But, O Lord, be gracious unto us for Christ's sake; forgive us our trespasses, for we heartily repent of them; and work in our hearts an ever increasing measure of sorrow for them, that we, fearing Your judgments which You bring upon the stiff-necked, may endeavor to please You. Grant that we may avoid all pollution of the world and of those who are excluded from the communion of the Church, in order that we may not make ourselves partakers of their sins, and that *he* who *is* excommunicated may become ashamed of *his* sins. And since You desire not the death of the sinner, but that he may repent and live, and since the bosom of Your Church is always open for those who return, kindle, therefore, in our hearts a godly zeal, that we, with good Christian admonitions and example, may seek to bring back this excommunicated person, together with all those who through unbelief and recklessness of life go astray. Add Your blessing to our admonitions, that we thereby may have reason to rejoice again in *them* for whom we must now mourn, and that thus Your holy name be praised, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who has taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for Readmission: 1

Announcement

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord:

It is known to you that some time ago our fellow-member _____ was excommunicated from the church of Christ. We can now announce to you that he, by this remedy and also through good admonitions and your Christian prayers, has come to confess his sin, and now asks to be readmitted to the fellowship of the church. Since it is our duty, according to the command of God, to receive such persons with joy and thanksgiving, and since all things should be done decently and in good order, we inform you that at the next celebration of the Lord's Supper we shall loose this man from the bond of excommunication and receive him again into the fellowship of Christ's church.

If any of you should have reason against such readmission, it is incumbent upon you to give notice as soon as possible. Meanwhile let us thank the Lord, who has shown favor to this lost sheep, and let us earnestly ask him to perfect his work of conversion in him to eternal salvation. Amen.

¶ Afterwards, if no hindrance occur, the minister shall proceed to the readmission of the excommunicated sinner according to the following form:

Readmission

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

We have recently informed you of the conversion of _____, to the end that, with your consent, he might be received again into the church of Christ. No one has brought forward any objection against this readmission, and therefore we will now receive him again into the communion of the saints.

The Lord Jesus Christ taught his church to put out of the fellowship those who refuse to repent of their sins. In Matthew 18 he says, *Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven*. But he immediately added, *and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Matt. 18:18). Indeed, he taught us that excommunication does not take away all hope of salvation. For God has sworn by himself, saying, *As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live* (Ezek. 33:11). Therefore the church keeps hoping and praying for the repentance and return of the lost sinner, always eager to receive those turning from and sorrowing for their sins. The apostle Paul commanded the congregation at Corinth to forgive and comfort the brother who had been reprovved and had come to repentance. He exhorted the church to reaffirm their love for him lest he should be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

Christ also teaches us that God reckons the sentence of absolution, passed upon a repentant sinner according to the Word of God, as binding. For this reason no one who truly repents needs to doubt in any way that he is certainly received by God in grace, as Christ has declared, *If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven*" and *"whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (John 20:23; Matt. 16:19).

Confession

That we may proceed to your readmission into the fellowship of Christ and his people, I ask you, _____, to stand now, and in the presence of God and his church respond to the following questions:

First: Do you declare with all your heart that you are truly sorry for the sin and stubbornness on account of which you were justly excluded from the church?

Second: Do you also truly believe that the Lord has forgiven all your sins for the sake of Christ's blood and now receives you by his grace and mercy through him?

Third: Do you, therefore, desire to be readmitted to the church of Christ, promising, by the grace of God, to live from now on in all godliness according to the Word of God?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Declaration

We, then, here assembled in the Name and the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and on his behalf, declare to you, _____, that you are absolved from the bonds of excommunication. We joyfully receive you again into the church of our Lord, and declare that you share in the fellowship of Christ, of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual gifts and blessings of our Savior which God promises to his church and bestows upon her. May the eternal God preserve you in this to the end, through his only Son Jesus Christ. *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it* (1 Thess. 5:24). Amen.

Charge

Dear brother, be assured in your heart that the Lord himself has received you in grace. Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the weakness of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. The love of Christ has brought you back. Love him, for he has forgiven much. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit anew, who has promised in your baptism to dwell in you and to sanctify you as a member of Christ. And you, dear fellow Christians, receive this brother with all your love. Rejoice and be thankful, for this brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found. Rejoice with the angels, for Christ said, *I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance* (Luke 15:7). Count him no longer as a stranger, but as a fellow member with the saints of the household of God.

Prayer

Since there is no good in ourselves, let us, with praise and thanksgiving, implore the Lord Almighty for his mercy:

Gracious God and Father, we thank and praise you through Jesus Christ that you have granted this brother godly sorry and repentance unto life and have brought us to rejoice in this. We ask you to show him your grace, that he may be continually assured of the complete remission of all sins, and may derive from that assurance joy and delight to serve you. Since for a time he has grieved many by his sin, grant that he may now edify many by his new path of faith. Grant also that he may walk steadfastly in your ways till the end. Teach us, Father, by this example, that with you there is always forgiveness, and may you therefore be praised and adored. Grant that now, we, with our brother, may serve you with childlike fear and obedience all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit is the one and only true God. Amen.

¶ *Or:*

... through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for Readmission: 2

Announcement

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

As you are aware, some time ago our fellow-member _____ was excommunicated from the church of Christ because of his persistence in a serious and offensive sin without any token of genuine repentance. As a congregation, it has been our prayer that God would use this excommunication as the extreme remedy to bring him to conversion. We thankfully announce that the Lord has answered our prayers, and we rejoice in the blessed results of Christian discipline and with joy we announce that _____ has repented and expressed his desire to be restored to fellowship with Christ and his people. According to God's command, we are to receive back joyfully those who repent of their sins, and so, if there are no lawful objections, this readmission will be celebrated on _____. Meanwhile, let us praise the Lord for the favor shown this poor sinner and ask God to perfect his powerful work of grace in him to his eternal salvation. Amen.

¶ Afterwards, if no hindrance occur, the minister shall proceed to the readmission of the excommunicated sinner according to the following form:

Readmission

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

It is known to you that _____, who was excommunicated, has requested to be readmitted to the communion of Christ and his church. Since no one has presented any valid reason why this restoration should not take place, we now proceed with gladness to receive our brother again into the church of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord teaches us in Matthew 18 that those who have been excommunicated from the life and fellowship of the church are not deprived of all hope of salvation, for in the way of faith and repentance sinners may once more be set free from the bonds of condemnation. God even declares in his Word that he takes *no pleasure in the death of the wicked* but rather that he should *turn from his way and live* (Ezek. 18; Luke 15). Likewise, the church always hopes for the conversion of those who have fallen into gross sin and is ready to receive back the penitent, which is in keeping with what the apostle Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 5. Therefore, all who truly repent should not doubt in any way that the Lord receives them in grace, as Christ assures us: *If you forgive the sins of anyone, they are forgiven*” and *“whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (John 20:23; Matt. 16:19).

Confession

_____, please stand now, and in the presence of God and his people respond to the following questions:

First: Do you declare before God and his church that you are truly sorry for your sin, and do you believe that the Lord has forgiven you for the sake of Christ?

Second: Do you reaffirm your union with Christ and desire to be readmitted to the covenant family of God, promising to live from now on in all godliness according to the command of the Lord?

Third: Do you promise to do all you can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to strengthen your love and commitment to Christ by sharing faithfully in the life of the church, honoring and submitting

to its authority; and do you join with the people of God in doing the work of the Lord to which he calls us?

¶ *Answer:* I do.

Declaration

We, then, being here assembled in the Name and the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ declare you, _____, to be absolved from the bonds of excommunication. We joyfully receive you again into the church of our Lord, and declare that you share in the fellowship of Christ, of the holy sacraments, and of all the spiritual gifts and blessings of our Savior, which God promises to his church and bestows upon her. May the eternal God preserve you in this to the end, through his only Son Jesus Christ. *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it* (1 Thess. 5:24). Amen.

Charge

Dear brother, be assured in your heart that the Lord himself has received you in grace. Be diligent to guard yourself against the subtleties of Satan, the wickedness of the world, and the weakness of the flesh, lest you again become entangled in sin. The love of Christ has brought you back; love him, for he has forgiven much. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit anew, who has promised in your baptism to dwell in you and to sanctify you as a member of Christ.

And you, dear fellow Christians, receive this brother with all your love. Rejoice and be thankful, for this brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found. Rejoice with the angels, for Christ said, *I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance* (Luke 15:7). Count him no longer as a stranger, but as a fellow member with the saints of the household of God.

Prayer

Since there is no good in ourselves, let us, with praise and thanksgiving, implore the Lord Almighty for his mercy:

Gracious God and Father, we thank and praise you through Jesus Christ that you have granted this brother godly sorry and repentance unto life and have brought us to rejoice in this. We ask you to show him your grace, that he may be continually assured of the complete remission of all sins, and may derive from that assurance joy and delight to serve you. Since for a time he has grieved many by his sin, grant that he may now edify many by his new path of faith. Grant also that he may walk steadfastly in your ways till the end. Teach us, Father, by this example, that with you there is always forgiveness, and may you therefore be praised and adored. Grant that now, we, with our brother, may serve you with childlike fear and obedience all the days of our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit is the one and only true God. Amen.

¶ *Or:*

... through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for the Ordination (or: Installation) of Ministers of the Word

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

We have before made known to you the name of our brother here present, who is now to be ordained to the Ministry of the Word (or: installed in the ministry to which he has been called). Since there were no lawful objections against his person or teaching, we shall therefore proceed, in the name of the Lord, to his ordination (installation).

The Holy Scriptures teach us that God, our Heavenly Father gathers his church out of the corrupt race of men to life eternal, and to give to his church such teaching and care that she may grow in faith, love and service. God, by a particular grace, uses men for service to these ends appointing them to the preaching of the Gospel, and to a diverse ministry for the building up of the body of Christ. The apostle Paul solemnly charged Timothy to *preach the word* (2 Tim. 4:2), and our Lord Jesus charged his disciples to *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you* (Matt. 28:19–20) The apostle Paul declares that the Lord Jesus Christ has given *the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ* (Eph. 4:11–12).

Let us now hear what the Scriptures say concerning the office of the minister of the Word. The minister of the Word is called by the command of God to preach the Gospel of his kingdom. This preaching has the twofold object of calling sinners to reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and nurturing believers in the faith and life of the kingdom of God. Ministers are called *ambassadors for Christ*, as though God were pleading by them, *Be reconciled to God* (2 Cor. 5:20). This preaching must be addressed to all people. The preaching of the Gospel must also be addressed to the gathered congregation for the nurturing of Christian faith and life and for strengthening them against all error. Paul charged Timothy *in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, to preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching* (2 Tim. 4:1–2), and he charged Titus that a minister *must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it* (Titus 1:9). The minister of the Word is called to administer the sacraments which the Lord has instituted as signs and seals of his grace. Christ gave this charge to his apostles, and through them to all ministers of the Word, when he commanded them to *make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (Matt. 28:19); and when he said of the Lord's Supper: *Do this in remembrance of me* (1 Cor. 11:24–25). The minister of the Word is called to the service of prayer. In speaking of their calling, the apostles say: *We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word* (Acts 6:4). So, too, it is the calling of all God's ministers to lead the people of God in *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanks givings...for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions* (1 Tim. 2:1–2).

The minister of the Word is called, together with the elders, to shepherd the people of God in the Christian life, giving guidance and counsel in all things needful, exhorting them to *contend earnestly for the faith once for all delivered to the saints* (Jude 3), and keeping the church of God in good order and discipline. They are pastors, appointed to shepherd the church of Christ which he purchased with his own blood, in keeping with the Lord's command: *Feed my sheep! Feed my lambs!* They, together with the elders, watch over the house of God for the right and fruitful ordering of the faith and life and worship of the people of God. In their exercise of the keys of the kingdom, what they *bind on earth shall be bound in heaven*, and what they *loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Matt. 18:18).

¶ The officiating minister shall now read paragraph (1), (2), (3), or (4), depending on whether this is the ordination, or installation, of the pastor of an established congregation, a foreign missionary, or a home missionary, or the ordination of a teacher of theology.

(1) For the Pastor in an Established Congregation

We will now proceed to ordain (install) a minister of the Word in this congregation. We rejoice that in his faithful love the Lord Jesus has provided a minister to serve as pastor and teacher to this people, and also as their leader in the missionary calling of this church. We receive this servant of our Lord from the hand and heart of the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. We are grateful that our Savior has committed preaching, teaching, and pastoral care to the office of the ministry, and that he will continue to use sinful men for such high and holy purposes until the day of his return.

No one is equal to this holy ministry in his own strength. We set our hope on Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has said: *Behold I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, _____, are willing to accept this office, you are requested to stand, and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ Answer: I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ The officiating minister shall then say (in the case of ordination with the ceremony of the laying on of hands, other ministers present participating):

God, our Heavenly Father, who has called you to this holy office, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your ministry that you may be engaged in it faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his Name and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

¶ The officiating minister shall address the congregation:

Dear people of God and members of this church, since this solemn act involves obligations also on your part, I ask you before God:

Do you in the name of the Lord welcome this brother as your pastor?

Do you promise to receive the Word of God proclaimed by him and to encourage him in the discharge of his duty?

Will you pray that he may, in the power of the Spirit, equip you in the work of advancing God's Kingdom for the honor of Christ our Lord, the building up of his church, and the salvation of men?

To these questions, what is your answer?

¶ Answer: We do, God helping us.

¶ The officiating minister (and/or others designated) shall then exhort the ordained minister and the congregation in the following manner:

Beloved brother and fellow-servant in Christ, take heed to yourself and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you a guardian, to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood. Love Christ and feed his sheep, exercising the oversight, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge. Set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have. Take heed to your teaching. Be patient in all trials. Be a good soldier of Jesus Christ, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. And when the chief Shepherd appears you will obtain the unfading crown of glory.

And you, beloved Christians, receive your minister in the Lord, with all joy, and hold him in honor. Remember that through him God himself speaks to you. Receive the Word which he, according to the Scripture, shall preach to you, not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God. Let the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, and bring the Good News, be beautiful and pleasant to you. Submit to those whom God has placed over you, for they care for you as those who shall give account. May they do this with joy and not with sorrow, for this would be unprofitable for you. If you do these things, the God of peace shall enter your homes. You who receive this man in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward, and through faith in Jesus Christ, the inheritance of eternal life.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we are thankful that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant, sent to this people as a messenger of your peace. Send now the Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the ability to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel. Grant him the wisdom to care for and guide the people over whom he is placed. Through his ministry build up your holy church, and grant her increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. We pray that this people may receive him as having been sent by you. May they receive his teaching and exhortation with all reverence, and believing in Christ through His Word become partakers of eternal life. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

(2) FOR A FOREIGN MISSIONARY

We now proceed to ordain (install) N_ as a foreign missionary, for service in _____. It is the task of these ministers to bring the Gospel to foreign lands, so that all peoples may come to the knowledge of salvation and to the service of the Lord, and the church of Jesus Christ be established in all the earth. Jesus Christ has said: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24: 14). In the person of her missionaries the church reaches into the lives of those who are yet without God and without hope. She brings to all lands the witness that Jesus is the Son of God, that the glory of the nations belongs to Him, and that His grace, love, and redemption are offered to them in the way of repentance and faith. In this work of missions the church may lift up her eyes to the Lord's coming, and look with longing to the day when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

No one is equal to this holy ministry in his own strength. We set our hope on Jesus Christ our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, N- are willing to accept this office, you are requested to stand, and in the presence of God and His church give your answer to the following questions: Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God Himself to this holy ministry?

Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ *Answer:* I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ *The officiating minister shall then say (in the case of ordination with the ceremony of the laying on of hands, other ministers present participating):*

Go, then, beloved brother, and bring the Gospel to those to whom you are sent. Make disciples of them, and baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. God, our Heavenly Father, who has called you to this holy ministry, enlighten you with His Spirit, strengthen you with His hand, and so govern you in your ministry that you may be engaged in it faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of His name, and the coming of the kingdom of His Son Jesus Christ.

And you, beloved congregation, be in continuing fellowship with this missionary whom you send forth in the name of Christ. Sustain him with your fervent prayers. Support him with your gifts. Strengthen his hand and heart in every need. As Christ received you, be ready to receive those who are brought into the body of Christ through his ministry, that there may be one flock, one shepherd.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we thank you that it pleases Thee by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant, now being sent by this people in your name to be a messenger to others of the Good News of your peace. Send now the Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the ability to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel. Grant him the wisdom to care for and guide the people over whom he is placed. Through his ministry build up

your holy church, and grant her increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. Let those to whom he comes see in him the ambassador of Christ, calling them to be reconciled to God. May they receive his teaching and exhortation with all reverence, and believing in Christ through His Word become partakers of eternal life. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

(3) For a Home Missionary

We now proceed to ordain _____ as a home missionary for service in _____. The calling of these ministers is in particular the preaching of the Gospel, the spiritual care, and the instruction of those in our homeland, who, though exposed to the witness of the church and the Gospel have been alienated or are yet estranged from the Lord and his church. In the parable of the Great Supper the Lord Jesus Christ has spoken about the lord who sent his servants out into the streets and lanes of the city, into the highways and hedges, to invite all men to his feast. Even so our Lord calls us to bring men into the house of the King through the ministry of his love, in order that his house may be filled. The Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached for a testimony to our own nation as well as to all nations of the world. Thus men are called to walk in the way of God's commands and promises. And in this ministry we look to the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

No one is equal to this holy ministry in his own strength. We set our hope on Jesus Christ, our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now in order that it may appear that you, _____, are willing to accept this office, you are requested to stand, and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ *Answer:* I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ *The officiating minister shall then say (in the case of ordination with the ceremony of the laying on of hands, other ministers present participating):*

Go then, beloved brother, and bring the Gospel to those to whom you are sent. Call the unbelieving to faith, the faithless to obedience, and invite men in the name of the Lord into the house of your King. May God, our Heavenly Father, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your ministry that you may fulfill it faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his Name, and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ.

And you, beloved congregation, be in continuing fellowship with this missionary whom you send forth in the name of Christ. Sustain him with your fervent prayers. Support him with your gifts. Strengthen his hand and heart in every need. As Christ received you, be ready to receive those who are brought into the body of Christ through his ministry, that there may be one flock, one shepherd.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we thank you that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant, now being sent by this people in your name to be a messenger to others of the Good News of your peace. Send now your Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the ability to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel. Grant him the wisdom to care for and guide the people over whom he is placed. Through his ministry build up

your holy church, and grant her increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. Let those to whom he comes see in him the ambassador of Christ, calling them to be reconciled to God. May they receive his teaching and exhortation with all reverence, and believing in Christ through His Word become partakers of eternal life. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

FORMS FOR THE COMMISSIONING OF MINISTERS TO EXTRAORDINARY TASKS

(4) For a Teacher of Theology

Congregation of Jesus Christ: _____ has been appointed by this congregation for the particular task of teaching at [institution/ministry]. We are mindful of the need for the training of men who as ministers of the Word shall preach the Gospel of salvation to the people of God in the church of Christ and to men outside of the church of Christ.

The first messengers of peace in the days of the New Testament were taught directly by our Lord Jesus Christ, and were by him personally trained and sent. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, he gave diverse extraordinary gifts and knowledge of the mysteries, for the salvation of sinners and the edifying of the saints. But since those extraordinary methods lasted only as long as the Lord judged them to be necessary for the founding of his church among the nations, the necessity was soon recognized of training men for the holy ministry under the ordinary dispensation of the Spirit by the regular methods of education. Thus Paul wrote to his fellow-minister, Timothy: *...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also* (2 Tim. 2:2).

For the most effective discharge of this task in our day, the church has established a theological school, and appoints ministers of the Word who will serve the cause of the Gospel by teaching and training those who are to become ministers of the Word in Christ's church. Our brother _____ has been called to serve in this important task.

No one is equal to this holy ministry in his own strength. We set our hope on Jesus Christ our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, _____, are minded to accept this office and fulfill this task, you are requested to stand and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every doctrine in conflict with them?

Do you promise to discharge the duties of your office faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ Answer: I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ The officiating minister shall then say

God, our Heavenly Father, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your calling that you may discharge its duties faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his name, and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we are thankful that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the gift of this your servant, sent to train men to be messengers of your peace. Send now your Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the power to teach others to speak to make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel. Endow him with wisdom to instruct and care for

those men who are preparing for the Gospel ministry that through his ministry your church will be preserved in peace that she may increase in number and in virtue. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be steadfast to the end. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

(5) For Other Extraordinary Tasks

Congregation of Jesus Christ: _____ has been called by this church for the particular task of serving as it is recognized that this is a task which is spiritual in character, directly related to the ministry of the Word, and one which is to be performed as a service for the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is required that one so appointed be mindful of his ordination to the ministry of the church in the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the service of prayers, and the ministry of the care and discipline of the church of God. It is further required that one so appointed serve in his particular task as a minister of the Word of God, and in loyalty and service to the church by which he is called.

No one is equal to this holy ministry in his own strength. We set our hope on Jesus Christ our Lord, who has said: *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age* (Matt. 28:20).

Now, in order that it may appear that you, _____, are minded to accept this calling, you are requested to stand and in the presence of God and his church give your answer to the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation you are called by God himself to this holy ministry?

Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and do you reject every teaching in conflict with them?

Do you promise to perform your task faithfully, to conduct yourself worthily of this calling, and to submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

¶ Answer: I do so believe and promise, God helping me.

¶ The officiating minister shall then say:

God, our Heavenly Father, enlighten you with his Spirit, strengthen you with his hand, and so govern you in your calling that you may discharge its duties faithfully and fruitfully, to the glory of his name, and the coming of the kingdom of his Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

No man is of himself sufficient for these things. Let us call upon the name of God:

Merciful Father, we are thankful that it pleases you by the ministry of men to gather your church out of the lost human race to life eternal. We acknowledge the extraordinary gift of this your servant, to participate in that calling. Send now your Holy Spirit upon him. Enlighten his mind to know the truth of your Word. Give him the power to teach the mystery of the Gospel. Give your servant courage through your Spirit to fulfill his calling against every difficulty and to be

steadfast to the end. Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for the sake of your dear Son, in whose name we pray:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

We have before made known to you the names of our brothers here present who were chosen to the office of elders and deacons in this church, and have indicated their belief in our confessions by their agreement with the Form of Subscription. Since there were no lawful objections, we shall therefore, in the Name of the Lord, proceed to their ordination.

Instruction

Let us hear what the Word of God teaches regarding these offices.

The office of elder is based on the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, when he ascended, left his Church in the world and provided it with officers who should rule in his Name. The apostle Paul, in Acts, insists upon the ordination of elders in every church, and, in his letter to Timothy, commands those who *rule well to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching* (1 Tim. 5:17). In this and other passages Paul distinguishes between the elders who labor particularly in the ministry of the Word and the sacraments, and those who are responsible for the supervision of the church together with the ministers of the Word. Therefore the Church, from the beginning, has had elders in addition to ministers and pastors.

The work of the elders is that of ruling in the Name of the ascended King, and as servants of the great Shepherd, caring for his flock. It is also the duty of the elders to maintain the purity of the Word and sacraments, to uphold the good order of the church, carefully guarding the sacredness of the offices and faithfully exercising discipline. They should with love and humility promote the faithful discharge of the office by their fellow-officers, having particular regard to the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word, that the church may be edified and may show itself to be the pillar and ground of the truth.

To fill such a sacred office worthily, the elders should set an example of godliness in their personal life, in their home life, and in their relations with their fellow-men. Walking thus in all godliness, and faithfully discharging their office, *when the chief Shepherd appears, they will receive the unfading crown of glory* (1 Peter 5:4).

The office of deacon is based upon the love and concern of Christ on behalf of his own. This concern is so great that he considers what is done unto one of the least of his brothers as done unto him. In this way our Lord appoints the needy as his representatives in our expression of sympathy and benevolent service on earth. *For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me* (Matt. 25:35–36).

According to Acts 6, the apostles themselves in the beginning ministered unto the needy; but afterwards, being overburdened with this service to the extent that some were neglected, certain men were chosen to whom they committed the special responsibility of exercising this ministry, leaving the apostles greater opportunity to continue steadfastly in prayer and in the ministry of the Word. Since that time the Church has recognized this service as a distinct office.

The work of the deacons consists in the faithful and diligent gathering of the offerings which God's people in gratitude make to their Lord, in the prevention of poverty, in the humble and cheerful distribution of gifts according to the need, and in the relief of the distressed both with kind deeds and words of comfort and encouragement from Scripture.

To fill such a sacred office worthily, the deacons, as well as the elders, should set an example of godliness in their personal life, in their home life, and in their relations with their fellow-men. Thus conducting themselves as worthy representatives of Christ's loving care, and faithfully

ministering in His Name to those who are the beloved of God, they *gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus* (1 Tim. 3:13).

Vows

Brothers, in order that the church may hear that you are willing to take your respective offices upon you, please answer the following questions:

First: Do you elders and deacons feel in your hearts that you are lawfully called by God's church, and therefore by God himself, to your respective holy offices?

Second: Do you believe the Old and New Testament to be the only Word of God, and the doctrinal standards of this church to be in harmony therewith?

Third: Having heard the description of the purpose and requirements of these offices, do you promise to fulfill them faithfully by the grace of God: you elders, in the government of the church, together with the ministers of the Word; and you deacons, in the ministration to the poor?

Fourth: Do you promise to walk in all godliness and submit to the government of the church in all things pertaining to your office?

¶ *Each answers individually:* I do.

May the Almighty God and Father replenish you all with his grace, that you may faithfully and fruitfully discharge your respective offices. Amen.

Exhortation

I charge you, elders, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be diligent in the government of the church which is committed to you jointly with the minister of the Word. Be faithful watchmen over the house of God, taking heed that purity of doctrine and godliness of life be maintained. I charge you, deacons, in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be diligent in receiving the gifts of God's people, wise and cheerful in the distribution of the same, sympathetic and self-denying in the ministry of Christian mercy.

I charge you, beloved Christians, to receive these brothers as the servants of God, sustaining them with your daily prayers. Render to the elders all honor, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord. Provide the deacons generously with the necessary gifts for the needy, remembering that in so much as you do it unto the least of these his children, you do it unto him. May God give us to see in the ministry of the elders the supremacy of Christ, and in the ministry of the deacons the care and love of the Savior.

Being thus engaged in your respective callings, each one of you shall receive of the Lord the reward of righteousness.

Prayer

O Lord God and heavenly Father, we give thanks that you have been pleased, for the better edification of your Church, to ordain in it rulers and assistants besides the ministers of the Word, by whom your Church may be preserved in peace and prosperity, and the needy assisted. We thank you for giving us in this place men who are of good testimony and by your promise endowed with your Spirit. We ask you to provide them more and more with such gifts as are necessary for them in their service: with the gifts of wisdom, courage, discretion, benevolence, sympathy, and self-denial, to the end that every one may acquit himself as is becoming in his respective office. May the elders take great care of doctrine and life in keeping out the wolves from the sheepfold of your beloved Son, and in admonishing and reproofing disorderly persons.

Likewise, the deacons in carefully receiving gifts and generously and wisely distributing them to the poor, and in comforting them with your holy Word. Give grace both to elders and deacons, that they may persevere in their faithful labor, and never become weary by reason of any trouble, pain, or persecution of the world. Grant especially your divine grace to this people, over whom they are placed, that they may willing submit themselves to the good exhortations of the elders, counting them worthy of honor for their work's sake. Give unto the rich generous hearts towards the needy, and to the needy grateful hearts towards those who help and serve them; to the end that, every one acquitting himself of his duty, your holy Name may thereby be magnified, and the kingdom of your Son Jesus Christ enlarged, in whose Name we conclude our prayers. Amen.

Solemnization of Marriage: Form 1

¶ *Where the wedding takes place before the congregation the following announcement is to be made on the previous Sunday:*

The consistory announces that _____ and _____ have indicated their intention to enter into the married state, according to the ordinance of God. They desire to begin this holy state in the Name of the Lord and to complete it to his glory. If no lawful objection is brought forward, the ceremony will take place, the Lord willing, on _____.

Beloved in the Lord, we are assembled here in the presence of God for the purpose of joining in marriage _____ and _____. Since the consistory has received no lawful objections, we may now proceed to the solemnization of their marriage in the Name of the Lord. Therefore, let us reverently call to mind what the word of God teaches us about marriage.

Instruction

The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself at the very beginning of history. He created man in his own image, he supplied him with many blessings and gave him dominion over all things. Moreover, God said: *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him...So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, this at last is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh* (Gen. 2:18, 21–24). We therefore believe that the Lord also today gives husbands and wives to each other. Since they are united by his hand, nothing shall separate them in this life.

Our Lord Jesus honored marriage by his blessed presence at the wedding in Cana, and confirmed it as an institution of God, as an honorable state, and as a lasting bond when He declared: *What therefore God has joined together let not man separate* (Matt. 19:6). Since God has made marriage such a strong bond, *He hates divorce* (Mal. 2:16), as also our Lord Jesus Christ shows in these words: *whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery* (Matt. 19:9). Since the Lord forbids immorality, *each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband* (1 Cor. 7:2), so that our bodies may be preserved as *a temple of the Holy Spirit* (1 Cor. 6:19) and we may *glorify God in our body* (1 Cor. 6:20).

The apostle Paul shows the exalted nature of marriage when he calls it a symbol of the mystical union of the Savior and the Church, his redeemed bride, commending it as a state honorable among all. The word of God also teaches us the purpose of marriage. First, husband and wife shall live together in sincere love and holiness, helping each other faithfully in all things that belong to this life and to the life to come. Secondly, by marriage the human race is to be continued and increased. Thirdly, by marriage the advancement of the kingdom of God is to be promoted. This purpose calls for loving devotion to each other, and a common responsibility for the 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.

For the home which marriage establishes the Lord ordained that the man should be the head of the wife even as Christ is the Head of the Church, and that he should protect her and provide for her in love, a love which, if exercised in the spirit and after the example of Christ, will be conducive to mutual happiness. God also ordained that the wife should be subject to the husband in all things that are according to his Word, showing him respect even as the Church to Christ. Thus the liberty of both husband and wife is glorified by mutual loyalty to law, and a home so begun in the name of the Lord and regulated by his commandments becomes the very foundation of a Christian society and affords a foretaste of the eternal home.

Marriage, then, is a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness to man, an institution of the highest significance to the human race, and a symbol of the union of Christ and his Church. We may, therefore, as Christians look with confidence for grace in the discharge of our mutual responsibilities and for guidance and help in our common difficulties and trials.

Statement of Intent

And now, _____ and _____ having heard from the Word of God the teaching concerning marriage, do you consent thereto, and do you desire to enter into this holy estate as ordained by God?

¶ *Groom:* I do.

¶ *Bride:* I do.

May the Lord God confirm the desire and purpose of your hearts, and your beginning be in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Vows

¶ *To the groom:*

_____, do you declare here before the Lord and these witnesses that you take as your lawful wife _____, here present? Do you promise to love and guide her faithfully, to maintain her, and to live with her in holiness, according to the holy gospel? Do you also promise never to forsake her, but to be true to her always, in good days and bad, in riches and poverty, in health and sickness, for as long as you both shall live? What is your answer?

¶ *Groom:* I do.

¶ *Optional:* I, _____, do solemnly declare here before the Lord and these witnesses that I take to myself and acknowledge as my wife _____ here present. I promise with the gracious help of God to love and guide her faithfully, to maintain her, and to live with her in holiness, according to the holy gospel. I promise never to forsake her, but to be true to her always, in good days and bad, in riches and poverty, in health and sickness, for as long as we both shall live.

¶ *To the bride:*

_____, do you declare here before the Lord and these witnesses that you take as your lawful husband _____, here present? Do you promise to love and obey him, to assist him, and to live with him in holiness, according to the holy gospel? Do you also promise never to

forsake him, but to be true to him always, in good days and bad, in riches and poverty, in health and sickness, for as long as you both shall live? What is your answer?

¶ *Bride*: I do.

¶ *Optional*: I _____ do solemnly declare here before the Lord and these witnesses that I take to myself and acknowledge as my husband _____ here present. I promise with the gracious help of God to love and obey him, to assist him, and to live with him in holiness, according to the holy gospel. I promise never to forsake him, but to be true to him always, in good days and bad, in riches and poverty, in health and sickness, for as long as we both shall live.

Ring Ceremony

¶ *To the Groom*:

Do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love?

¶ *Groom*: I do.

¶ *Optional*: I give you this ring as a symbol of my constant faithfulness and abiding love.

¶ *To the Bride*:

Do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love?

¶ *Bride*: I do.

¶ *Optional*: I give you this ring as a symbol of my constant faithfulness and abiding love.

Pronouncement

I now pronounce you, _____ and _____, husband and wife, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate. From now on you go down life's pathway together, and may the Father of all mercies, who of his grace has called you to this holy state of marriage, bind you together in true love and faithfulness and grant you his blessing.

Prayer

_____ and _____, since we cannot expect anything from ourselves, you shall kneel before the Lord and we shall pray with you and for you that he may enable you to fulfill your vows and grant you his blessing.

Most merciful and gracious God, of whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named, we ask you to, set your seal of approval upon the marriage into which our brother and sister have entered this day. Give them your fatherly benediction; grant them grace and your Holy Spirit to fulfill with pure and constant affection the vow and covenant made between them. Guide them in the way of righteousness and peace, that, loving and serving you with one mind and heart all the days of their life, they may be abundantly enriched with the tokens of your everlasting favor in Christ Jesus our Lord. In all life's experiences lift up your countenance upon them, that they may be thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity. May their marriage be fruitful for this life and for the life to come. Grant them wisdom and strength to build a home which shall be to the glory of your Name and the coming of your kingdom. May they live together many years, and in the

hour of death may they part in the blessed hope of celebrating forever with all the saints of God the marriage of Christ and the Church he loved. Hear our prayer in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Solemnization of Marriage: Form 2

Declaration of Purpose

We have come together before the face of God to join _____ and _____ in marriage. We seek to honor the will of God for marriage, the concern of the Christian church for its well-being, and the interest of the state in the orderly development of society.

Parting from Parents

Today _____ and _____ leave their parents to establish a new home. Do you, _____ and _____, give your blessing to them and promise them your continued love and support?

¶ The parents answer:

We give them our blessing, and so promise, God helping us.

Who gives this woman to this man?

¶ The one giving the bride answers:

I do.

Prayer of Invocation

God, our Father, we praise you for making and redeeming us to live together in love. We thank you for the love and trust which bring _____ and _____ to this their marriage day. Favor them with the honor of your presence at their wedding. Unite them by your Spirit so that together they may reflect the love of Christ for his church. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Instruction

Since we have received no lawful objections to this proposed union, let us reverently call to mind the institution, purpose, and obligations of the marriage state.

The holy bond of marriage was instituted by God himself at the very dawn of history. Making man in his own likeness, he endowed him with many blessings and gave him dominion over all things. Moreover, God said: *It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him* (Gen. 2:18). Thereupon God created woman of man's own substance and *brought her to the man* (Gen. 2:22). *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh* (Gen. 2:24).

Our Lord Jesus honored marriage by his blessed presence at the wedding in Cana, and confirmed it as a divine ordinance, as an honorable estate, and a lasting bond when he declared: *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate* (Matt. 19:6). The apostle Paul shows its exalted nature when he calls holy wedlock a symbol of the mystic union of the Savior and the Church, his redeemed bride, commending it as a state honorable among all.

The purpose of marriage is the propagation of the human race, the furtherance of the kingdom of God, and the enrichment of the lives of those entering this state. This purpose calls for loving devotion to each other, and a common responsibility for the nurture of the children the Lord may give them as his heritage and as parties to his covenant.

For the home which marriage establishes the Lord ordained that the man should be the head of the wife even as Christ is the Head of the Church and that he should protect her and provide for her in love; a love which, if exercised in the spirit and after the example of Christ, will be

conducive to mutual happiness. God also ordained that the wife should be subject to the husband in all things that are according to his Word, showing him deference even as the Church to Christ. Thus the liberty of both husband and wife is glorified by mutual loyalty to law, and a home so begun in the name of the Lord and regulated by his commandments becomes the very foundation of a Christian society and affords a foretaste of the eternal home.

Marriage, then, is a divine ordinance intended to be a source of happiness to man, an institution of the highest significance to the human race, and a symbol of the union of Christ and his Church. We may, therefore, as Christians look with confidence for grace in the discharge of our mutual responsibilities and for guidance and help in our common perplexities and trials.

Statement of Intent

And now, _____ and _____ having heard from the Word of God the teaching concerning marriage, do you assent thereto, and do you desire to enter into this holy estate as ordained by God?

¶ *Groom:* I do.

¶ *Bride:* I do.

May the Lord God confirm the desire and purpose of your hearts, and your beginning be *in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth* (Ps. 124:8).

Vows

¶ *To the groom (repeating after the minister):*

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my wife. I promise before God, and all who are present here, to be your loving and faithful husband. I will love you and give myself up for you, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in riches and in poverty, in sickness and in health. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to develop the gifts that God has given you, and never forsake you, as long as we both shall live.

¶ *To the bride (repeating after the minister):*

I, _____, take you, _____, to be my husband. I promise before God, and all who are present here, to be your loving and faithful wife. I will love you and submit to you, as the church loves and submits to Christ. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in riches and in poverty, in sickness and in health. I will serve you with tenderness and respect, and encourage you to develop the gifts that God has given you, and never forsake you, as long as we both shall live.

Ring Ceremony

¶ *To the Groom:*

Do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love in covenant established in Jesus Christ?

¶ *Groom:* I do.

¶ To the Bride:

Do you give this ring as a symbol of your constant faithfulness and abiding love in covenant established in Jesus Christ?

¶ Bride: I do.

Pronouncement

According the ordinances of the Church of Christ and the power vested in me by the State/Province of _____, I now pronounce you husband and wife, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. What therefore God has joined together let not man put asunder. From now on as you go down life's pathway together, may the Father of all mercies, who of his grace has called you to this holy state of marriage, bind you together in true love and faithfulness and grant you his blessing.

¶ The minister may say to the groom: _____, you may now kiss your bride.

Prayer

Most merciful and gracious God, of whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named, we ask you to set the seal of your approval upon the marriage into which our _____ and _____ have entered this day. Give them your fatherly benediction; grant them grace and the Holy Spirit to fulfill with pure and constant affection the vow and covenant between them made. Guide them in the way of righteousness and peace, that, loving and serving you with one mind and heart all the days of their life, they may be abundantly enriched with the tokens of your everlasting favor in Christ Jesus our Lord. In all life's experiences lift up your countenance upon them, that they may be thankful in prosperity and patient in adversity. May their marriage be fruitful for this life and for the life to come. Grant them wisdom and strength to build a home which shall be to the glory of your Name and the coming of your kingdom. May they live together many years, and in the hour of death may they part in the blessed hope of celebrating forever with all the saints of God the marriage of Christ and the Church he loved. Hear our prayer in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying:

¶ Congregation:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Prayers

Preface

These prayers are for voluntary use. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not impose the use of prescribed forms of public prayer in worship nor does the United Reformed Churches in North America today. These prayers are offered as aids and examples for congregational use as well as for those who are called to lead in public prayer.

Prayers for the Lord's Day

Opening Invocation/Declaration of Dependence

¶ May be prayed responsively:

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.—Ps. 124:8

Congregation of Jesus Christ, from where does your help come?
Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.—Ps. 121:1–2

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.—Ps. 46:1

Prayer of Invocation—1

Almighty God, to you our hearts are open, our desires are known, and from you no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the gracious power of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Invocation—2

Almighty and everlasting God, you are always more ready to hear than we are to pray, and to give more than we desire, or deserve; pour down upon us the abundance of your mercy; forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, except through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession—1

Dearly loved brothers and sisters, we are called to examine ourselves in the light of God's Law. Let us go to God in public confession:

¶ Prayed in unison:

Our Father, we are sinful and you are holy.

We recognize that we have heard in your Law difficult words,
knowing how often we have offended you in thought, word and deed,
not only by obvious violations,
but by failing to conform to its perfect commands,

by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
There is nothing in us that gives us reason for hope;
for where we thought we were well, we are sick in soul.
Where we thought we were holy, we are in truth unholy and ungrateful.
Our hearts are filled with the love of the world;
our minds are dark and are assailed by doubts;
our wills are too often given to selfishness
and our bodies to laziness and unrighteousness.
By sinning against our neighbors,
we have also sinned against you,
in whose image they were created.
In this time of silent confession we bring you our particular sins.

¶ An opportunity for silent confession may be given.

¶ Prayed by the minister:

Our Father, although you are a holy God who cannot look upon sin, look upon Christ our Savior and forgive us for his sake. You have promised us that if we confess our sins, you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For if we do sin, we have an Advocate before your throne, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins. Give us your pardon by your mercies, dear Father, for you have clothed us in Christ's righteousness. We ask also that you would give us an increase of the grace of your Holy Spirit, so that we may learn the wisdom of your ways and walk in your holy paths, for your glory and the good of our neighbor. Amen.

Prayer of Confession—2

Dearly beloved, the law causes us to acknowledge and confess our many sins and wickedness; not hiding them from the face of Almighty God our heavenly Father but confessing them with a humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart that we may obtain forgiveness, by his infinite goodness and mercy. Therefore I urge you to join me with a pure heart and humble voice, before the throne of grace, praying:

¶ Prayed in unison:

Almighty and most merciful Father,
we have erred and strayed from your ways like lost sheep,
we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,
we have offended against your holy laws,
we have left undone those things which we ought to have done,
and we have done those things which we ought not to have done;
and there is no health in us.
But you, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders,
spare us, as we confess our faults,
restore us, as we are penitent,
according to your promises declared unto us in Christ Jesus our Lord;
and grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake,
that we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life,
to the glory of your holy Name. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Almighty and merciful God, we realize and confess before you that if you should regard our merits, we would be unworthy to lift our eyes toward heaven and present our prayers before you. Our consciences accuse us, and our sins testify against us. And yet in your fatherly goodness you have adopted us in Christ and delight to hear our prayers which we offer through his mediation. Therefore we look to no other King and seek no other Advocate for the help that we need in this world and in the world to come. You call us to seek not only our own salvation and good, but that of your whole church and the world, and we do so now.

We pray first for your benediction on your holy Gospel, that it may be faithfully proclaimed and the world filled with the knowledge of your truth. To that end, please send workers into your field to plant, water, and harvest a people for your name. But frustrate the work of those who would sow weeds of heresy and discord. Pull down all of the strongholds of Satan in this world and establish your kingdom throughout the earth. Please give fatherly attention to your servants who suffer persecution for the sake of the Gospel and strengthen them in mind and body by your Spirit through the means of grace. [Specific prayers added for the peace, purity, and progress of the Gospel throughout the world.]

We pray also for those who serve our common welfare in temporal affairs, especially those who govern us, that they may do so with wisdom, integrity, and the knowledge that their councils stand under your final judgment. Dear Father, who sends rain upon the just and the unjust alike, give to us also, we pray, such humility of conduct and faithfulness in our worldly callings, that we may contribute to the good of our neighbors. We ask that you would restrain wickedness and vice in society, promote justice and the common good, and cause us to be salt and light in this evil age. [Specific prayers added for civil authorities.]

We remember also all who suffer from physical dangers, temptation, doubts, illness of mind or body, financial distress and especially those who are near death. May the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ your Son refresh them in their trials and give them the grace to bear the difficulties you send them for their good. Give also to us the grace to share in their suffering and provide for their needs as we are able. Comfort, we pray, all widows and orphans and be to them a father. Show your mercy to prisoners, to those in the military or whose business takes them great distances. Guard their families and bring them back safely, we pray. [Specific prayers added for members of the congregation.]

Bless the land with fruitful harvest, and give us wisdom and patience to be good stewards of it and of the resources you graciously give us for our callings. Keep us from exploiting your good gifts for our own selfish accumulation and grant that we may be ever mindful of our duties to each other and your creation. Order our priorities and interests, so that our callings in life will promote rather than hinder our love for you and our neighbor. We ask that you would deepen the bonds between us as spouses, parents and children and resolve conflict and strife according to your wisdom and grace. Give to those among us who are single gifts for building up the communion of saints as well as faithfulness in the face of temptation, and grant that your people may build them up in the most holy faith. Strengthen us through your means of grace that we may worship you not only with our words but with our lives, and so build us up into one body, a city in the world whose light cannot be hidden. Make each of us, we pray, a living sacrifice of

praise and thanksgiving pleasing to you. For this is our reasonable service in view of that sacrifice which alone has reconciled us finally and forever with you. We bring to your throne these intercessions on behalf of each other through that intercession of our Elder Brother at your right hand, even Jesus Christ your eternal Son. Amen.

Prayer Before the Sermon—1

Eternal Father, who has spoken in various times and in various ways to your people in the past, but in these last days in your Son, the Incarnate Word, we pray that you will open the mouth of your servant to proclaim that Word in the power of the Spirit. And we pray that this same Spirit will open the hearts of its hearers here assembled to receive your holy Gospel and write on their hearts your holy Law, even as you have promised. All of this, gracious Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying: “Our Father....”

Prayer Before the Sermon—2

Blessed Lord, who has caused Holy Scripture to be written for our learning; grant that we may hear, read, learn, and inwardly digest them, that through the comfort of your holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer After the Sermon—1

Our merciful God, who is pleased to condescend to speak to us through your word, grant us all grace that we may not be mere hearers of your word, but doers also. Give us the grace of your Holy Spirit that we may believe what has been promised to us. May we bring glory and honor to your name in all that we do, as you conform us to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. All of this, gracious Father, we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray, saying: “Our Father....”

Prayer After the Sermon—2

Almighty God, grant that the words we have just heard meekly with our outward ears to be grafted inwardly in our hearts by your grace. As we receive your Word with pure affection, may our hearts be filled with love and reverence for you. Cause us to bear the fruits of the Spirit and to live in holiness, diligently following your commandments. And may it please you to use us in leading into the way of truth all who are lost, wandering, and confused. All this we pray for the honor and praise of your Name, through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer Before the Explanation of the Catechism

Almighty and everlasting God, our heavenly Father, we acknowledge that we are sinners, conceived and born in sin, unable of ourselves to do any good. But we do repent of our sins, and seek your grace to help us in our remaining infirmities. Through the teaching of your word, satisfy our hunger and quench our thirst with your refreshing truth, that we, with all our hearts, may love and serve you, together with our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit, one only true God, who lives and reigns forever. Amen.

Prayer After the Explanation of the Catechism

Gracious and merciful Father, we give you thanks for having established your covenant with believers and their children. This promise you have not only signified and sealed by holy

baptism, but daily prove it by perfecting your praise through the mouths of children. You also continue to establish your saints in this faith throughout their lives. “For,” as you have told us, “the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.” So give us, we pray, the grace to inwardly digest the food you have given us and to bring forth works of service and gratitude in this world. All of this we ask in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying: “Our Father...”

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we, your unworthy servants, do give you most humble and hearty thanks for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us, and to all men. We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all, for your inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we beseech you, give us that due sense of all your mercies, that our hearts may be sincerely thankful: and that we show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.

Concluding Prayer

Almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you have given us grace to offer our common prayers with one heart. You have promised to grant the requests of just two or three who are gathered together in Jesus’ name. Fulfill now the desires of our hearts and the petitions of our mouths, as is most beneficial for us, your servants. And grant us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the world to come life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with the Father and Holy Spirit is eternally praised. Amen.

Prayers for Special Services

Christmas

Merciful Father, you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son. He who was rich for ourselves became poor, the eternal Word made flesh, a great Light shining in the darkness. Only because of your Word and Spirit have we seen that Light and been drawn into its brightness. Give us the grace humbly and joyfully to receive your Son even as the shepherds and princes who welcomed him, and to look no further for our redemption than to this child lying in a manger. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Good Friday

Our Father, who so loved the world that you gave your only-begotten Son, we acknowledge and marvel at your mercy. Even while we were enemies, you reconciled us; even while we were strangers, you made us co-heirs with Christ of all eternal blessings; even while we stood condemned, you redeemed us; even while we were imprisoned, you delivered us from the tyranny of sin, death, and the devil. On this solemn occasion, we loathe our miserable estate and celebrate your marvelous grace. Beneath the cross of Christ, we come to know that ours is the guilt, but yours the forgiveness; ours the condemnation, but yours the gift of justification; ours the bondage, yet yours the freedom of adoption and new obedience. Even the faith with which we confess our dear Savior’s sacrifice was won for us by his death. Therefore, we cry out to you in

sorrow for our sins and in thanksgiving for your gift. Give us the grace, we pray, to receive again this word of the cross which alone can refresh us on our pilgrim way, and send us out again into the world as witnesses to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

Easter

Holy Father, giver of all perfect gifts, we join the heavenly choir to herald the news that you have defeated the powers of sin, death, and condemnation by the victory of Jesus Christ your Son over the grave. We confess that the circumstances of this present age often rise up to testify against the promise that you have declared in your Word. Nevertheless, we bring the experience of our hearts under your judgment: You have raised Jesus Christ from the dead as the first fruits of the whole harvest at the last day. As in his resurrection you have brought the new creation into this passing evil age, raise us up and seat us with Christ—in this life, through faith, and in the next, beholding with our own eyes the resurrection of our bodies in life everlasting. All of this we pray, with joy and thanksgiving, in Christ's name. Amen.

Ascension

Almighty God, although we could not ascend to your holy place, you have descended to save us and after your Son won our redemption he ascended to the seat of all authority and dominion. Even now, he intercedes for us at your right hand, ruling over all of his enemies, and ours, for our salvation and the glory of your holy name. Help us to receive and to make known throughout the world this good news that Christ Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And fill our hearts with longing expectation for his return in power and glory to restore all things. In the name of Christ our King. Amen.

Pentecost

Father in Heaven, we give you thanks especially on this day for the gift of your Holy Spirit. Just as you sent your Son to redeem us, you sent your Spirit to renew us after his image, and to begin even now the new creation that awaits us fully and finally at the last day. Forgive us for grieving the Spirit, forgetting the great work that he performed at Pentecost and continues to perform as he makes your Word effectual for the justification and sanctification of sinners. We give you praise for sending your Spirit of adoption into our hearts, so that we may call you "Father"; for his ministry of testifying to Christ, convicting the world of sin and judgment, and opening our hearts to receive the gospel of your Son. Even now, through the gospel, he is gathering from all nations a church to declare your goodness. May we be filled again with marvelous wonder at this saving operation of the Holy Spirit, who, together with you and the Son, is worshiped and glorified, one God, world without end. Amen.

Day of Prayer

O God, of infinite wisdom, power and goodness, we acknowledge you as the Creator of all things in the heavens above, in the earth beneath, and in the waters under the earth. We adore you for the grandeur and beauty of all your works. We adore your lovingkindness, in having made all things subservient to the needs and happiness of your children. What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? You have given him dominion over the works of your hands—the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea. You have given to us for food every moving thing that lives, and every herb yielding seed, and every fruit tree yielding fruit, after its kind. You have crowned us with mercy and loving-kindness.

We adore you for your gracious promise of old, that while the earth remains, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease. You visit the earth and bless it. You send the springs into the valleys which run among the hills. You cause the grass to grow for all cattle, and herb for the service of man, that he may bring forth food out of the earth. You make the furrows of the field soft with showers; you bless the springing thereof. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy. You crown the year with your goodness; your clouds drop fatness; they drop upon the pastures of the wilderness, and the little hills rejoice on every side. O Lord, how manifold are your works; in wisdom you have made them all.

We would adore you, O God, not only in the riches of your bounty and compassion, but in your righteous judgments. You open your hand, and we are filled with good; you hide your face, and we are troubled. But we know, O God, that in your wrath you remember mercy; and we acknowledge your long-suffering and your loving-kindness. Give us grace to believe and feel, that whom the Lord loves he chastens; and make us ever ready to offer unto you, in spirit and in truth, the prayer of the holy prophet: Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet we will rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our salvation.

For ourselves and our country, O gracious God, we thank you, that notwithstanding our manifold transgressions of your holy laws, you have so constantly done good to us; that you have given us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. These have been among the witnesses of your great goodness, for they assure us that you are the living God. Teach us to believe with a strong faith, that you are Lord of the seasons; that you cause the earth to bring forth, and it obeys you. Accept our thanksgivings for all your blessings; fill our hearts with humility and love, with gratitude and trust; continue your loving-kindness to us, and assist us to show forth the fruits of grace, in a sincere obedience to his will, through whom all blessings are given, your Son our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

National Day of Thanksgiving

Our Sovereign God, who created all things for your pleasure and who gives to all life, breath, and every good thing, we praise you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. For rain and sunshine, in abundance and in lack, we acknowledge that our times are in your hands. You supply all of your creatures with your good gifts: the just and the unjust alike. Nevertheless, we especially give you praise for the surpassing greatness of your saving grace that you have shown to us in Christ Jesus our Savior. For our election in him before the foundation of the world; for our redemption by him in his life, death, and resurrection; for our effectual calling, justification, sanctification, and all of the blessings of our union with him, we give you our heartfelt thanks. And we look with great anticipation toward that day when you will raise us to life everlasting, glorified and confirmed in righteousness, so that we may sing your praises without the defilement of our present weaknesses, distractions, and sins. As you have served us with these gifts, we ask that you would give us grateful hearts so that through us you may serve our neighbors. In the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, who taught us to pray, saying, "Our Father...."

New Year's Eve

Almighty and most gracious God, as we close the year with this day, we thank you for all your tender mercies bestowed upon us during the whole course of our lives, and especially during this past year. We therefore offer unto you the sacrifice of our praises, and we acknowledge, that through your great goodness and help, we are enabled to pass our years in peace, although we have offended you in innumerable ways. O merciful God, pardon all who sincerely repent of their sins. Grant that, while our years are passing away, we may work out our salvation with fear and trembling in the time you give to us. Enable us to press onward always towards the end of our heavenly calling, even that blessed eternity, which Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord, has prepared for us. Amen.

New Year's Day

Eternal and Almighty God, we humble ourselves in your presence to dedicate to you the beginning of this year, by adoration, prayer and praise. We come before your Supreme Majesty, and acknowledge, with gratitude, the manifold blessings which you have freely bestowed upon us, through the whole course of our lives. We thank you, that having preserved us to the present time, you have permitted us to enter upon a new year. You have not ceased, O most gracious God, to give to us the abundance of your lovingkindness. But you have especially sustained us with every spiritual blessing by keeping in the midst of us the light of your Gospel. You have invited us to repentance, through your mighty help, through your great goodness, and through the warnings of your Word and Spirit; and have mercifully granted unto all of us favorable opportunities to grow in grace. Despite our unworthiness, for the love of Jesus Christ, take not away from us your protection and favor.

Moved by your grace, we devote ourselves to you at the beginning of this year, desiring to employ it better than we have done the years that are past. And since this day also warns us that our years pass away like a flood, like a dream, give us grace that we may seriously number our days that we may have a heart of wisdom; that we may discern the vanity of this life; and that we may aspire to that better life, when days, and months, and years, shall be counted no more forever. While we continue in the flesh, may we more and more live not according to its desires, but according to your will. And grant, O God, that when our years shall come to an end, and the day of our death arrives, we may depart in your peace that passes all understanding and in the sure hope of life everlasting. Favorably hear us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers for Personal and Family Use

Morning Prayer

Merciful God, thank you for keeping watch over us last night. As we face a new day, we ask that you would fix our eyes on Christ as our only hope and your glory as our only aim. You alone are worthy of this glory because you are the very author of our life, the creator and sustainer of all that exists. The heavens declare your wisdom, power, goodness, and faithfulness to all you have made. Yet our highest praise is reserved for the great deeds of redemption that you have worked for us poor sinners. Bound in our sin, suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, by nature children of wrath even as the rest, we have nevertheless heard the good news that you have delivered us from slavery, freed us from the condemnation of your just law, and brought us new life from above. Even as we face our ordinary tasks this day, recall to our hearts the extraordinary comfort of your promise. Grant also, we pray, the strength of your Spirit to live out the callings you have

given us and to all people as creatures made in your image. Make us fit vessels for your work in this world this day—a sacrifice of thanksgiving well-pleasing in your sight and a light that shines before our neighbors. All of this we ask in the name of your Son, who taught us to pray, “Our Father...”

Evening Prayer

Merciful God, we come to you now at the end of this day in the name of our Savior, that Light shining in the darkness, dispelling the night of our sins and the blindness of our hearts. Lord of our labor, now be Lord of our rest. Free us of doubts, anxieties, and temptations and continue to work your sanctifying grace in us even as we sleep. Remembering that we are not only frail but sinful, we ask you to defend us from all dangers, but especially from the assaults of the world and the devil as also from the disease of our own hearts. We confess that we have not spent this day without grievously sinning against you, to whom all hearts are open and no wickedness is hidden. Yet, clothed in the righteousness of your dear Son, we invoke your name and claim your salvation. Give us repentant and believing hearts that delight in following your ways. We ask also that you would be with those who are afflicted with grief, pain, temptation, doubts, and especially for [specific requests]. Together with them preserve us all in one communion and body until we enter at last your everlasting rest. In the name of Christ our Savior. Amen.

Prayer Before Meals

The eyes of all wait for you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. You attend to our every need through the creatures you have made, especially our neighbors whose vocations serve to bring these provisions to our table and we ask a special blessing for those who have prepared it for us. If not even a sparrow can fall from the sky or a hair fall from our head apart from your fatherly care and wisdom, we cannot fail to look to you alone for security in this life as also in the life to come. So give us grateful hearts as we pray, saying, “Our Father...”

Prayer After Meals

We praise you, Lord, for our creation, our preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all else we praise you for your greatest gift: Your Son Jesus Christ, who was born, lived, died, and rose again from the dead for us and for our salvation. As he intercedes for us at your right hand even now, we enter your sanctuary boldly to intercede on behalf of [specific requests]. Praise the LORD! O give thanks to his name, for he is good; for his loving kindness lasts forever. Amen.

Prayer for the Sick/Spiritually Distressed

Eternal God, the only Creator, Preserver, Judge and Savior of the world, you alone hold the powers of life and death. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he had conquered death and hell, announced, “I was dead, but I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to death and Hades in my hand.” Yet often our circumstances seem to us to testify against your promise. What we see does not appear to agree with what we have heard. Yet, even at the cross, where you seemed so absent and your Son so cruelly and unjustly abandoned by you, we have been taught that he was thereby fulfilling your purposes to redeem us from the power of darkness. We confess that our hearts are so bound to the realities that we see with our eyes in the moment that we easily forget the greater realities that we hear with our ears through your word.

Teach us through these trials to number our days, recognizing that we are but fading flowers in this age, but flourishing oaks in the age to come. We know that these struggles are not tokens of your wrath, but are part of your plan to save us, sanctify us, and glorify yourself. While we may fear the circumstances, we no longer fear the condemnation of the law, the sting of death, or the sharp arrows of Satan. For we know that your Son gained victory for us by his cross and resurrection. We ask that you would, even through these tests, deepen our confidence to appear before you clothed not in the filthy rags of our own works, but in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ our Savior. Continue to look upon us in him, for we pray in his name, who taught us to pray, "Our Father..."

Prayer Before Communion

Eternal and Almighty Father, we commemorate today the death of your Son in the celebration of the holy Supper. He ordained it as a pledge of his love to us and for our remembrance of his sufferings that have ransomed us from our sins. Since we are miserable sinners who are unworthy to be partakers of your holy sacraments, we pray you will favorably look upon us. Sanctify us, O Lord, by your Holy Spirit, that we may serve you acceptably in showing forth with faith and joy the death of our Savior, and that we may glorify you by holy lives; through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer after Communion

Heavenly Father, we praise you that in your abundant mercy, you delivered up Jesus to the death of the cross. We thank you that today we experienced the comfort of commemorating that death, in the holy Supper. We extol you for a gift so precious. We pray that you would cause our souls to benefit from the sufferings of our Redeemer, signified and sealed in communion: the pardon of our offences, the graces of your Spirit, the comfort of your love, the light of your peace, and, after this life, the glory of your kingdom. Hear us in the name and for the sake of our merciful Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayers for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Opening Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Heavenly Father, eternal and merciful God, it has pleased you according to your infinite wisdom to gather a church to yourself out of the nations of all the earth, and to govern it through weak servants. Called by you to watch over your flock purchased by your Son's precious blood, we invoke your name now for this solemn assembly, gathered here according to the example of the apostolic churches. Faced with many weighty issues concerning the care of your people, we ask that you would make us truly mindful of your purposes for your church. Draw our minds and hearts away from vanity and pride, discord and pettiness, and do not let these sins which still cling to us distract us from advancing your great cause in this world. Renew us, we pray, in the joyful commission of bringing your good news to the ends of the earth, making us more faithful stewards of the mysteries and ambassadors of reconciliation. We ask that your Spirit would be present among us to guide us into all truth, bringing us to agreement on the matters before us. May Scripture reign in our hearts, just as the Living Word reigns over your church, for we acknowledge only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. All of this we ask because Christ is our Mediator and Advocate, who with you and the Holy Spirit, the only God, deserves eternal praise and glory. Amen.

Closing Prayer for Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Lord God, we give you heartfelt thanks for gathering a church in our land and for making us ambassadors and guardians of such a kingdom. As those who are receiving rather than building your kingdom, make us ever mindful that it is not our labors but your electing, redeeming, justifying and sanctifying grace alone that renders your church indestructible and victorious against all adversaries. We give you praise for your providence in preserving liberty in this land for the free proclamation of the Gospel and ask that you would, by your Holy Spirit, fill us with joy to make diligent use of such opportunity. Your Spirit, who leads your church into all truth, has been present in our assembly, giving us wisdom in our deliberations. We pray that he would also give us the strength to bless the efforts that we purpose to put forth and finish the work that he has begun. Continue to draw the remnant of the nations to your heavenly Jerusalem that is coming down out of heaven and maintain the peace and purity of your church, we ask. Strengthen us with a mighty zeal for the ministry of word and sacrament, as well as for the care of your flock in body and soul. As you hold Christ Jesus ever above and before us as the Mediator for sinners, may our churches faithfully proclaim this good news to those who have never heard it. Give strength, humility, and boldness to your under-shepherds, we pray: to ministers, elders, and deacons. We also ask that you would give prudence to our civil rulers, so that they may act with justice and wise restraint. As you have promised to be present with us even to the end of the age, we ask you to enlighten, guide, awaken, convict and console us by your Word and Spirit. Hear us, dear Father, through your Son, who with you and the Holy Spirit, the only true God, is worthy of eternal praise and glory. Amen.

Opening Prayer for the Meetings of Deacons

Merciful God and Father, you have not only declared that we will always have the poor with us, but have also commanded us to bear their burdens with them. For this reason, you have established the office of deacon. We ask that you would give us wisdom to faithfully discharge the duties of our office in this place. We acknowledge that in your kingdom each member supplies what is lacking in the other, so that your name may be exalted and your people drawn together with ever-stronger cords of love and affection. And since we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from your mouth, help us to assist our brothers and sisters in such a way that they may look to these offerings and services as tokens of your covenant faithfulness. May they together with us render you everlasting thanks in this age until that age when our trials will yield to that everlasting rest you have prepared for us from the foundation of the world. In the name of Christ our Savior we ask this. Amen.

CECCA Report to Synod Visalia, California, June 2-6, 2014

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 Nyack, 2012. The following terminology document serves as the mandate of our committee:

I. The first step, Ecumenical Contact, will follow a period of initial exploration. Ecumenical Contact will focus on studying matters of general concern between the URCNA and the “foreign” federation. This step will be implemented, where possible and desirable, by:

1. Exchange of official observers at major assemblies such that one visit be made to one assembly/church per year to churches with whom we have ecumenical relations.

2. Consultation on issues of joint concern, including:

a. authority and sufficiency of Scripture;

b. creeds and confessions;

c. formula of subscription to the confessions;

c. significant factors in the two federations’ history, theology, ecclesiology and stands on ethical issues.

d. church order and polity;

e. liturgy and liturgical forms;

f. preaching, sacraments and discipline;

g. theological education for ministers.

h. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies.

i. Exchange of denominational Church Directories (Yearbooks).

j. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the Confessional Standards.

k. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order.

l. Exchange of the most recently denominationally published editions of Psalters/Hymnals.

m. Exchange of information regarding current ecumenical relations.

II. The second step, Ecumenical Fellowship, will focus on the oneness of the URCNA with the “foreign” federation, even though we are separated by geographical boundaries. This step will be implemented according to church order article 36, (in addition to the points listed under step one above) by:

- a. Occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option).
- b. Intercommunion, including ready reception of each other's members at the Lord's Supper – but not excluding suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership – as regulated by each consistory (session).
- c. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting the fundamentals of Christian unity.
- d. Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another.
- e. Joint action in areas of common responsibility.
- f. Agreement that, as changes in polity, doctrine or practice are instituted, the churches will inform each other – understanding that the adoption of substantial changes may jeopardize the established ecumenical relationship.

Since our report to Synod Nyack, CECCA has met eight times: six times by way of conference call meetings and two face-to-face meetings. This report will first focus on churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Fellowship (phase 2). Second, it will focus on churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Contact (phase one). Third, it will focus on churches with whom we are corresponding with a view to entering into Ecumenical Contact (phase one). Fourth, it will report on the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Fifth, it will conclude with a number of recommendations that require action by Synod.

I. Churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Fellowship

The Reformed Churches in New Zealand (RCNZ)

At Synod Nyack, 2012, CECCA received a request for advice from the fraternal delegate of the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. This request pertained to changes that were being proposed to their Form for the Baptism of Infants (the same as ours). These changes were prompted by the belief of some that the Form for the Baptism of Infants has overtones of presumptive regeneration. On behalf of CECCA, two of its members sent documents in support of the Form for the Baptism of Infants in its present form. CECCA plans to send one of its members to the upcoming RCNZ synod in September 2014.

II. Churches with whom we are in Ecumenical Contact

A. The Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA)

CECCA has the distinct impression that the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA) continues to want to be a Reformed church federation firmly based on the Scriptures and Confessions. However, there are differences in viewpoints and practices with regard to women in office despite decisions taken by Synods. In other words, some churches just go ahead and do their own thing despite what a synod has decided.

The GKSA needs time to sort out why churches within its federation are doing this and how they are going to deal with this. On the one hand, they need time to sort out when

freedom in diversity crosses the line into disobedience to the Word of God and when the decisions and actions of the local churches compromise the common accord adopted by the Church Order. On the other hand, they need to sort out when ecclesiastical decisions place a yoke on a person's conscience (cf. Art. 32 Belgic Confession).

The upcoming synod of the GKSA in January, 2015 plans to deal with this issue. CECCA plans to send one of its member to this synod.

CECCA proposes that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the GKSA at this time.

B. The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv)

The developments in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv) continue to be a cause of concern for CECCA. In our evaluation of these concerns, CECCA focuses on primary sources as much as possible. Formal parallels with the Christian Reformed Churches in North America (CRCNA) are a reason for us to be careful that we do not judge the GKv prematurely as being the same as the CRCNA. To that end, CECCA has committed itself to carry on its own correspondence with the BBK (the CECCA of the GKv) and to evaluate the issues independent of that done by other federations that are expressing concerns about the direction of the GKv.

To help us in coming to a fair appraisal of the developments in the GKv, CECCA had its latest face-to-face meeting in Hamilton, Ontario so that it could also attend a conference sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary that took place on January 17 and 18, 2014, featuring speakers from the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen, the Netherlands, and from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary. The theme of the conference was: *Correctly Handling the Word of Truth: Reformed Hermeneutics Today*. Featured speakers from the Theological University of Reformed Churches (Kampen, NL) were Dr. J.M. Burger - A Soteriological Perspective on our Understanding, Dr. A.L.Th. de Bruijne - Christian Ethics and God's use of the Bible, Dr. B. Kamphuis - The Hermeneutics of Dogma, Dr. G. Kwakkel - The Reader as Focal Point of Biblical Exegesis, Dr. K. van Bekkum - Some Remarks on the Reformed Hermeneutics of Biblical Historical Narrative. A summary of most of these speeches as well as the summary of respondents can be found at http://www.godgeneratedlife.com/downloads/hamilton_conference.pdf

At this present time, Synod Ede of the GKv is meeting. Synods of the GKv tend to meet only in plenary sessions on weekends and thus can last anywhere from six to nine months. The Deputies for Men/Women in the Church presented this synod with a report that recommends opening all the offices in the church to women. The English translation of this report can be found at http://www.godgeneratedlife.com/downloads/2014male_female_report.pdf. Since CECCA did not receive an invitation to send a fraternal delegate to this synod, it decided to send a letter to Synod Ede (**See: Appendix 1**). The reason we did not receive an

invitation to send a fraternal delegate is because they no longer view us as a church with real potential for a sister church relationship (See: **Appendix 2**).

CECCA proposes that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the GKv at this time.

C. The United Reformed Churches in Congo (URCC)

The relationship between the URCNA and the URCC is very much in the very earliest stages of development. Although we are in the Ecumenical Contact (= phase one) relationship with the URCC, it has proved to be difficult to move beyond that point to date. Because of unforeseen difficulties, a planned first meeting with the URCC at its first Synod (scheduled for July 23-28, 2012 in Kananga) had to be cancelled. A planned meeting in late summer of this year was also cancelled after it became clear that it would be very difficult to meet with the Pastors and Elders of the churches when no Synod would be in session. Additionally, the URCC looks forward to have the visiting delegates of the URCNA participate in the teaching ministry of its (fledgling) seminary. However, the seminary is in recess until October – well after the date a visit had been planned.

From March 4 to 10, 2014 Rev. Christo Heiberg brought a visit to the URCC (See **Appendix 3 for the report**).

CECCA proposes that the URCNA enters into Ecclesiastical Fellowship (phase two) with the URCC.

D. The Calvinist Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT)

Rev. Ray Sikkema visited with the Calvinist Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRC-NTT) in August 2013 (See **Appendix 4 for the report**). During this visit he also had the opportunity to meet with the Synod of the GGRI NTT (a federation of churches located primarily on the Island of Sumba). The GGRI NTT is one of three federations constituting the GGRI – the other two being the Reformed Churches in KalBar [Borneo] and the Reformed Churches in Papua. The GGRI was formed in the Spring of 2012 with a view “to work together more closely and to help each other – in their respective three provinces.”

Talks are presently underway to have the GGRC join the GGRI. Should that occur, the GGRC would continue to hold its own Regional Synod meetings – as do the other three federations presently constituting the GGRI – and gather with the (General) Synod of the GGRI when it meets.

The GGRC is thankful for our ecumenical relationship and very much appreciates the contact, expressing that communicating via the Internet is good but that a “personal relationship” is better. Not only do they look forward to hear our preaching and have us conduct seminars on agreed upon topics/issues; they are also willing to share with us their strategy for reaching out to the un-churched.

CECCA proposes that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the GGRC-NTT at this time.

E. The Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC)

Rev. Jason Tuinstra visited the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland Continuing in May 2013 (See **Appendices 5 and 6 for the speech and the report**). The FCC is made up of six presbyteries, representing thirty-eight congregations. The FCC was formed in 2000 but sees itself as a continuation of the Free Church of Scotland. Given this, they trace their history back to the “Disruption of 1843” when, under the leadership of Thomas Chalmers, 450 ministers left the Church of Scotland. Through the Church of Scotland, the FCC dates back to 1560 and the Reformation under John Knox. The GA ended as it began, with thanks and praise to God. While the URCNA has different confessional backgrounds than the FCC, it is clear that we share the singular, like precious faith. Our practices may differ at points (no instruments, exclusive metrical Psalm singing), but our similarities are clear.

CECCA proposes that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the FCC at this time.

F. The Free Protestant Church in Argentina (FPCA)

The Free Protestant Reformed Church in Argentina is located in Santa Fe, Argentina, which is a city of 350,000 people some six hours northwest of Buenos Aires. Since Synod Nyack, Rev. Podesta, the pastor of this church, is back to square one and is looking at starting up his ministry anew. There were some "betrayals" by other pastors and congregants with whom he was involved before and this wrecked his ministry. There were sexual immoralities, other scandals and lies, the details of which were not possible to obtain. **He has taken a year to think things over and reorganize.** Evidently, at its peak his ministry had some 6 churches but the implication is that they were quite small. At present it is Rev. Podesta and 8 to 10 other people who meet in a home. They are in need of virtually everything, prayer, finance and mentoring.

In view of the specific circumstances of the FPCA ministry at this present time, CECCA believes FPCA would be best helped if a single sponsoring congregation of the URCNA could be located to cooperate with it, assist it and maintain regular contact with it. Rev. Podesta responded warmly to CECCA's decision, indicated that he looks very much forward to developments at Synod Visalia and in any event expressed desire to remain in permanent contact with CECCA (See also: **Appendix 7**).

CECCA proposes to synod to discontinue Ecclesiastical Contact (Phase one) with the Free Protestant Church in Argentina (since there is not instituted FPC in Argentina) and that a congregation of the URCNA be located to cooperate with, assist and maintain regular contact with the house congregation of Rev. Podesta.

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

A. The Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT)

The Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT) consists of two congregations. The first congregation, the Riga Reformed Bible Church has been planted at 1990 by pastor Alvis Sauka. Ten year later, a second congregation was planted in Riga. Church leaders and member embraced Reformed theology through the teaching received at Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in Riga. Professors like Mark Vanderhart, Cornelis Venema, Gerard Van Groningen, Hans Buyer, Simon Kistemaker, Larry Sibley and more have been instrumental in mentoring these two congregations (**See also: Appendix 8**).

CECCA proposes that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the ERCLAT.

B. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales (EPCEW)

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW) is a denomination of 14 churches and two mission churches (Ribchester, Lancashire and Stockholm, Sweden). There are Bible studies in Hexham (North East England) and two in Berlin, which plan, God willing, to become church plants in the future. In Hexham, a Mission to the World missionary has been appointed, and is due to start work there in February, 2014. The groups in Berlin are established and the EPCEW is looking at ways to progress them to church plants. The total (communicant and baptized) membership of the EPCEW is about 650 (2012 figure), a growth of about 10% from the previous year. There are 10 established churches in England, three in Wales, and one in Sweden, at Tranås. The church in Sweden has been fully part of the denomination for several years.

The EPCEW is a member church of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, and hosted the worldwide conference in September 2013, in Cardiff. As well as international contacts through the ICRC, the denomination is in sister church relations with several British denominations, (the Associate Presbyterian Churches, the Scotland; the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ireland; the Free Church of Scotland; the Free Church of Scotland Continuing; the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland) as well as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India, and the Reformed Churches Netherlands Liberated. The EPCEW holds to the Westminster Standards. For more information, see:

<http://www.epcew.org.uk/resources.html>

CECCA proposes that the URCNA enter into Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the EPCEW.

IV. The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

The International Conference of Reformed Churches is a conference of Reformed Churches around the world held once every four years. The first preliminary meeting was held in 1982 in the Netherlands with the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) taking leading roles. Subsequent meetings have been held in Scotland (1985), Canada (1989), The Netherlands (1993), Korea (1997), the USA (2001), South Africa (2005), New Zealand (2009) and Wales, United Kingdom (2013). The next conference will, the Lord willing, be held in 2017 Jordan, Ontario with the URCNA being the hosting federation and the Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church of Jordan being the hosting church.

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

Brother Huibert den Boer and Rev. Dick Moes attended the Conference in Cardiff, Wales from August 28 to September 4, 2013 (Rev. Ray Sikkema was also present as chairman of the Missions Committee). The theme of the Conference was “Preach the Word” based upon 2 Tim 4:2. This theme was covered in three papers entitled “The Necessity of Preaching,” “The Nature of Preaching” and “The Practice of Preaching in Non-Literary Cultures.” The Conference proposed several amendments to the Constitution. This Constitution will be passed along to the major assemblies of the member churches for approval (**See Appendix 9**). The Conference recommended several changes to the structure of the Conference in order to encourage more regional interaction between the member churches and to give a higher priority to their theological education and diaconal ministries. To facilitate this a Coordinating Committee, a Theological Education Committee, a Diaconal Committee and a Regional Conferences Committee have been appointed in addition to the already existing Missions Committee (**See also: Appendix 10**).

VI. Recommendations

CECCA recommends to Synod Nyack:

1. that the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA);
2. that the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv);
3. that the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Fellowship (phase two) with the United Reformed Churches of Congo (URCC);
4. that the URCNA remain in Ecclesiastical Contact (phase one) with the Calvinistic Reformed Church in Indonesia (GGRT-NTT);
5. that the URCNA remain in Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC);
6. that Synod encourage that a congregation of the URCNA be located to cooperate with, assist and maintain regular contact with the house congregation of Rev. Podesta (cf. FPCA)
7. that the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT);
8. that the URCNA enter into Ecumenical Contact (phase one) with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW);
9. that Synod appoint Rev. Dick Moes to replace Rev. Ray Sikkema as member-at-large of CECCA;
10. that Synod welcome the fraternal delegates present at Synod, extending to them the opportunity to address Synod on behalf of the sending church;
11. that Synod welcome the fraternal observers who may be present, extending to them the opportunity to greet Synod on behalf of the sending church;
12. that Synod grant the privilege of the floor to the following members of CECCA to answer Synod's questions regarding this report: Rev. Ray Sikkema, chairman and Rev. Dick Moes, secretary.

Humbly submitted,

Rev. Bill Boekestein, member
Br. Huibert Den Boer, member
Br. Doug Field, member
Rev. Christo Heiberg, member
Br. Nuiver, member
Rev. Jason Tuinstra, member
Rev. Ray Sikkema, chairman
Rev. Dick Moes, secretary.

P.s. It should be noted that CECCA has elected Rev. Christo Heiberg as the new chairman (effective at the close of synod).

Appendix 1

Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA)
Rev. Dick Moes
21556 49B Ave
Langley, BC, Canada
V3A 8P6

January 15, 2014

Secretariaat Generale Synode Ede 2014
Generale Synode Ede
Postbus 770
3800 AT Amersfoort

Dear brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

It is with great sorrow that we write you this letter on behalf of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). We would have written you earlier, but we have only recently been able to obtain a copy of the official English translation of the “Report of Deputies Male/Female in the Church: Men and Women in the Service of the Gospel.” While some of the members of our committee are able to read Dutch, most of them cannot.

The majority of the deputies recommend on page 33 to your upcoming Synod Ede the following:

to declare, on the basis of this report, that:

- a. the position that besides men, women also may serve in the offices of the church, as described in this report, fits within the breadth of what can be affirmed as Biblical and Reformed;
- b. whether or not, besides men, women also serve as office-bearers ought not to become an obstacle for the GKv in ecclesiastical contacts with the CGK and the NGK, or in church plant projects.

The report also contains the vision underlying this recommendation. Page 17 of the report contains the following illustration:

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

The small triangle represents the text in its original context for its first readers; the larger triangle represents the text in a different context, such as the context of the 21st Century readers in the Netherlands today.

The majority of the deputies are of the opinion that Paul's context was that the spread of the gospel would be hindered by allowing women to serve in an ecclesiastical office. Accordingly, they write on page 14 of their report:

Paul requires – and he does so with apostolic authority – that women, during the instruction in doctrine that occurs when the congregation assembles, assume an obedient attitude. They do so in submission (the Greek uses the verb *hupotassein*), quiet and unassuming, rather than dominating the proceedings. A woman may accept instruction, but she may not herself instruct, for that is an exercise of authority, which would cause unrest.

However, according to the majority of the deputies, the spread of the gospel is hindered today when women may not serve in an ecclesiastical office. Accordingly, the majority of the deputies write on page 24:

In our contemporary Western context, men and women may participate on an equal level. This does not imply that we go along uncritically with unbiblical egalitarian thinking; instead, it is an attempt to actualize what men and women, with their own distinct gifts, can mean in the service of the Gospel.

The agreement in both contexts is the spread of the gospel. The difference in context is the question: what hinders the spread of the gospel? Consequently, our context demands that we actualize (i.e. change) the text to make it relevant for the context in which it is read today.

You realize, of course, that when the ultimate goal of biblical interpretation is to fuse the two contexts/horizons of the text so that what is written in the original context needs to be changed to make it relevant for the context of the reader today, that what is written is no longer the deciding factor in the interpretation, but the two contexts are. Since the reconstruction of the original context and the construction of the current context is never certain but debatable, this method of biblical interpretation can lead to such arbitrariness that the reader has a blank check to make the text say what he wants because the text

itself no longer has the last word, but the debatable context does.

Brothers, if the vision underlying the “Report of Deputies Male/Female in the Church” is endorsed by your synod, this will have grave implications for other issues your churches are wrestling with, such as living common law, gay marriage, assisted suicide, divorce and remarriage. Therefore, we urge you to reject this report with its underlying hermeneutical vision. In doing so, you will truly promote the spread of the gospel in your culture today.

Wishing you every blessing from above as you continue to labor in the Lord’s service.¹

In Him,

Dick Moes
Secretary CECCA

¹ We thankfully made use of the excellent article by Rev. Pieter Boonstra, “Een nieuwe manier van bijbellezen,” in the November 2013 issue of *Nader Bekeken* in the formulation of our main concern with the “Report Deputies Male/Female in the Church.”

Appendix 2

The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (BBK)
of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands
c/o BBK Office
Postbus 499
8000 AL Zwolle
The Netherlands

The Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA)
of the United Reformed Churches of North America
c/o Rev. Dick Moes
2156 49B Ave.
Langley, BC, Canada
43A 8P6

January 30, 2014

Dear Brothers in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We have had contact with you through brother Dick Moes about your possible presence at the General Synod of our churches being held this year. In an email exchange with Kim Batteau and in a personal conversation with Lucius de Graaff, we tried to explain the situation, as we perceive it.

First of all, we deeply regret that we did not inform you of our policy regarding contact-churches which are currently not seeking deeper contact with our churches (and thereby hoping to eventually establish a sister-church relation). This was an oversight on our part, and we are very sorry about it. Good communication is needed in relationships, including church relationships.

As far as the matter is concerned, Kim and Lucius tried to explain our policy to Dick. It may seem a bit strange to you, since Kim was a fraternal delegate to your Synod meeting in 2012 in Nyack, N.Y., and participated in various discussions there. However, that visit of Kim's to your Synod did not change the attitude of your churches to us, that is, officially your churches turned down our (repeated) offer of a sister-church relationship, and you officially decided to continue our relation at a "lower level" than a full sister-church relationship. This, on the basis of concern about our spiritual and theological direction as a church federation. We regretted that then, and regret it still. The consequence is that our relationship is not moving to deeper contact, on the contrary.

Expressing criticism is certainly a right of all churches which have contact with each other, but we have the policy that if a non-sister-church is not seriously interested in establishing a sister-church relationship, we will not invite such a church to our General Synod to send official delegates with the right of speaking on the floor at plenary sessions.

There is another possibility, whereby you might want to send observers to our General Synod. It is always possible for a contact-church, such as yours, to send delegates to attend a General Synod as observers, however, as mentioned, without the right of speaking on the floor at plenary sessions. If you would like to send such observers, they would be welcome.

We would like to underscore our desire to maintain and develop good relationships with all confessionally Reformed churches in the world. However, because of the policy framework we are currently using, this means that we cannot extend to you an invitation to attend our General Synod as a church contact with real potential for a sister-church relation at this time.

Once again, we regret not having communicated this to you on time, or sufficiently. We pray that God would bless your federation with faith and obedience to our Lord and His Word.

Sincerely in Christ,

On behalf of BBK,

Klaas Wezeman, chairman of BBK

Appendix 3

VISIT TO THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

MARCH 2014

Thursday March 6, 2014

I arrived around noon at Kinshasa's International Airport, a day later than anticipated, since I had missed my connecting flight in Addis Ababa due to a two-hour delay coming from Toronto.

After clearing customs, which went easier than anticipated, I was welcomed outside the airport building by two pastors of the United Reformed Churches of the Congo (URCC), Revs. Kalala Kabongo and Abel Ntita. The latter is a pastor (actually church planter) in the city, while the former is a pastor in place called Mbuji Mayi, some 600 km south east of the capitol. Rev. Kabongo served as my interpreter for most of the time. He studied at the school of the GKSA in Potchefstroom, RSA during the early nineties, and is well acquainted with the reformed ecclesiastical world.

We drove off into an easterly direction just south of the Congo River (the second largest river on the globe in terms of volume) on the Patrice Lumumba Freeway, named after the famed revolutionary leader and first Prime Minister on an independent Congo, who was executed in 1961.

On our way towards the hotel where I was booked in for the four nights we briefly stopped over at the Sion URCC congregation. This was to be my first real exposure to the Congo. I was struck by the abject poverty visible everywhere in the township, but equally impressed by the friendliness and neat appearance of most of its people.

We entered a half completed, half ruined church building to meet with a few elders who were waiting upon our arrival. After being warmly welcomed and treated to an ice cold Coke in a bottle (a typical African custom which I also experienced in Malawi) I was invited to address the brothers. I spoke briefly from Ephesians 4:1-6 and encouraged them in their great calling and work. After some pictures were taken we were on our way again to Hotel Ixoras, situated some 20 km. further down the highway in the suburb of Limete.

After a shower and some rest the two pastors came to pick me for a meeting at a nearby restaurant, where I enjoyed supper. We spoke at length about the state of the URCC in general, its brief history, the split that occurred around 2008 (and the different perspectives on it), as well as on the URCC's ecumenical relations. Rev. Kabongo presented me with a fact sheet on the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a nation as well as on URCC as a federation. I was also informed on the URCC's doctrinal position and style of church government and was presented with a beautiful new copy of the Heidelberg Catechism in the Tshiluba language (sponsored by the Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto).

The pastors explained in some detail how secularism, the cults and Islam are steadily making inroads into the Congolese society (which is nominally still 80% Christian) and how the small reformed witness is struggling to find its place amidst a sea of Pentecostalism and the emerging Prosperity Gospel craze (introduced to the African continent from America via Nigeria). Muslims also begin to infiltrate largely through business and trade by making sure that all their employees (in a country of rampant unemployment) submit to Allah. Though Congolese society is still quite pro American, negative Western impact is especially felt through the promotion of permissive sexual values and violence by means of the powerful entertainment industry and more in particular by Western governments enforcing on African countries the acceptance of homosexuality. Rev. Kabongo shared with me in dismay the latest news how the Swedish government was cutting off all economic support for Uganda due its government's stand against homosexuality. One should bear in mind that Congolese society is still in many ways quite conservative compared to the West. This can be seen in several ways, e.g. the modest apparel of females, respect for the elderly, and the absence of pornography.

Friday March 7, 2014

On Friday morning we made our way through the hectic traffic of the Lumumba Freeway towards downtown Kinshasa and beyond for three visits. The first was at Don de Dieu URCC where a dozen ladies were having a Bible study. The wife of the local pastor, Jeanne, addressed the ladies on their reformed identity. Subsequently, the president of the women's society led a Bible study from I Corinthians 13, pointing to God's great gift of love in Christ His Son and what it means to love each other as Christians today. I thought her presentation was sound, to the point and challenging. When given an opportunity to speak I did so briefly, speaking from Romans 6:23, encouraging these ladies in their walk with Christ. At the close I offered everybody a cold drink, which was purchased at a nearby vendor, one of literally thousands of such little makeshift stores in this mega city of seven million.

During refreshments Rev. Ntita shared with me that though divorce was by no means accepted by the Congolese society, it has unfortunately become all too common as of late. The URCC though has so far mostly been spared from the scourge. Another challenge the church has to face regarding marriage is the huge brides-price bridegrooms have to pay, anything up to \$2000 for a bride, making it impossible for some to marry when they want to. I encouraged him to call upon his people to break the shackles of this unbiblical traditional custom.

From hereon we went to another church-plant, some half an hour's drive through the city's nerve-wrecking maize of traffic, where an elder and his wife, Pierre and Pauline Mukala, their children, and some other believers were waiting on us. Pierre is an English teacher in his late forties. He was busy studying for the ministry at Lubumbashi when the training was suddenly discontinued by the leadership of the Eglise Réformée Confessante au Congo (ERCC), an action sparked by a disagreement between the ERCC's leadership and the Dutch missionaries, which directly led to the split in the federation and to the formation of the URCC (the URCC remaining sympathetic to the missionaries,

considering the closing of the seminary illegal and unwarranted). Pierre is now pursuing ways and means to complete his studies.

The “church building” where we sat was similar to the former one. Though up to forty souls meet here on a Sunday, it consists merely of some posts holding up a corrugated iron roof, and sheets of fabric serving as walls. One was nonetheless pleased to hear how well these believers are grounded in the reformed faith and how courageous they are to proclaim the full counsel of God in their predominantly Catholic / Pentecostal / Pagan environment. In the end Pauline Mukala eloquently summarized the challenges they are facing to establish a reformed witness in their community, one being their society’s reluctance to come to a church where the preacher is not an ordained pastor!

We left this church-plant and its wonderful people to travel through the late Friday afternoon traffic, which now seemed more chaotic than ever, the streets at one point awash with army soldiers returning from a military funeral. The cacophony of sounds was simply deafening, with horns honking, dog’s barking, men yelling, music playing, and a sea of motorbikes and cars driving everywhere at the same time. Thankfully we had a driver whom I paid \$10 per day for the five days.

Our third and last visit of the day was an elders meeting at a church where conditions were again extremely poor. The meeting lasted from three to five, with pastor Jean Philippe giving a beautiful exposition of John 10:1-6, speaking of our Lord Jesus as the Good Shepherd and what his example means for us as elders and pastors of the flock. Again, I could not so much as trace a shred of poor exegesis or theology, but only a sincere and sound exposition of Scripture. The pastor then went on to ask the brothers why church attendance is fluctuating so much from Sunday to Sunday. General consensus was reached that more consistent house visitation was needed, considering that many of these families are relative new to the reformed faith. I was asked to give my advice on worship and did so by pointing to the general guidelines that we hold dear as reformed churches, while acknowledging that the Gospel must be contextualized (while never compromised) in every culture in a unique way. We were then treated to some delicious fruit from the jungle before we headed back to my hotel, bringing to a close a very hot and busy day. That night a powerful tropical thunderstorm broke loose, the likes of which I have never experienced in my life, with thundering and lightening many times louder than the worse we experience in Ontario.

Saturday March 8, 2014

The next morning, less hot and humid due to all the rain, we visited the congregation of Rev. Abel Ntita in Limete, not far from my hotel. Here again ladies were gathering for Bible Study, their pastor teaching them about God’s covenant with Abraham and how His salvation does not only concern the individual but whole families, quoting Scripture from Genesis to Acts and beyond. I was asked to address the ladies and did so gladly from Mathew 5, pointing out how Christ came to liberate women from the bondage of sinful man’s degrading views and treatment of women. I did so against the backdrop of the terrible scourge of rape in the war-torn east of the country and also of news that morning yet that a new movement for women’s rights was founded in Kinshasa. As we left Rev.

Ntita told me that it was in fact International Women's Day!

Hereafter we went to Rev. Ntita's humble abode, which made me think of the kind of homes the Lord's people might have lived in in New Testament times. It is very basic and humble but warm and joyful. We were treated to delicious traditional Congo cuisine by Abel's wife Joseé, cooked on an open fire just outside the front door. I also met two of Abel's children.

We then made our way back to Sion URCC where we stopped over on the first day. Pastor Ntita had to teach a small group of elders on church planting. He translated into French and adapted to the Congolese context the book on church planting written by several of our URCNA pastors back home. Arriving there just after two, the meeting was already underway, with a young man teaching the brothers on a chalkboard. I was struck by this lad's joyful faith as he led us through the principles of church planting in French. He lives right next to the church and like so many others are jobless and praying for work. Pastor Ntita took over halfway and completed the afternoon's course, which lasted three hours, with no break for a drink on a very hot Saturday afternoon. I was wondering what most of us would be doing on a similar Saturday afternoon back in Ontario! In closing I also spoke a few words encouraging the brothers in their glorious task of planting churches in the DRC. After some refreshments – coke in a bottle again- we left for home bringing to an end another very busy day. In the car on our way back, Rev. Ntita shared with me that he has never been a pastor of an established congregation, but has always been planting churches. I was also impressed how he challenged his Congolese brothers during the afternoon to take the Gospel deep into the jungle to the Pygmies, and not to look down on them because they are of a different race.

Sunday March 9, 2014

On Sunday morning we were all going to worship at the Sion URCC where I have been twice before. The service lasted about three hours and was quite an experience. Though in many ways different from ours in worship style, especially its singing, the order of worship is reformed from beginning to end. The lyrics of the songs were clearly Biblical and Evangelical and well chosen to fit the order of worship. The law was read from Jeremiah 7, the assurance of pardon was clearly proclaimed, the singing was moving and passionate, the Apostles Creed was confessed by the whole congregation standing, the administration of baptism was similar to ours (with the same questions being asked to the couple after a brief explanation of the meaning of the sacrament). I was granted the honour to preach and did so expounding God's Word from Ephesians 2:1-10, introducing my message with the story of the slave trader saved by grace, John Newton. Remarkably enough, only a few folks in the audience have ever heard of Newton or William Wilberforce.

The faith, joy and love that I experienced among these Christians in their humble circumstances was something hard to forget. And again one cannot but be impressed by how well and modestly these people dress for worship in spite of their many material challenges, including very poor facilities for worship. That indeed puts us to shame in the West, where even Reformed Christians are too readily influenced by the culture of the

day. On my way to the church that morning I took the pictures of two Mormon “churches” well built and in immaculate shape. But yet it was here in this humble place that the living God was pleased to gather for Himself a people through His Word and Spirit, in the one true faith, to the glory of His name.

That evening I met with my colleagues to close off my visit to the Congo. They asked me for my impressions and asked that I speak openly and honestly, which I did. They then shared with me their desire for closer ecumenical contact, i.e. ecumenical fellowship, and that we may come to their help in some of their most basic and urgent needs.

The next morning around ten, my two colleagues came to take me to the airport, the traffic now being much calmer. We greeted each other with warm Christian affection, hoping that we would yet see each other’s faces again.

BASIC FACTS ON THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Population according to the BBC: 70 million

Capitol: Kinshasa / Second city: Lubumbashi

Political leader: President Joseph Kabila

Size: 2.34 million sq km. (one quarter the size of the US)

Major Languages: French, Lingala, Kiswahili, Kikongo, Tshiluba

Religion: Christianity 80%, Islam 12%, Traditional 3%, Other 5%

Life expectancy: 47 for men, 51 for women

The country is very rich in minerals, a major cause of political turmoil and government corruption.

Infrastructure beyond major cities is virtually non-existent.

The Congo River is the second largest in the world. A third of the country comprises of rainforest.

BASIC FACTS ON THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH OF THE CONGO

The United Reformed Church of the Congo (URCC) originated in 2008 due to a schism that occurred in the Eglise Réformée Confessante au Congo (ERCC) [The ERCC came into being in the 1980’s through the French Radio Ministry of Rev. Aaron Kayayan and mission work by the GKN-Vrijgemaakt around Lubumbashi in the south]

Church government: Presbyterial Synodal

Liturgy: Based on (Dutch) Reformed order of worship

Confessional basis: Three Ecumenical Creeds & Three Forms of Unity

Membership: 14 248

Congregations: 198, Church Plants 23, in 10 Provincial Synods

Office-bearers: Pastors 23, Elders 297, Deacons 218

Strengths:

1. Enthusiasm about evangelism and church planting
 2. Hunger for the Word, eager to lay solid Biblical foundations
 3. Strong marriages
 4. The URCC is registered with the government
 5. Preaching the full counsel of God amidst widespread spiritual confusion.
 6. Integrity of its leadership
- Challenges:
7. Widespread poverty and government corruption
 8. War in the east of the country & political instability
 9. Growing impact of Western Secularization through Internet and television.
 10. Growth of Islam, Cults, Pentecostalism and Prosperity Gospel
 11. Hierarchical tendency in Congolese culture
- Opportunities:
- 1) The Congolese are open to the Gospel
 - 2) The DRC's constitution recognizes the freedom of worship
 - 3) Ecumenical ties with RCUS, URCNA and GKN-V
 - 4) Membership of the ICRC
 - 5) Only real voice of consistent Christianity in the country
 - 6) Situated in the heart of Africa.
 - 7) Still free from Muslim extremist threats

Immediate Needs:

- Ordained ministers & theological training
- Translation of the catechism and other essential literature into the various indigenous languages.
- Hymn books.
- Robust apologetics to face rising challenges from several quarters
- Lack of church buildings
- Assistance in socio-economic projects

Recommendations

- That we enter into Phase Two or ecumenical fellowship with the URCC
- That we seriously consider how we can be of help to our Congolese brothers and sisters in their need. Humbly submitted, Rev. Christo Heiberg

Appendix 4

Report of Visit to Indonesia

July 31 – August 14, 2013

Brothers, herewith a brief report of my visit to Indonesia.

As per our decision (made at our face-to-face meeting in Chicago, January 24, 2013) namely that I should seek opportunity to travel to Indonesia with a member of the CanRC, I traveled with the Rev. Dr. Andrew Pol to Indonesia leaving on July 31 and returning on the 14th of August. We flew to Denpasar, Bali where we “rested” for a day and a half, whereupon we flew to Waingapu, Sumba, the Island where the Synod of the GGRI would hold its meetings.

For the next three nights, we lodged with the Rev. Doko, a “retired” teacher of the theological school of the GGRI. He had suffered a stroke four years ago and now lives in squalor, not having received any income for several months. (I had agreed with Rev. Pol that, rather than lodging in a Hotel, we should stay at the home of church members.) On Sunday, August 4, I preached at Petawang, Rev. Pol translating.

On Monday we met with the members of the Soli Deo Gloria Foundation (YaSDeG) which operates a Reformed Senior High School, grades 10-12, near Waingapu. Since this is the only such school in Sumba (operated by members of the GGRI) most of the students live on “campus”. We discussed the ministry needs of the school for the future. There may be opportunity for the school to purchase some additional land which will permit the school both to expand its “program”, e.g. teaching the students how to care for land and animals, and enlarge its facilities. Whether the Theological School should also be located on this property is a matter under discussion.

On Tuesday we drove to Kataka, a small, poverty-stricken village in the hills where the Regional Synod of the GGRI was scheduled to meet for two weeks. (No Western style conveniences available there.) In addition to Rev. Pol of the CanRC, a “foreign” delegate was present also from Australia (from the FRCA which has ecumenical relations with and is supportive of some of the ministry programs of the GGRI). Also present were Rev. Yonson Dethan (along with two delegates) from the GGRC and Rev. Edwer Dethan, the missionary of the Smithville CanRC working in Timor – operating a broadcasting ministry and a Bible College. Since Rev. Pol had served as a missionary on Sumba for five years, he is fluent in the language spoken – a great blessing for me. Rev. Pol would type up the gist of the discussion – so as to keep me abreast of the Agenda matters discussed. As did the other “foreign” delegates, I spoke some words of greeting. – underscoring, i.a., the importance of the GGRI and the GGRC coming to ecumenical unity. (Though I was not a delegate, I was well received.)

On Thursday (for most of the afternoon and early evening) the visitors/delegates from “abroad” met with the “CECCA” members of the GGRI. We discussed at length the “issue” of the relationship between the GGRI (with whom both the CanRC and the FRCA have Ecumenical relations) and the GGRC (with whom the URCNA has an Ecumenical Contact relationship). The GGRI has most of its congregations in Sumba (with one in

Timor) and the GGRC has its congregations in Timor. Historically, the two federations had worked together quite amiably. Depending on who you ask, the reason for the misunderstandings that have plagued the two federations of late are variously attributed to (1) pressures from the FRCA (re ministry programs), (2) conflicts between the brothers Dethan, (3) a conflict between Yonson Dethan and an earlier leader of the GGRC (who has now passed away – whose funeral Yonson was asked to conduct!), and (4) the question of the relationship between the ministry of the Smithville CanRC (Rev. Edwer Dethan) and both the GGRI and GGRC.

As I listened to (and indeed participated in the “discussions”), it struck me that the GGRI is very sensitive to (what it considers to be) interference from especially the FRCA. There was a genuine desire (expressed by the GGRI members) for ecumenical relations with the GGRC. The GGRC, though surely not averse to ecumenical relations with the GGRI, expressed a lot of hurt because of unresolved past issues – not the least of which is the “judgement” (expressed by the delegate of the FRCA) against the person of Rev. Yonson Dethan. At our meeting, all participants pledged to work toward “ecumenical union” between the two federations.

The Rev. Madah Biha, a member of the “CECCA” committee of the GGRI (the only pastor of the GGRI working in Timor) expressed genuine interest in having an ecumenical relationship with the URCNA. He indicated that he would be in contact with me/us.

(It should be noted that the GGRI is a new federation presently made up of three Regional Synods. The three Regional Synods – the GGRI-NTT in Sumba, the Reformed Churches in KalBar [Borneo] and the Reformed Churches in Papua – formed the GGRI in the Spring of 2012 with a view “to work together more closely and to help each other – in their respective three provinces”. Should the GGRC decide to join this new federation, it would continue to hold its own Regional Synod meetings – as do the other three members – and gather with the (General) Synod of the GGRI when it meets. The mission churches established by the mission work of Smithville CanRC through the ministry of Rev. Edwer Dethan also plan to join this new federation “once the GGRI-NTT and the GGRC decide to unite”.

It should also be noted that both federations operate a “Theological School” and that the school in Sumba has not been “accredited” while the school in Kupang is “accredited”. The idea is, therefore, that the theological students from Sumba go to Timor for their last year so as to be eligible for a diploma “that is officially recognized in Indonesia”. It is my understanding that these “theological schools” are post High School, not post College institutions. It is for that reason that some of the graduates are sent to Canada or Holland for additional training.)

On Thursday evening we (Rev. Yonson Dethan and I) left Kataka. We spent another night at the home of Rev. Doko. Friday was a travel day. Yonson and I traveled to the Airport that morning and waited many hours before we could fly from Waingapu, Sumba to Kupang, Timor.

On Saturday I met for nearly 5 hours with the CECCA committee of the GGRC. Some of the questions (which we had raised and discussed at the Synod) I also discussed with these brothers – including (1) What is your view of/response to the question: “How can the GGRC and the GGRI come together?” (2) Do you agree that the GGRC should be admitted to/accepted as a Regional Synod of the GGRI – of which the GGRI-NTT is also a member? (3) Do you agree that the mission work of Rev. Edwer Dethan (eventually) be recognized as the work of the GGRC?

Additionally, I asked the brothers “What do you see should be the fruit of our (that is of the URCNA and the GGRC) ecumenical relations?” In response, the brothers told me not only such things as: we have one Savior; we are brothers, we hold to the same doctrines; we have an obligation to know each other and support each other. They also said that they have a good strategy for reaching out to the un-churched and could share that with us. They indeed agreed that communicating via the Internet is good; however, a “personal relationship” is better – so as to gain a good (a better) understanding of each other. They look forward not only to hear our preaching, they very much anticipate that some of us will come to conduct seminars on agreed upon topics/issues. We spent some very meaningful time together which was enjoyed and appreciated by all the participants.

Later on that Saturday, I met with Rev. Ed Dethan at “his” school and broadcasting facility. Though we were somewhat pressed for time (Ed had to take his wife to the hospital because of an injury to her foot), I got a very good impression of the theological school (whose Library holds 1254 of my books). Whereas the Soli Deo Gloria Reformed School in Sumba is a High School, this school offers a post High School curriculum. The school is presently involved in a building program; quite impressive! The radio programs can be heard throughout Timor.

On Sunday I preached twice – again with interpreters. This went well. I spent considerable time talking with Yonson – both on Sunday and on Monday morning. He is rather disturbed (and indeed “down”) about (what he experiences as) attacks against him. I believe Yonson appreciated the talks, I will touch base with him again in Cardiff (the venue of the ICRC meeting) later this month.

On Monday I travelled back to Denpasar, Bali; spent another night at the Hotel; was dropped off at the Airport at 2:30 PM on Tuesday; waited 11 hours (till 1:30 AM on Wednesday) and flew home via Seoul and Chicago to Toronto where I arrived at 5:00 PM – a long 36 hour day later.

I thank the Lord for His guiding mercies. He made all things wondrously well for me. I thank you for permitting me to make this trip. May it serve to enhance our relationship with the churches in Indonesia – the GGRC and the GGRI.

In Christ,
Rev. Ray Sikkema

Appendix 5

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

Moderator, fathers and brethren,

I have the distinct honor of being the first representative of the United Reformed Churches in North America to bring you face-to-face greetings. We are grateful for the relationship that has been forged in our mutual love for the King of the Church and the commitment that our churches have to the enduring truth of God's Word. As we give expression to our unity in Jesus Christ, we look forward to seeing how the Lord will both cure and mature the foundation that has already been laid through our ecumenical contact. If this is going to take place, though, it might be helpful for me to better introduce you to the federation of churches that I represent.

The United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) was formally organized in 1996 at Synod Lynwood. This was an exciting development that came during a very painful time. The preceding years were ones of heartache as we saw our former denomination surrender the authority of Scripture to the issues of the day. After years of seeking to work against this erosive tide, the Lord graciously allowed the URCNA to form. The burden of our founding fathers was not to create something new but to return to something old - to return to the simple truth of God's Word and the summaries of that Word in the Three Forms of Unity.

Since 1996, the Lord has tremendously blessed the URCNA. We are a federation of 115 congregations spread throughout the United States and Canada. We consist of nearly 24,000 souls, being served by 1120 elders and deacons and 145 ministers. We have numerous church plants in places such as Hawaii, Washington DC, New York City and Toronto. We have mission works and international church planting endeavors in Italy, the Philippines, India and Central America. The Lord has further blessed us with numerous ecumenical relations with Reformed and Presbyterian churches in North America and across the globe.

At Synod London (Ontario, Canada) 2010, the Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA), the committee on which I serve, reported on the letter that we received from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) and your request to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship. While we were excited about this development, CECCA decided to put this request on hold temporarily. The committee wanted to spend some time learning about your history and your relationship to the Free Church of Scotland.

At Synod Nyack (New York, USA) 2012, CECCA had the privilege of hosting Mr. Warren Gardner from the FCC. We appreciated his address to our synod and enjoyed learning more about your churches as he met with our committee. Having previously investigated your history and having satisfactorily answered the questions that were

asked at Synod London, I'm grateful to report that the URCNA voted to enter into phase one "Ecumenical Contact" with the FCC.

Given the newness of our relationship, your invitation to us to attend this meeting of your General Assembly is most helpful. The purpose for "Ecumenical Contact," according to our committee's mandate, is to "focus on studying matters of general concern between the URCNA and the 'foreign' federation."

Having read the report of your General Assembly 2012 in the *Free Church Witness*, there are a two areas in which I want to encourage you.

First, our Church Order states, "*The 150 Psalms shall have the principle place in the singing of the churches.*" While our federation does not exclusively sing from the Psalter, we share your enthusiasm for Psalm singing. We encourage you to remain resolute in the use of God's Word as your source of praise. You have done wonderful work through the resources that you make available and the beautiful CDs that have been produced.

Second, the institution of marriage as ordained by God is under attack in the United Kingdom as it is in the United States. The apostle Paul reminds us that marriage is a picture of the mysterious union between Christ and the Church. Tragically, this inescapable truth is being suppressed in unrighteousness. Nevertheless, "bride" and "bridegroom" are not simply words with which we have formed an emotional attachment. These are gospel words. They represent the hope of the gospel. Thus, the blurred lines are not just in terms of human relationships. The gospel is being blurred, as it is with all other assaults on marriage. As you bring the hope of the nations through this contemporary issue, may you do so in a winsome way. With grace on your lips, may the Lord use your voice to be diligent defenders of the faith and compassionate shepherds calling for the lost to be found through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Finally, accept my personal gratitude for all your help and hospitality in allowing my wife and I to be in your company during this week. A special thanks to Mr. MacLeod for all his help in preparing me for this assembly along with the assistance of Mr. Gracie and Mr. Gardner. We look forward to being able to reciprocate by hosting you at our upcoming synodical meeting in 2014 in Visalia, California. Until then, may the Lord of the Church continue to feed and sustain you for the sake of the glorious work to which He has called you.

Humbly Submitted,

Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra

Foreign Delegate (URCNA)

Appendix 6

A Report on the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC)

On May 20th, the Free Church of Scotland Continuing convened its annual meeting of General Assembly at the Liberton Kirk in Edinburgh, Scotland. This assembly is made up of elders and minsters from the six presbyteries of the FCC. It is tasked, not unlike our synods, with handling overtures, committee reports and the general business of the church. There was nothing particularly controversial or divisive on the docket for 2013 and the matters of the church were dealt with as efficiently as they were carefully.

The FCC is made up of thirty-eight churches and one foreign mission in Canada. While it might sound odd to our ears, they have a US Presbytery that consists of five congregations. In fact, this year's GA was moderated by the minister of the Atlanta congregation, Rev. Warren Gardner. Not only was it odd for this US citizen to rise for the reading of the Loyal and Dutiful Address to Her Majesty the Queen, it was even more strange to have it read with a Southern drawl! (Rev. Gardner was later assured that he did not relinquish his citizenship for reading said address.) Rev. Gardner showed himself a capable moderator and a compassionate servant of Christ and His church. His leadership and wisdom was greatly appreciated by the body.

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.

The reasons for the disruption in 2000 are too numerous to get into in this report. If you are interested, I would strongly encourage reading their history in a free download written by Ian Murray (www.freechurchcontinuing.org/publications/books). It is a sad history that brings to mind the words of the Apostle Paul in I Cor. 10:12, "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*" A warning to us all.

On Tuesday evening, I was invited to address the GA on behalf of the URCNA. This privilege came as a result of the decision made at Synod Nyack 2012 to enter into "Phase I: Ecumenical Contact" relations with the FCC. My address focused the URCNA's history as a federation and the shared convictions and concerns of our federations. I was not the only one to address the body. Delegates from Australia, South Africa, England, Wales and Northern Ireland also addressed the body during the week.

The GA ended as it began, with thanks and praise to God. While we have different confessional backgrounds, it was clear that we share the singular, like precious faith. Our practices may differ at points (no instruments, exclusive metrical Psalm singing), but our similarities are clear. Having spent a week with our brothers and sisters in Scotland, the blessing of our ecumenical bond is unquestionable. May the Lord greatly bless this new relationship, for His glory and the building up of His church.

Humbly Submitted,

Rev. Wm. Jason Tuinstra

Appendix 7

FREE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN ARGENTINA (FPCA) aka Iglesia Protestante Libre

CECCA discussed in considerable detail the FPCA and its pastor Br. Jose Luis Podesta at its annual face-to-face meeting in Hamilton, Ontario on 1/15/14. This ministry is located in Santa Fe, Argentina which is a city of 350,000 people some six hours northwest of Buenos Aires. We currently have Level I contact with him and his organization. Br. Podesta is aware of the relationship that the UCNRA has with the Reformed Church in Milan, Italy (sometimes called "the Milan Model") and has in the past expressed interest in initiating a similar relation. Nevertheless, due primarily to language difficulties, contact with him had become sporadic in recent months. In the interim it developed that one of the newer members of CECCA, Doug Field, knows Spanish and the committee asked him to contact Br. Podesta, obtain current information about him and his ministry and evaluate whether a visit to him in Santa Fe would be appropriate prior to the deadline for submission of this report.

Br. Field made contact with Br. Podesta by email on 1/18/14 and he responded immediately and in great detail. They then had about an hour's Skype conversation on 1/22/14 and that has been followed by numerous emails. All of these contacts have been fully reported by Br. Field to the committee. They may be summarized as follows:

Pastor Podesta appears to be in his mid-40's. He is extremely pleasant, open, honest and forthright. He is an immensely voluble talker. Not only his email correspondence but his conversation in person is distinctly stream-of-consciousness.

In essence, he is back to square one and is looking at starting up his ministry anew. There were some "betrayals" by other pastors and congregants with whom he was involved before and this wrecked his ministry. There were sexual immoralities, other scandals and lies, the details of which were not possible to obtain. He has taken a year to think things over and reorganize. Evidently, at its zenith his ministry had some 6 churches but the implication is that they were quite small.

At present it is Br. Podesta and 8 to 10 other people who meet in the home of his "novia" (this word means both serious girlfriend and fiancée). They are in need of virtually everything, prayer, finance and mentoring. He commented to Br. Field that he is of Italian extraction (millions of Argentines are) and that he sometimes has an angry and volatile temper that needs reining in by way of what he calls "sharing experiences" and which might more precisely be called mentoring/guidance counseling.

Some trouble was experienced getting the details of his theological education and ordination. He evidently started out as a Catholic novitiate. He studied for several years in Spain. He got interested in the Reformation when in the course of his studies to become a Catholic priest he read some Martin Luther. He told his professor that he thought Luther made a lot of sense and that was the beginning of the end for him with

Rome. He indicates that he has 6 years theological education and is "Licenciado" in theology. The term "licenciado" in Spanish America refers to a person who has completed all education and testing for a given profession. As an example, engineers, architects, attorneys and accountants are all "licenciado."

He says he is ordained in the OPC. By way of potential mutual contact he mentioned Rev. Steven Larson who is an OPC minister now out of the ministry and thought to be teaching math at a junior college somewhere in the area of Santa Ana, California. He professed to be completely unfamiliar with CLIR. It was posed to him whether preferred an ecumenical relationship through CECCA or perhaps to be adopted by an individual URCNA congregation and he responded, "anything and everything." What was clear is that he is not in contact with any other ecumenical committee and he has and has had no other ecclesiastical fellowship status with anyone. Br. Field was not successful in getting information about what may be available in his own denomination, but it is certain that he is not taking advantage of anything. He said that as far as reformed churches in Argentina are concerned generally there isn't much. Maybe there exist one or two in Buenos Aires and about 6 Korean reformed churches that have what it is inferred is a little federation there.

He would welcome a visit from CECCA or other representative(s) of the URCNA and indicated that this could be accomplished either in Buenos Aires, thus avoiding the visitors a six-hour bus ride to Santa Fe or in Santa Fe itself. He was willing to complete the visit by mid to late March if desired.

Br. Podesta is born and raised in Santa Fe. In the current circumstances of restarting his ministry he is making his living giving natural and traditional Chinese medical treatments and therapies. He mentioned that he is taking some classes for which he soon needs to sit for examination and they are in traditional Chinese medicine.

Br. Field determined that it would be difficult based upon what is currently known to recommend that CECCA make the expenditure of time and resources to visit Br. Podesta in Santa Fe. At best this good brother is involved in a very nascent re-start of whatever ministry he formerly had there. What he needs and wants and repeatedly brings up in various ways, more or less artfully couched, is money. He obviously has little to no giving base and his group of believers is not generating any appreciable level of donations at all as far as could be determined.

In view of the more detailed information that they now have of the specific circumstances of the FPCA ministry, the brothers of CECCA have considered how best to support the effort in Argentina and concluded that FPCA would be best helped if a single sponsoring congregation of the URCNA could be located to cooperate with it, assist it and maintain regular contact with it. By way of formal letter to him dated 2/3/14 CECCA advised Br. Podesta that it believes at this time the URCNA can most effectively work with him and his ministry through a single one of our congregations. He has been advised of the dates of Synod Visalia and told that CECCA hopes to propose that a congregation of the United Reformed Churches sponsor the ministry in Argentina. He understands that

CECCA will not be making a visit this spring. CECCA expressed its hope that the sponsoring church might do so if all materializes as we desire.

Br. Podesta responded warmly to CECCA's decision, indicated that he looks very much forward to developments at Synod Visalia and in any event expressed desire to remain in permanent contact with CECCA.

Humbly submitted,
Douglas Field

Appendix 8

The Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT)

We believe that Holy Scriptures (OT and NT) fully contain the will of God, and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for anyone to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures.

We accept Ecumenical creeds; i.e. the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. We accept The Three Forms of Unity as well as Westminster Confession of Faith as official statement of the ERCLAT.

FORM OF SUBSCRIPTION

We, the undersigned, Ministers of the Gospel and Elders of the Reformed congregation of _____ of the Synod of ERCLAT sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this our subscription that we believe that the Three Forms of Unity and Westminster Confession of Faith fully agree with the Word of God.

We promise teach and to defend the doctrine by our public preaching, teaching or writing. If we will have any difficulties respecting doctrine, we promise we will speak first reveal it to Synod to examine such sentiments and we will submit to the judgment of the Synod. If we refuse to submit then by this very fact we will be suspended from the office.

The Riga Reformed Bible Church has been planted at 1990 by pastor Alvis Sauka with 12 teens as first attendees. The most important molder of our theology, ecclesiology and so on has been Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary(BRTS) founded by and with assistance of Professor Gerard Van Groningen from Covenant Theological Seminary at 1998. Professors like Mark Vanderhart, Cornelis Venema, Gerard Van Groningen, Hans Buyer, Simon Kistemaker, Larry Sibley and more have been very important in shaping our worldview. Then after 10 years Riga Reformed Bible Church sent out team lead by pastor Ungars Gulbis to plant another Reformed Congregation, i.e. Riga Reformed Church at 2000.

So now our synod or presbytery consists of two Reformed Congregations. We have just started to write our book of church order and polity. Elders from each congregation meet once a quarter for dealing with current situation, problems etc if there is no need to meet more for dealing with something urgent.

There is no fixed liturgical order for our churches except that it should contain, preaching of the word, sacrament, prayers (all forms) and fellowship. We suggest to have Holy Supper each Sunday as Jean Calvin wanted for his congregation. If there is problem of discipline in any of our churches it is dealt locally and if necessary we deal with at

meetings of Presbytery.

Ministers of ERCLAT are trained mainly at BRTS. ERCLAT has sister relationships with Reformed Church Liberated Of Netherlands, we are in a friendship with Oak Glen United Reformed Church (pastor John Vermeer), St. Helens Church in London (Senior pastor William Tailor) and Presbyterian Church on Ireland, we are members of World Reformed Fellowship (WRF).

Appendix 9

CONSTITUTION OF THE ICRC

I. NAME

The name of the Conference shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches (“ICRC”).

II. BASIS

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

III. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Member Churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches;
3. to facilitate and promote cooperation among the Member Churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the Member Churches;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

IV. MEMBERSHIP

1. The Conference was duly constituted on October 26, 1982, by delegates from the eight founding churches, having been previously authorized to do so by their major assemblies. A list of past and present members of the Conference shall be maintained among the Conference’s documents.

2. Churches eligible for membership are those which:
 - a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
 - b. have complied with the applicable *Regulations* regarding applications for membership;
 - c. are not members of any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis.

3. Admission to membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote.

4. Suspension or termination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes that a Member Church, in its doctrine and/or practice (which includes the ordination of persons to the offices of minister or ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 30) is no longer in agreement with the Basis. Removal of suspension shall also be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote. A proposal to suspend, terminate, or remove the suspension of the membership of a Member Church may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church. A suspended Member Church may send Delegates to meetings of the Conference but shall not vote.

5. When a Member Church fails to send at least one Delegate to three consecutive meetings of the Conference, its membership shall be automatically terminated as of close of the third such meeting, unless during that meeting the Conference determines by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, that there are good and sufficient grounds for such failure.

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

It is understood that the Conference is not a synodical, classical, or presbyterial assembly, and therefore all actions and decisions of the Conference, other than those with respect to a church's membership in the Conference (*Constitution*, IV), are advisory in character and may in no way curtail, restrict, or intrude into the exercise of the jurisdiction or authority given to the governing assemblies of the Member Churches by Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church.

VI. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

This *Constitution* may be amended by two-thirds majority vote of the major assemblies of the Member Churches eligible to vote, such amendment having been proposed to the Member Churches by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches present and eligible to vote, each Member Church having one vote. An amendment, as proposed to the Member Churches, is not amendable.

A proposal to amend the *Constitution* may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church eligible to vote, or by a Committee of the Conference, and shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary not later than two years before the meeting of the Conference.

PROPOSED CONSTITUTION **(Showing Amendments in Context)**

I. NAME

The name of the Conference shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches (“ICRC”).

II. BASIS

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

III. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Mmember Cchurches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Mmember Cchurches;
3. to facilitate and promote encourage cooperation among the Mmember Cchurches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the Mmember Cchurches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

IV. MEMBERSHIP

1. The Conference was duly constituted on October 26, 1982, by delegates from the eight founding churches, having been previously authorized to do so by their major assemblies.

A list of past and present members of the Conference shall be maintained among the Conference’s documents.

Those Cchurches eligible for membership are those shall be admitted as members which:

- a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
- b. have complied with the applicable Regulations regarding applications for membership been sponsored by at least two member Churches;
- c. furnish
 - i. their confessional standards,
 - ii. their declaratory acts (if applicable),
 - iii. their form of subscription,
 - iv. their form of government;
- d.c. are not members of the World Council of Churches or any other organization

(such as the World Council of Churches or the World Communion of Reformed Churches) whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis;

e. are accepted by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, every member Church having one vote.

3. Admission to membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote.

4. Suspension or tTermination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Mmember Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes is of the opinion that the Mmember Church, in its

doctrine and/or practice (which includes the ordination of persons to the offices of minister or ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in I Timothy), is no longer in agreement with the

Basis; removal of suspension shall also be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote. A proposal to suspend, terminate, or remove the suspension of the membership of a Member Church may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church. A suspended Member Church may send Delegates to meetings of the Council but shall not vote.

2.5. When a Member Church fails to send at least one Delegate to three consecutive meetings of the Conference, its membership shall be automatically terminated as of close of the third such meeting, unless during that meeting the Conference determines by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, that there are good and sufficient grounds for such failure.

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

It is understood that the Conference is not a synodical, classical, or presbyterial assembly, and therefore all actions and decisions of the Conference, other than those with respect to a church's membership in the Conference (Constitution, IV), are advisory in character and may in no way curtail, restrict, or intrude into the exercise of the jurisdiction or authority given to the governing assemblies of the Member Churches by Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church. The conclusions of the Conference shall be advisory in character. Member Churches are to be informed of these conclusions and are recommended to work towards their implementation.

VI. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

This The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the major assemblies of the Mmember Cchurches eligible to vote, such amendment having been proposed to the Member Churches by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches present and eligible to vote, each Member Church having one vote.

An amendment, as proposed to the Member Churches, is not amendable.

A proposal to amend the Constitution may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church eligible to vote, or by a Committee of the Conference, and The proposed amendment(s) shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary not later than two years before the meeting of the Conference. He shall send it to the member churches immediately.

Appendix 10

Report of the ICRC Meeting in Cardiff, Wales August 28-September 4, 2013²

On Wednesday evening, August 28, delegates, observers and visitors of the Eighth Meeting of the ICRC assembled for a Prayer Service in the sanctuary of the Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Cardiff, Wales. Rev. Dr. Peter Naylor led the service and Rev. Ian Hamilton, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Cambridge, England, preached a sermon on 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 under the theme “The Context and Privilege of Gospel Ministry.” Several brothers from the UK led in prayer for the conference, the delegates and their respective churches and the kingdom of God generally. The delegates, together with members of the churches in the area of Cardiff, “lifted the roof” in joyful praise to the Lord singing Psalms and hymns. The URCNA delegates at this conference were brother Huibert den Boer, Rev. Dick Moes and Rev. Ray Sikkema (chairman of the Mission’s Committee).

The conference was held in the conference centre of the University of South Wales, Pontypridd, where most of the delegates were accommodated. A few delegates were accommodated at the Village Hotel about 6 miles away. The staff at the Stilts Food Court on the university campus provided excellent meals.

The conference was opened by the retiring chairman, Rev. Bruce Hoyt, who welcomed the delegates from far and near and then led in a brief meditation on Luke 18:24-34. At the recommendation of the Interim Committee the following were appointed as the Executive: Rev. Richard Holst (EPCEW) Chairman, Rev. Dick Moes (URCNA) Vice-Chairman, Rev. Dr Peter Naylor (EPCEW) Recording Secretary, Rev. Dr James Visscher (CanRC) Corresponding Secretary, and Mr Kyle Lodder (CanRC) Treasurer. The chairman expressed appreciation to Rev. Cornelius van Spronsen, the retiring Corresponding Secretary, and Mr Henk Berends, the retiring Treasurer, for their faithful service over many years. Both Corresponding Secretary and Treasurer served in their function during this ICRC.

When the conference opened there were 30 member churches as follows:

8) <i>Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church</i>	<i>ARPC</i> ³
9) Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia	CRCI
10) Canadian and American Reformed Churches	CanRC
11) Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands	CRCN
12) Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales	EPCEW
13) Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland	EPCI
14) Free Church of Scotland	FCS
15) Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)	FCSC
16) Free Church in Southern Africa	FCSA

² Taken largely from the Press Release written by Rev. Jack Sawyer (OPC) and Rev. Bruce Hoyt (RCNZ).

³ If a member church is not represented at the Eighth ICRC 2013, it is shown in italics.

17) Free Reformed Churches of North America	FRCNA
18) Free Reformed Churches of South Africa	FRCSA
19) Heritage Reformed Congregations	HRC
20) Independent Reformed Church in Korea	IRCK
21) Orthodox Presbyterian Church	OPC
22) Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia	PCEA
23) Presbyterian Church Korea (Kosin)	PCKK
24) Presbyterian Free Church of India	PFCI
25) Reformed Churches of Brazil	RCB
26) Reformed Churches in Indonesia	RCI
27) Reformed Churches in the Netherlands	RCN
28) Reformed Churches of New Zealand	RCNZ
29) <i>Reformed Churches of Spain</i>	RCS
30) Reformed Churches in South Africa	RCSA
31) Reformed Church in the United States	RCUS
32) Reformed Presbyterian Church of India	RPCInd
33) Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland	RPCI
34) Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America	RPCNA
35) Reformed Presbyterian Church of NE India	RPCNEI
36) <i>United Reformed Church in Congo</i>	URCC
37) United Reformed Churches in North America	URCNA

During the conference the following churches were received as members with joy and thanksgiving:

1) Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Kenya)	AEPC
2) Sudanese Reformed Churches	SRC

The theme of the Conference was “Preach the Word” based upon 2 Tim 4:2. This theme was covered in three papers. The authors of the papers gave addresses based on their papers in the evening sessions which allowed members of the local churches to hear the addresses. On the morning following each address, the conference divided into four groups for discussion, after which there was a period of questions from the groups directed to the author of the papers.

Rev. Dr Robert Letham (EPCEW) gave the first address entitled “The Necessity of Preaching” Dr Letham noted that preaching involves a proclamation of the Word of God and an appeal to the hearers, which requires the work of the Holy Spirit to bring about change in the hearts of the hearers. He noted that while the Spirit and the (proclaimed) Word are distinct, they are inseparable and so we can be confident that the preaching of the Word of God will accomplish God’s intended purpose. Rev. Dr James Visscher (CanRC) gave the second address entitled “The Nature of Preaching.” Dr Visscher noted that preaching is the faithful proclamation of God’s Word, which Word is a Triune revelation, covenantal in content, Christocentric, progressive, relevant, comprehensive, compelling, and evangelistic. Dr Visscher pointed out that each of these aspects of the Word has implications for preaching and for the hearer. Rev. Dr Jun Ho Jin (KPCCK) gave

the third address entitled “The Practice of Preaching in Non-Literary Cultures.” Dr Jin noted that 55% of the 650 million evangelical Christians are not Caucasian giving evidence that the centre of Christianity has shifted to Africa and Asia. In these continents literacy rates are low, 40% in Africa and 20% in Asia. Dr Jin, using Asia and specifically Cambodia as an example, recommended that preaching in non-literate cultures should be easy and simple, should include apologetics designed for the culture, should be expository and applicatory, should rise from a cultural “point of contact,” and should address the power encounters common in Asian culture.

Five churches applied for membership in the ICRC: the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (AEP), the Sudanese Reformed Churches (SRC), the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA), the Universal Reformed Christian Church in Nigeria (URCCN), and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Malawi (EPCM). These churches each gave an introduction of their church to the Conference. The URCCN and the EPCM were not accepted at this time due to the fact that they had only one sponsoring church instead of the two required. The CRCA missed being accepted by one vote. Had one of the sponsoring churches not left the conference early they would have been accepted.

In addition observers/delegates from the Reformed Churches of Korea (RCK) and the Reformed Churches of Brazil (RCB) also gave introductions of their churches.

The Missions Committee reported on its work in fulfilling its mandate. Two meetings were held, one in the Netherlands and one at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. The highlight of those meetings was the time spent with representatives of the missions’ agencies of some of the member churches. The Missions Committee wants to encourage all member churches to send members of their mission agencies to participate in such meetings for mutual reflection on the mission task of the church and to discuss strategies for building up of the church for the glory of our God.

Mr Mark Bube (OPC) prepared another edition of the “Mission Field Survey.” He explained the sections of the booklet and how useful it could be to churches that are engaging in mission to relate to one another and help one another. All member churches are urged to send in information for incorporation in a future update of the booklet.

A special committee to review the constitution, regulation and structures of the ICRC presented its report at this meeting of the Conference. The Conference proposed several amendments to the Constitution. This will be passed along to the major assemblies of the member churches for approval. The Conference also approved substantial revisions to its regulations. It recommended several changes to the structure of the Conference in order to encourage more regional interaction between the member churches and to give a higher priority to their theological education and diaconal ministries. To facilitate this a Coordinating Committee, a Theological Education, a Diaconal Committee and a Regional Conferences Committee have been appointed in addition to the already existing Missions Committee. Finally, in order to give greater visibility to the ICRC and to improve communication among the member churches and make information about the various

ministries of the member churches more easily accessible, a Website Committee was appointed.

The Conference adopted a four-year budget for 2014-2017 in the amount of \$155,000 USD, or \$35,000 USD per annum, was adopted. This is an increase of approximately \$15,000 USD from the previous budget total of \$140,000 USD. Resources for newly formed committees were budgeted.

The next meeting of the Conference is scheduled for 2017 in the Hamilton area of Ontario, with the Jordan United Reformed Church (URCNA) to be host church.

Humbly submitted,

Brother Huibert den Boer
Rev. Dick Moes
URCNA delegates

URCNA Web Oversight Committee Report **March 21, 2014**

Brothers in Christ,

The Web Oversight Committee is a standing committee of Synod comprised of representatives from each Classis and a synodically appointed Webmaster. The current members of the committee are as follows:

Classis Central US	Mr. Jay de Young (Secretary)
Classis Eastern US	Mr. Ray Lackey
Classis Michigan	Mr. Gary Fisher (Webmaster appointed by Synod)
Classis Ontario East	Mr. Bruce Vrieling (Chairman)
Classis Pacific Northwest	Rev. Adrian Dieleman
Classis Southwest Ontario	Mr. Tim Feijer
Classis Southwest US	Rev. R. Andrew Compton
Classis Western Canada	Mr. Kevin Pasveer

Each Classis is encouraged to ensure they have an active member on the Committee. There are several members who have not been heard from in quite some time; it is possible they have been retired by their Classis and a replacement has either not been found or has not contacted the Committee. Classis Clerks are requested to please contact the Webmaster (webmaster@urcna.org) and ensure the name and contact information of Classical appointees have been communicated properly when they change.

In the two years since the last Synod, the Committee has mostly communicated over email with no large projects on its agenda. Quite recently this has changed as we have been working with the hosting provider of the www.urcna.org website to migrate to a newer and more flexible backend system. It is our hope that this new system will allow us to finally address some of the look and feel deficiencies of the current site. (The date for migration has not yet been set, but we are hoping it will be before the start of Synod.)

As always, the Committee requests input from individuals and churches regarding the website. This input should normally flow through your Classis representative to take to the Committee.

Synod 2012 tasked the committee with developing guidelines regarding posting to the website, and also to create a job description for the webmaster. These are addressed among our recommendations below. Both items have been reviewed and approved by the Oversight Consistory as Synod requested.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That Synod thank Mr. Gary Fisher for his work as Webmaster, and re-appoint him for another term.

Recommendation 2: Synod 2012 directed the Web Oversight Committee to recommend an appropriate honorarium for the Webmaster. Our recommendation is that the current amount (\$4500/year) not be changed.

Recommendation 3: That Synod thank the Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church of Waupun for their oversight of the Committee, and request that its oversight continue until at least the next Synod.

Recommendation 4: That Synod direct the Classes to immediately stop collecting funds for the Web Oversight Committee (the amount is currently \$100 per year per Classis).

Grounds: a) There is plenty of money in the fund until at least the next Synod.

Recommendation 5: That Synod approve the following guidelines regarding posting of material to the website.

Guidelines for Posting Material to the Website

a. WHO IS AUTHORIZED TO POST: Individuals authorized to post material to the website include the Webmaster, the Stated Clerks from each Classis and the Synod, the Treasurers, the Convening Consistory, and a designated administrator from each synodical committee (who have their own page). In addition, each church is responsible for entering and maintaining its own church data. In each of these instances this is done with the help of the webmaster as needed.

b. TYPES OF MATERIALS POSTED: Normally materials posted will fall within the boundaries of what has been previously authorized by Synod (see *Acts of Synod 2007* Article 51). Recognizing that occasional exceptions need to be made, minor deviations can be authorized by the Web Oversight Committee. Larger matters would need to be approved by the Oversight Consistory. Fundamental changes to the type of material to be posted would normally require approval by a Synod.

c. SCOPE OF MATERIAL POSTED: The scope of materials posted to the Federation website ordinarily include those matters of interest or importance to or about the Federation, within the boundaries set by a) and b).

d. APPEALS CONCERNING POSTING: Appeals concerning any materials posted to the website (including materials posted by Classis clerks and synodical committees) should first be made to the poster of the material (e.g. the Webmaster, the Stated Clerk, etc.), then the Oversight Committee, then the Oversight Consistory, and then Synod. Appeals to Synod should follow the standard procedures for synodical appeals. Items requiring immediate action may be referred to the Webmaster for correction, replacement, or removal from public view pending review.

Recommendation 6: That Synod approve the following job description for the Webmaster:

Webmaster Duties

Note: because the Webmaster is classified as one of the “Functionaries” of the URCNA we have formatted and recommend the following for inclusion in that section of the “REGULATIONS FOR SYNODICAL PROCEDURE” document, where the duties of the Stated Clerk and the Treasurers are also defined. We have numbered them starting at 1.0 here for clarity; if approved by Synod, we assume it would be inserted as section 4.7 according to the current numbering.

1.0. The Webmaster

1.0.1. Qualifications: The Webmaster shall belong to a member congregation of the United Reformed Churches, currently serving, or having served as a minister or elder within a church of the federation. He must likewise possess:

- a. Proficiency in the technical skills required;
- b. Ability to write clearly and succinctly;
- c. Administrative and organizational ability;
- d. Ability, inclination and resources to assist website users in a timely manner, including by phone or email.

1.0.2 Term: Synod shall appoint a Webmaster to serve from that Synod until the conclusion of the next Synod. Synod shall stipulate his honorarium in the currency of his respective country, with input from the Web Oversight Committee.

1.0.3. Supervision: The Webmaster shall be supervised by the Website Oversight Committee acting under the authority of the Oversight Consistory, and is ultimately accountable to Synod for the performance of his duties.

1.0.4. General Responsibilities:

The Webmaster shall:

- a. Attend to the day to day operation of the Federation Website;
- b. Assist and encourage member churches in maintaining accurate and timely Profiles and statistics on the website;
- c. Respond to membership, help and maintenance requests in a timely and professional manner;
- d. Serve as the primary point of contact for website technical issues and queries;
- e. Assist the Stated Clerk of each Classis in maintaining his respective Classis page;
- f. Assist the administrator of each Synodical Committee in maintaining his Committee’s page;
- g. With the assistance of the Stated Clerk, 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;
- h. Assist the Stated Clerk in the preparation and online publication of the annual Directory;

- i. Assist the Synodical Interim Committee / Convening Consistory in maintaining its pages, links and documents on the website;
- j. Provide the Website Representative in each Classis with details and statistics, as available, relevant to his Classis' website usage, need for updates, etc. appropriate for his Report to Classis;
- k. Utilize information provided by each Classis' Website Representative to help ensure that changes within each Classis are promptly reflected on the website, including new churches, ministers, etc.;
- l. Prepare a weekly update of non-Directory changes, scheduled calendar events, and other relevant information, and distribute the update on demand to the churches and authorized individuals;
- m. Advise the Chairman of the Website Oversight Committee in the preparation of the Committee's Synodical Report;
- n. Serve as a full member of the Website Oversight Committee;
- o. Periodically inspect areas of the website for evidence of tampering or potential security issues;
- p. Based on user input, industry developments and functionality, periodically determine and recommend potential improvements and upgrades to the Website for consideration by the Website Oversight Committee;
- q. Submit a written report of his work to Synod, as part of the written report of the Oversight Consistory.

Respectfully Submitted,

Website Oversight Committee

Bruce Vrieling, Chairman

March 20, 2014

Esteemed brothers,

The Consistory of the Grace United Reformed Church presents this report to synod for our duties as the oversight Consistory for the Website Oversight Committee (WOC). Synod Nyack 2012 (article 88 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.

Actions we took were:

- As needed, we paid for various items related to the operation of the website (e.g. domain registration, web forwarding, etc.); we submitted these costs for reimbursement by the federation. We had researched having the federation treasurer pay these directly, but it could not be done because the internet company (Network Solutions) requires credit card or PayPal payment and these methods of payment are unavailable to the federation.
- In pursuing their mandate from Synod Nyack, the WOC presented our Consistory with proposed "Webmaster Duties" and "Guidelines for Posting Material to the Website." We reviewed and approved both documents.

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 Consistory to serve as the Oversight Consistory for the WOC until the next synod.

Ground: Synod Nyack's appointment of Grace URC was until the "next synod."

Sincerely, in Christ

Elder Larry Van Den Berg
Clerk

Report of the URCNA Missions Committee (interim)

Dear Fathers and Brothers,

As part of the missions policies it adopted for our federation, Synod Nyack 2012 established a URCNA Missions Committee and gave it the following mandate:

- (1) The committee would function as an informational hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregations by doing the following:
 - (a) obtaining updates from the missionaries and church planters for publication in the missions newsletter and missions page of the URCNA.org website;
 - (b) ascertaining and remaining 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) generally promoting the cause of missions in the URCNA in a way that consistently represents our commitment to function as a covenanted body;
 - (d) gathering information about the work of missions and church planting which could be contributed to a manual of helpful guidelines to assist Consistories, missionaries and church planters in the day-to-day activity of missions;
 - (e) producing a report on the work of URCNA missions to each synod;
 - (f) having 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.

- (2) Specific Tasks of Committee members:
 - (a) Committee members shall assist the Chairman-coordinator in the execution of his tasks; this shall include an annual review of the labors of the Chairman-coordinator to be given to the his Consistory and to synod;
 - (b) Committee members shall report to their respective classes on the work of the committee;
 - (c) Committee members shall maintain contact with domestic and foreign missionaries within their respective classes;
 - (d) Committee members shall request financial data pertaining to support of missions from the churches of their respective classes. This financial data will be published to the churches along with amount of money needed to support URCNA missions (2012 Acts of Synod, 527-28).

Synod Nyack 2012 appointed the Synodical Study Committee on Missions (a committee appointed by Synod London 2010) to serve as the interim Missions Committee until Synod Visalia 2014, at which time the representatives elected by each classis would be constituted as the Committee (2012 Acts of Synod, 57). The interim Missions Committee presents the following report on its work.

I. Updates on URCNA Missions

In accordance with the mandate to “function as an information hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregation by...obtaining updates from the missionaries and church planters,” each member of the Committee has made regular reports to his respective classis on the work of URCNA missions. Because the Committee is also mandated to produce “a report on the work of URCNA missions to each synod,” we submit the following updates.

A. Classis Central U.S.

The churches of Classis Central U.S. currently have two domestic missions (Chicago Heights, IL, and Sioux Falls, SD), two missionaries who serve in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Nathan Brummel and Rev. Andrew Spriensma), and its own church plant advisory committee.

1) Chicago Heights, IL

El Pacto de Gracia is the Spanish-speaking church plant in Chicago Heights, Illinois, pastored by Rev. Valentin Alpuche, and overseen by Faith URC in Beecher, IL. A few individuals at El Pacto have become members of Faith URC, and membership classes continue. The people gather for evening worship each Lord’s Day, using the building of First Presbyterian Church of Chicago Heights (PCUSA). There is also a mid-week Bible study. In the spring, Rev. Alpuche accepted a call to serve the Hispanic mission of the RCUS in Shafter, California. The council of Faith URC, assisted by their Joint Venture Committee, is looking for another man to carry on the work in Chicago Heights.

2) Sioux Falls, SD

Sioux Falls United Reformed Church, pastored by Rev. Spencer Aalsburg, is under the oversight of Hills URC in Hills, MN. There is now an elder and a deacon assigned to the work in Sioux Falls. Each Lord’s Day morning an average of fifty to sixty souls are in attendance for worship. They use the building belonging to the Protestant Reformed Church in Sioux Falls. Earlier this year, evening services began for two Sundays each month. For the other evening services each month the people in Sioux Falls gather for worship in Hills, MN, which helps them to maintain fellowship between them and the overseeing church. Rev. Aalsburg continues to teach in numerous venues, and the church plant continues to grow in every way through the Lord’s gracious provision.

3) Rev. Nathan Brummel

Rev. Brummel serves in a full-time capacity as a professor at Divine Hope Reformed Bible Seminary, under the oversight of Immanuel URC in DeMotte, Indiana, where he is an associate pastor. DHRBS is an independent Reformed seminary that provides a four-year program in biblical and theological studies for offenders behind bars in Indiana and Illinois. The seminary

has a campus at the Danville Correctional Center in Danville, IL, and a study center at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City, IN.

4) Rev. Andrew Spriensma

Rev. Spriensma continues to serve as a U.S. Army Chaplain under the oversight of Faith URC in Beecher, IL. While stationed in Wiesbaden, Germany, he served as the pastor of the traditional Protestant worship service and as the rear-detachment chaplain for a unit deployed to Afghanistan (Rev. Spriensma was deployed there for two months in 2013). He is now stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. His primary work involves his giving pastoral care and counsel to the seven hundred fifty soldiers within his infantry battalion and their families. Rev. Spriensma is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan again in the fall of 2014.

5) Church Plant Advisory Committee

In the last few years, church planting in Classis Central U.S. has been a story of many blessings along with some serious set-backs. Having learned from these experiences, Central Classis now aims with this new committee for better coordination among its churches in its mission efforts. The CPAC is composed of five men, both elders and ministers, from five churches of Central Classis, and is overseen by the Consistory of Immanuel URC of DeMotte, Indiana. The committee's work includes gathering and distributing information about current church plants within the classis, developing classis guidelines for church planting, and providing advice and recommendations to the Consistories regarding potential fields for church planting within the general area of the classis.

B. Classis Eastern U.S.

The churches of Classis Eastern U.S. currently have four domestic missions (Cincinnati, OH; Jersey City, NJ; Princess Anne, MD; Washington D.C.), one missionary serving in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Neal Hegeman), and its own church planting committee.

1) Cincinnati, OH

Westside Reformed Church, in Cincinnati, OH, is pastored by Rev. Zac Wyse, and overseen by Zeltenreich Reformed Church, New Holland, PA. Being an Ohio native, Rev. Wyse had a desire to plant a reformed church in Cincinnati even before his seminary graduation and subsequent ordination in 2013. Upon graduation he moved to the city and redoubled earlier efforts to gather a core group for regular worship services. The church has been greatly blessed with regular growth.

2) Jersey City, NJ

Grace Reformed Church, in Jersey City, NJ, is pastored by Rev. Sam Perez, and overseen by Messiah's Reformed Fellowship, Manhattan, NY. This church plant was launched in an effort, not only to provide a more local church for several families from Messiah's Reformed

Fellowship, but also to root a reformed congregation in an important metropolitan area. By God's grace, and after much searching, Grace Reformed Church has secured a building for worship. They have been worshipping every Lord's Day since September 1, 2013.

3) Princess Anne, MD

Somerset Reformed Fellowship, in Princess Anne, MD is overseen by Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church, Pompton Plains, NJ. The overseeing Consistory is currently working with the core group to move toward calling a minister to pastor the congregation. The Fellowship has been meeting for Bible studies for several years with capable and dedicated assistance from a few local men.

4) Washington D.C.

Christ Reformed Church, in Washington D.C. is pastored by Rev. Brian Lee, and overseen by Zeltenreich Reformed Church in New Holland, PA. The transient nature of the population in D.C. has created challenges in terms of congregational and leadership stability. Notwithstanding, the church is experiencing growth and has begun to make greater strides toward organization.

5) Rev. Neal Hegeman

Rev. Neal Hegeman, under the Consistory of Trinity Reformed Church, Cape Coral, FL, continues to serve as the academic vice president of Miami International Seminary (MINTS). MINTS is a mission organization that uses higher education as its primary tool toward fulfilling the vision of the Great Commission. The goal of MINTS is to provide high quality Bible training in indigenous languages for pastors in areas where the Christian faith is expanding rapidly.

6) Church Planting Committee

Domestically, over the last decade, Classis Eastern U.S. has been making great strides toward a collaborative approach to church planting within its classical boundaries. In this spirit, classis appointed a Church Planting Committee. Currently, the church planting committee is actively seeking out possible church plant locations and engaging with potential core groups and church planters. The committee is also exploring ways to prepare church planters through internships and assisting the churches in their church planting activities. In 2013, a part-time position—Classical Church Planting Coordinator—was created. This position is currently filled, in an interim capacity, by Rev. William Boekestein. The classis has observed a “ripple effect” as more and more churches and individuals within Classis have become involved in the work of church planting. For example, Messiah's Reformed Fellowship (MeRF) was sponsored by West Sayville in 2003 and organized in 2012. Zeltenreich Reformed Church (formerly Covenant Reformed Church of New Holland), was sponsored by Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church in 2005 and organized in 2006. Since then MeRF has sponsored Grace Reformed in Jersey City, Zeltenreich has sponsored Christ Reformed Church in Washington, DC, and Westside Reformed Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. Pompton Plains RBC is presently overseeing the formation of a church plant in Maryland's Eastern Shore.

C. Classis Michigan

The churches of Classis Michigan currently have two foreign missions (Guadalupe, Costa Rica, and Cartago, Costa Rica) and one missionary serving in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Steve Poelman).

1) Cartago, Costa Rica

The Cartago Church in Cartago, Costa Rica, is pastored by Rev. Nick Lamme, who is called and overseen by Trinity URC of Caledonia, MI, and receives financial support and direction from the Joint Missions Committee of Bethany URC. Approximately fifty people gather regularly for worship. Rev. Lamme also assists Rev. Bill Green in translating, writing and editing the CLIR journal, books, catechism and Reformed materials, which are printed and distributed throughout South and Latin America. He also preaches at evangelistic and CLIR conferences, and serves as a board member and part time teacher at local Tepeyac Christian School in Guadalupe.

2) Guadalupe, Costa Rica

Pacto de Gracia Church in Guadalupe, Costa Rica is pastored by Rev. Bill Green, who is called and overseen by Bethany URC of Wyoming, MI. They meet in a new building which will be the future home of Tepeyac High School. About fifty people are in attendance each Lord's Day. Rev. Green also assists local Costa Rican Reformed churches which are part of a four-church presbytery he has helped establish. He labors with the Tepeyac Christian School in Guadalupe, which currently has 126 students. He promotes CLIR (Latin American Fellowship of Reformed Churches), which prints and distributes the CLIR Journal, critical Reformed books, and catechism materials into Spanish for the churches in South and Latin America. Rev. Green also speaks at many conferences and rallies.

3) Rev. Steven Poelman

Rev. Poelman is called by Cornerstone URC in Hudsonville, MI, and labors in northern India where he teaches at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary. In the summertime, Rev. Poelman and his family travel throughout India, teaching and leading seminars at different churches. He is currently on furlough, which ends June, 2014, at which time he will return to India.

D. Classis Ontario-East

The churches of Classis Ontario-East currently have one domestic mission (Niagara Falls, ON) and three foreign missions (Tepic, Mexico; Comayagua, Honduras; and Tegucigalpa, Honduras).

1) Niagara Falls, ON

The River of Life Church plant in Niagara Falls is a church plant pastored by Rev. Richard Bultjie, and overseen by Wellandport URC in Wellandport, ON. The work has experienced God's blessing in spiritual and numerical growth. Presently there are about thirty people in the

core group, including an elderly couple, middle aged, young people, children and infants, some of whom have no Christian background. The work rents a building where they meet for worship. The plant also has two mid-week small group Bible studies to nurture people in the faith. These meetings also provide a more informal setting in which visitors can interact with the members of the core group. In summer 2013, River of Life was also able to host a children's Bible camp and several meetings geared to ministering to ladies.

2) Tepic, Mexico

Iglesia Eterna Vida in Tepic, Mexico has been served for fifteen years by Rev. Richard Bout, but is now being served by Rev. Matthew Van Dyken. Rev. Van Dyken is called and overseen by Hope Reformed Church (URCNA) in Brampton, Ontario. He has worked with Rev. Richard Bout since 2011. The work continues to experience God's blessing in spiritual and numerical growth. God also continues to bring many visitors to the church. Iglesia Eterna Vida has at least four different Bible studies during the week, as well as numerous other activities. They are currently involved in leadership training for future officers, and the initial stages of beginning a preaching station on the other side of the city, which would duplicate their Sunday worship service. Rev. Van Dyken and Iglesia Eterna Vida are thankful to God for the many doors he has opened, and trust that the Lord will continue to bring people to Christ.

3) Comayagua, Honduras

Inglesia Reformada de Comayagua is pastored by Rev. Ernie Langendoen, who is called and overseen by Immanuel ORC in Jordan, ON. He labors in Comayagua, Honduras. The work continues to have steady attendance, with an average attendance of thirty-five persons. Presently, two people are preparing for profession of faith. Four members of the plant meet every two weeks as a council of one missionary, one elder, and two deacons. The church is involved in diaconal deeds—the latest project has been to reconstruct the house of one of their elderly members and his niece. They also have offerings for the poor. Rev. Langendon also gives radio messages every Saturday, and visits a girls' home twice a week to give devotionals. He also works with a local church in Choluteca, and has begun talks with another in San Pedro Sula.

4) Tegucigalpa, Honduras

Like Inglesia Reformada de Comayagua, Neuva Union in Tegucigalpa, Honduras is also pastored by Rev. Ernie Langendoen and overseen by Immanuel ORC in Jordan, ON. Presently, the attendance is small, about 6-8 people. Rev. Langendon preaches one Sunday a month, and native Honduran Orlando Sierra preaches three Sundays. The labor for the gospel in Honduras is challenging, as the country is filled with violence, political instability, and much poverty. The church remains grateful for the prayers and support they receive, and trust that the many more in Honduras will come to confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

E. Classis Pacific Northwest

The churches of Classis Pacific Northwest currently have two foreign missions (Imus and Pasig City, both in the Philippines).

1) Pasig City, Philippines

Pasig Covenant Reformed Church is pastored by Rev. Nollie Malabuyo, who is called and overseen by Trinity United Reformed Church in Walnut Creek, California. This work is now an organized church with average Sunday attendance of 40-45 people. They began worship services in 2008 and have been blessed by steady growth over the last few years. They offer an Inquirers' Class (for those interested in membership), as well as Sunday school classes for both adults and children. They also have a Saturday afternoon Bible study for all ages. In August of 2011, Rev. Malabuyo started a mission church in Imus.

2) Imus, Philippines

Trinity Covenant Reformed Church in Imus is a mission church of Pasig Covenant Reformed Church. It is also pastored by Rev. Nollie Malabuyo. They began worship services in August 2011 and have seen steady attendance, as well as growth, in this short time. Their average attendance is 25-30 people each Sunday. As well as the Sunday worship service, they also offer Sunday school classes for both adults and children. In addition to pastoring both the church in Pasig City, as well as the one in Imus, Rev. Malabuyo often has opportunity to mentor evangelical pastors in the Philippines in the areas of doctrine and worship.

F. Classis Southwestern Ontario

Classis Southwestern Ontario currently has two domestic missions (Scarborough and Toronto).

1) Scarborough, ON

The New Horizon church of Scarborough, ON has been overseen by the Cornerstone URC of London, ON since 2001. The church has been blessed with growth both numerically and spiritually under the ongoing ministry of Rev. Mitchell Persaud. They are thankful that the congregation now has two elders and two deacons on location to help shepherd the flock. While they are blessed with a membership of approximately fifty souls, the work remains very active in both building up the saints (through regular worship services twice a Sunday, catechism classes, etc.), as well as reaching out to those in the communities around them (through ESL Bible studies, Bible and tract distribution, etc.). Ministering within the Toronto area has had its blessings and challenges: the challenges of ministering among a transient city population, and the blessing of seeing people of many different backgrounds either coming to faith or growing together in their faith and fellowship through the grace of God.

2) Toronto, ON

The Hope Congregation is the church plant that has blossomed through the work of the Hope Centre in Etobicoke, ON (a suburb of Toronto). It is overseen by the Covenant Christian Church (URC) of Wyoming. Rev. Tony Zekveld was called to this work in 1995, and the ministry began with a focus on bringing the Gospel to those who have never heard. In the providence of God this led them to many opportunities in bringing the Gospel to those among the Sikh and Hindu community and this continues to be a primary (though not exclusive) focus for the church today. On top of that continued evangelistic focus, the Hope Congregation meets for two services each Lord's Day, is blessed to have local elders, and perhaps has the unique experience in the URCNA of worshipping on the Lord's Day with hymn and Psalm singing both in English and Punjabi!

G. Classis Southwest U.S.

Classis Southwest U.S. presently has four domestic missions (Colorado Springs, CO; Kauai, HI; Rifle, CO; and Ontario, CA) one foreign mission (Milan, Italy), one foreign mission developing (Bucharest, Romania), and one missionary serving in an extraordinary capacity (Rev. Alan Vander Pol).

1) Colorado Springs, CO

Covenant United Reformed Church in Colorado Springs is a church plant of Coram Deo Reformation Church in Littleton, CO. The work is nearing its third year anniversary, which will be in July 2014. It began in 2011 with four families from the area who were driving over one hour to attend services at Coram Deo. Coram Deo sent two elders and one deacon who lived in Colorado Springs to begin the work. Approximately fifty souls gather for worship at Covenant URC every Lord's Day. The work is sustained by outside sources, as well as internal tithes and offerings. Start-up funding, however, committed for a three-year span, has ended for Covenant URC. While this church plant is laboring to be self-sufficient, it has only 75% of its total needs met by tithes and offerings. The mother church, Coram Deo, is unable to cover the costs of this work, due to experiencing some shrinkage in its own congregation. Several families have transferred from Coram Deo in need of employment elsewhere. It is Coram Deo's desire to support this vital mission in an area where the Reformed witness is dim. They would cherish the support and encouragement of other URCNA churches as they seek to spread the gospel "in a dry and thirsty land" (Isaiah 44.3).

2) Kaua'i, HI

Grace Church of Kaua'i continues to receive blessings from the Lord's hand. They continue to have good attendance at worship services and weekly Bible Studies. Since their beginning, they have seen numerical increase, albeit small. They now have nine families with twenty-three professing members and nine baptized members, plus several regular-attending visitors. They are also blessed with an excellent relationship with their mother church, Grace URC in Torrance, CA, who faithfully prays for, supports financially, and tirelessly encourages the mission and its

church planter, Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen. The church plant remains zealous to proclaim the gospel of Christ's salvation to all on the island of Kaua'i

3) Rifle, CO

Grand River Reformation Church in Rifle began in 2011, and is overseen by Coram Deo Reformation Church in Littleton, CO. They are encouraged to witness families growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ, and in their understanding of the Reformed confessions. This church plant presently has about twenty-five people in its core group, as well as two men being considered as possible elder candidates. They are currently starting a new mid-week Bible study in Glenwood Springs, CO (which is about 25 minutes from Rifle) in an effort to expose more people to the light of the Reformation and the Three Forms of Unity. This work received initial start-up funding from an outside donor. These funds will continue for another year and a half.

4) Ontario, CA

Inglesia Reformada Unidate Ontario is overseen by the Ontario URC in Ontario, CA, and pastored by Rev. Ruben Sernas. This is a ministry to Spanish speakers in Ontario and the greater Los Angeles area. Over half of the population in Ontario speaks Spanish as their primary language. This work presently has ten families. They also have one bilingual elder who oversees the two Spanish services, and one bilingual deacon. In addition to these men, there are three more bilingual elders who also serve on the council of Ontario URC, the overseeing church. Rev. Sernas preaches in two services on the Lord's Day, and also volunteers as a chaplain at a local hospital. The work was recently received as a member of a JVC in order to receive outside support from Canada. Because of the socio economic realities of the Latino community, the Spanish ministry is highly dependent on outside support. This year, \$58,675 is needed in outside support.

5) Milan, Italy

Chiesa Riformata Evangelica 'Filadelfia' in Milan, Italy is pastored by Rev. Andrea Ferrari, who is called and overseen by Christ URC in Santee, CA. They presently have forty-five members, and meet twice every Lord's Day for worship and catechism classes. They also have a mid-week prayer meeting and catechism class. The work continues to experience God's blessing in spiritual growth, and regularly has visitors, many of whom come from the local universities. Rev. Ferrari is currently in dialogue with a missionary from the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) to help establish a confessional, Reformed denomination in Italy. Currently there are no confessional Reformed or Presbyterian denominations in the country. He also regularly labors in translating Reformed materials into Italian.

6) Bucharest, Romania

A future church plant in Bucharest is currently developing. A core group of Reformed believers, all of whom are Romanian nationals, meet every Lord's Day for Bible study and prayer. The leader of this work is Mihai Corcea, who is currently enrolled at Westminster Seminary California as a Master of Divinity student. Mihai and his wife, Lidia, hope to move back

permanently to their native country in 2016 to help the core group develop into a confessional church. The Corceas, as well as several people in the core group, have membership in CERF in Milan, Italy. Rev. Ferrari keeps in regular contact with them, visits them at least twice a year, and continues to offer guidance to the group. The Corceas worship at Christ URC in Santee, CA. It is the hope of the Christ URC Consistory that a URC congregation somewhere on the east coast of the U.S. will assume oversight of Mihai and this budding work in Bucharest, establishing a relationship similar to that of Christ URC and Milan, Italy,

7) Rev. Alan Vander Pol

Rev. Alan Vander Pol is called and overseen by the Consistory of First United Reformed Church in Chino, CA, and serves with Miami International Seminary (MINTS). MINTS is a mission organization that uses higher education as its primary tool toward fulfilling the vision of the Great Commission. The goal of MINTS is to provide high quality Bible training in indigenous languages for pastors in areas where the Christian faith is expanding rapidly.

H. Classis Western Canada

The churches of Classis Western Canada currently have one domestic mission (Regina, SK) and no foreign missions.

1) Regina, SK

Redeemer Reformation Church, in Regina, SK, is pastored by Rev. Brian Cochran, and overseen by Providence Reformed Church of Winnipeg (PRCW), the closest neighbouring church which is a six and a half hour drive away. Redeemer Reformation Church was an independent Presbyterian church but was established in 2010 as a URCNA congregation. It became a mission church when their only other office-bearer Elder Scott Finch moved out of town. Thus they requested to come under care of PRCW in 2013. The consistory and Rev. Cochran meet once a month via conference call and the council and Rev. Cochran meet once a month via conference call. An elder of PRCW, Elder Henry Nagtegaal, has been assigned as a district elder to the church plant and travels there once a month. Another elder of PRCW accompanies Elder Henry Nagtegaal every other month. Rev. Cochran evangelizes regularly in the community. He is presently leading a new members' class. By God's grace, these diligent labours are being blessed and the church is growing in number. Rev. Cochran hopes to begin an officer's training course in May, Lord willing. Redeemer owns a church building but currently relies on the Needy Church Fund (a fund set up by Classis Western Canada) to help to meet their church budget. So far, the Lord has blessed them with enough funds. In fact, thankfully they had a surplus in their 2013 budget.

2) Home Missions Committee

After the formation of a federation-wide missions committee, Classis Western Canada has formed a home missions committee. They meet via video-conference for the purpose of aiding the churches in church planting as well as discussing potential areas for setting up missions in Western Canada.

II. Missions Conference

In accordance with Synod Nyack's mandate to "function as an informational hub for URCNA missions, encouraging communication between URCNA missionaries, church planters, councils and congregations," the Missions Committee held a missions conference on June 26-28, 2013, at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana. Nearly fifty people attended the conference, mostly URCNA pastors and missionaries, but also many elders and laypeople. Ten seminary students were able to attend by the financial assistance of a private donor. Two ministers from the Reformed Churches of New Zealand were also present, as well as Mr. Mark Bube, the General Secretary of the Committee on Foreign Missions of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and Rev. Dr. Wes Bredenhof of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Altogether nine speakers presented lectures on everything from the nuts and bolts of church planting in North America to how to establish a confessional Reformed denomination in a country overseas. The Committee received overwhelmingly positive feedback from those in attendance. Each session was educational and motivating, making this a helpful conference to our federation as we continue to find our footing in missions.

There were two Q & A panels, one for domestic missions and the other for foreign. The Committee sought to make these brain-storming sessions for all in attendance. We also held a luncheon in which ideas for and concerns about funding church plants and foreign missionaries were discussed. The consensus was that we need to be more organized as a federation and prioritize our giving so that URCNA church plants and foreign missionaries are not underfunded.

The Committee also presented a first draft of its manual on church planting, and copies were distributed to all in attendance. The Committee encouraged attendees to offer feedback on the manual, as we want this work to be helpful to Consistories, councils, church-planters, core-groups, and Joint Venture Committees.

Overall, the Committee gives thanks to God for the outcome of the conference. It was a tremendous opportunity for fellowship, learning, sharing information, and mutual encouragement. We hope that it will bear fruit in years to come. We also hope to hold another conference in the summer of 2015.

III. Website

From early on, it became clear to the Committee that our federation was in need of one organized list of URCNA missions and missionaries. The Committee developed a missions page on URCNA.org, which lists all URCNA missionaries and mission works in three categories: domestic (i.e. U.S. and Canada) church plants, foreign church plants, and missions of extraordinary nature. Each group of URCNA missions is organized by classis, location, missionary, and overseeing church.

IV. Updated Missions Policies

As per Synod Nyack's mandate, the Committee incorporated the adopted changes and additions to the URCNA missions policies (2012 Acts of Synod, 60) and distributed the document along with the *Biblical and Confessional Basis for Missions* to the churches.

V. Church Planting Manual

In accordance with Synod Nyack's mandate to develop "helpful guidelines to assist Consistories, missionaries and church planters in the day-to-day activity of missions," the Committee presents the following manual on church planting. While the Committee recognizes that this manual does not exhaust all areas of the day-to-day activity of missions, nor explores the vast area of foreign missions, we believe it is a solid foundation for a shared strategy to be more effective in planting churches on domestic and foreign soil. In the future, we hope to supplement this manual by dealing specifically with how foreign and domestic missionaries go about their work of preaching to the unconverted and to those outside the church, and of discipling new believers.

How to Plant a Reformed Church
The Church Planting Manual of the URCNA

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Introduction

This manual is a suggested strategy for church planting in the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). The Missions Committee of the URCNA has written it in partial fulfillment of their mandate to develop helpful guidelines for the assistance of Consistories and church planters in the work of missions. It is not intended to say everything that needs to be said on the vast subject of church planting. Instead, it provides Consistories, church planters, and core groups with a plan for and advice on establishing a congregation in the URCNA.

Why Should We Plant More Reformed Churches?

As true churches of Jesus Christ, the URCNA are obligated to fulfill our Lord's Great Commission to make disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28.18-20). The book of Acts reveals how this is fulfilled through the planting of churches and the ordinary means of grace. After receiving the power of the Spirit (Acts 2.1-4), the apostles preached the gospel (2.14-36), baptized believers with their children (2.37-41), and began meeting regularly with those who "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (2.42). Thus, the first new covenant church was established. This same pattern of planting churches unfolds throughout the entire book of Acts as the apostles went throughout the world preaching Christ, baptizing believers and their households, and planting churches with appointed elders to oversee the new disciples (Acts 14.21-23).

The necessity of the local church for the making of disciples can hardly be overemphasized. This is our Lord's chosen means for gathering his redeemed people, feeding them with his Word, receiving their worship, nurturing their faith, and bonding them as a community rooted and established in love (Rom. 12; Eph. 4; Phil. 1.27-2.11). The local church is a manifestation of the *people* who belong to Christ, and also the *place* where he meets them through the means he has ordained. This makes the local church essential to church planting.

Because the church must continue to fulfill the Great Commission until the return of our Lord, true churches need to be planted where few or none exist. We must be committed to the task of making disciples not only by the weekly means of grace in our congregations, but also by planting new congregations. Our missionary task, as our Church Order says in Article 47, "is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted," which is often "performed beyond the field of an organized church." This vital duty is "to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor, who are called, supported and supervised by their Consistories." Since we have agreed in our Church Order that "the churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries," each of our congregations should prioritize church planting in the URCNA over all other mission-related endeavors.

Who Should Plant Reformed Churches?

Individuals do not plant churches. Churches plant churches. The biblical and Reformed method of church planting requires more than one gifted person launching out on his own to start a new work. It requires a large team of people gifted by the Holy Spirit and operating in different capacities. At a minimum, a church plant needs a committed congregation to finance the work (the mother church), overseeing officers (the Consistory with the advice of its classis), an ordained minister (the church planter), and a highly devoted, though perhaps small, group of people who want to be part of the church plant (the core group). These are the necessary parties in church planting.

In addition to these parties, a church plant may also benefit from involvement by the missions committee of its classis, joint venture committees (composed of members from multiple congregations that partner together in the support of a particular mission work), and the URCNA Missions Committee. It should be stressed, however, that within our federation any church plant is to be under the oversight of one particular Consistory. Although they are not alone in their effort and should take the fullest advantage of their classis, the Consistory bears the greatest responsibility in the establishment of a church.

When Should We Plant More Reformed Churches?

We should plant more churches when God provides us with a special opportunity to do so. Given the fact that large parts of North America are without sound Reformed churches, the harvest is indeed plentiful and the laborers are few. Truly, we must “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9.37-38). But we must also pray that the Lord of the harvest opens doors of opportunity so that these laborers may be sent (Col. 4.2-3).

The book of Acts is replete with examples of how the Lord opens doors of opportunity for church planting. Acts 13-14 reveals how Paul and Barnabas were set apart by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of missions. They were sent by the church at Antioch and went through the regions of Cyprus, Lycia, and Galatia, preaching the gospel and evangelizing. This led to the planting of churches in the cities of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch Pisidia, where Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Acts 14.21-23). When they returned to their mother church at Antioch in Syria, they “gathered the church together” and “declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (14.27).

Paul’s so-called “Macedonian Call” in Acts 16.6-10 is another example. At that point in history, the Holy Spirit prevented Paul, Silas, and Timothy from planting new churches in Asia and Bithynia, yet called them to go to Macedonia instead. This led to the planting of the church at Philippi, “a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony” (v.12).

Although God provided Paul with a vision about going to Macedonia, we cannot expect such occurrences today. God does not give us new revelation for when and where he would have us plant churches. Nevertheless, he still opens doors of opportunity at particular times, in particular places, and with particular people. When a family or a group of people in an area where no Reformed churches exist contacts a local Consistory or the URCNA Missions

Committee and says, “Come over here and help us,” we must respond. It may not be possible in every situation to plant a church. Circumstances vary from case to case, and there are limits to our resources. But Consistories, classes, and the URCNA Missions Committee must at least investigate the possibility of planting a church when new opportunities arise.

Likewise, Consistories, classes, and would-be church planters (whether seminary students or ordained ministers) must exercise great caution in constructing a plan to plant a church in a particular location if no special opportunity has presented itself. We must pray and be patient as we wait on the Lord to open the door.

Where Should We Plant Reformed Churches?

While there are cities large enough for a plurality of Reformed churches, we should focus our efforts on planting them where none currently exist. Just as our Lord commissioned his apostles to be his witnesses beyond the boundaries of Jerusalem and Judea and go into Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1.8), so also we must go to places where there is no Reformed witness. Presently, there are huge geographical areas and many major cities in the United States and Canada that are completely without a URCNA congregation and in some cases largely untouched by any Reformed or Presbyterian presence at all. We must take this into consideration before we set out to plant a Reformed church in a city where several like-minded churches already exist.

When opportunities to plant a URCNA congregation arise, we must find answers for at least two important questions: (1) Why do the interested parties want to plant a Reformed church in this particular place? (2) Are there any confessional Reformed or Presbyterian churches within reasonable driving distance?¹

How Should We Plant More Reformed Churches?

Church planting can only be accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit and the means he has chosen to bless, namely his Word. The New Testament is clear that Christ uses his gospel to create his church. “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10.17). We cannot approach church planting, therefore, in the way a retail corporation approaches the establishment of one of its stores in a new location. Church planting is not dependent upon demographical studies and shrewd business decisions. It is dependent upon the

¹ The church planting manual of the OPC, *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, points out that there must be sound reasons for beginning a mission work. It states, “One of the most basic questions asked of anyone who is involved in church planting is, ‘Why are you starting a new church?’ Implied is the question: ‘Aren’t there already enough churches here?’ It is neither Biblically correct nor wise to answer, ‘Because these folks can’t get along with others in their present congregation,’ or, ‘Because they just don’t like the other churches in town.’” It then lists “three examples of Biblical justification for starting new churches which can help to clarify and direct our church planting efforts.” (1) There is a special opportunity to plant this church in this place at this time; (2) This center of population and influence needs the ministry of the new church we will plant; (3) These fellow believers need our help to carry on what Christ has begun among them. See *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, n.d.), 21-23. We are deeply grateful to our brothers on the OPC’s Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension for producing this fine manual. We have benefited immensely from their wisdom and insight, and have sought to apply many of their principles, conforming them to our polity.

Holy Spirit using the Word of God to draw sinners to Christ, create faith in their hearts, and make them disciples. We are called to go out with a dependency upon his power, and in faithfulness to the task of proclaiming Christ. “How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10.14-15a).

Yet, we must also be wise and orderly in our efforts. Dependency upon the Holy Spirit does not mean that we should be haphazard or disorganized in our approach to church planting. God is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14.33), but desires all things in his church to be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14.40). The way in which the apostles sought to fulfill the Great Commission was no exception. They were methodical in their approach to making disciples. When Paul preached the gospel in synagogues or in crowds of Gentile unbelievers, his goal was always to establish a congregation with appointed elders and deacons so that disciples would be made through Word and sacrament, and Christ would be formed in them (Gal. 4.19). It is wise, then, for us to be strategic and orderly in our attempt to plant churches.

To that end, this manual recommends a four-phase plan. In the first phase of a church plant, initial conversations must begin so that it might be determined if there is serious interest in forming a core group and if a Consistory is willing to oversee this mission work. In the second phase, the core group begins to meet together on a weekly basis to study the Bible and the Three Forms of Unity (the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and Canons of Dort). As this work grows in numerical size and spiritual maturity, it must be overseen by a Consistory. As early as possible, the Consistory should seek the advice of its classis regarding the church plant. In the third phase, the Consistory calls worship services every Lord’s Day at the church plant and continues to supervise its development. Once the church plant possesses sufficient size, financial stability, and qualified men for office, it is ready to move to the fourth phase. In this final stage, the church plant organizes as a church in the URCNA with its own officers. This four-phase approach is explained in greater detail in the following chapters of this manual.

It is our prayer that this manual will be of benefit to Consistories, councils, classes, missions committees, joint venture committees, church planters, core groups, and every Christian who longs for a Reformed church to be planted in a town where no such church exists. May the Lord of the harvest continue to strengthen us and give us wisdom and courage as we seek to fulfill his commission to bring the gospel to the world and make disciples of all nations.

For Christ’s church,
The URCNA Missions Committee
March 2014

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Phase I: Establishing Interest

The purpose of Phase I is to determine if there is serious interest in forming a core group that wants to plant a church, and if a Consistory within the URCNA is willing to oversee such a work.

How is Initial Interest Established?

There are several ways that initial interest in a new church plant can be established. Some of the more common scenarios run as follows:

Scenario 1: Members of a URCNA congregation who live a long distance from the church ask their Consistory about the possibility of planting a church closer to their home. The Consistory investigates this possibility, and makes inquiries of the congregation. This may include informational meetings open to members and visitors who are interested in being part of the core group.

Scenario 2: A member family of a URCNA congregation relocates to an area where there is no confessional Reformed church. They contact the nearest Consistory and/or the URCNA Missions Committee, and ask about the possibility of planting a church in their new hometown. This Consistory, perhaps with the assistance of neighboring Consistories, begins to make inquiries.

Scenario 3: A number of Christians in a particular location discuss the need for a Reformed church in their area. This group of people may already be meeting on a weekly or otherwise regular basis. Similar to the previous scenario, these people contact the nearest URCNA church and/or the URCNA Missions Committee, and make their desires known. The Consistory begins to investigate the circumstances, and determines if planting a church in the area is feasible.

Scenario 4: A Consistory recognizes that many members of their congregation drive a very long distance to church. They inquire of their members to determine if there is a reasonable number of people interested in planting a church.

Scenario 5: A URCNA minister or seminary student has the desire to plant a church in a particular area. He approaches his Consistory, and pitches his idea to them. If the Consistory is convinced that the idea is wise, they begin to investigate the possibility of planting a church.

What Should the Consistory Investigate?

Regardless of which scenario unfolds, the investigating Consistory should determine several important details before moving to Phase II:

1. How many people/families seem genuinely interested in being part of this new work?

In some ways, the urgency of the Consistory's investigation will depend upon the number of families and individuals that have informed the Consistory of their desire for a church plant. For example, if only one family has contacted the Consistory, and made known that they are praying for a Reformed church in their area, the Consistory should discuss this information, but may choose to wait before acting further. On the other hand, if five families have approached the Consistory, the elders should not hesitate to act. Serious discussions should begin to take place.

2. Why does this group want to plant a Reformed church?

The Consistory should determine why this group is interested in planting a URCNA congregation. Some questions for which the Consistory should find answers are: Why is this group dissatisfied with the churches in their area? Has this group recently left another church and, if so, why? Do other NAPARC churches exist within reasonable driving distance? What is the ecclesiastical background of the members of this group, and is there reasonable expectation that they can work well with one another?

3. What are the basic demographics of this particular area?

Although the Consistory should never find their driving motivation for planting a church in demographics, they should nevertheless consider several factors. What is the local population of this particular area? What is the projected growth? Is it a transient city by nature? How distant and accessible is this city to neighboring towns?

4. Where would the core group meet for a weekly Bible study?

The importance for the core group to meet for a weekly Bible study is discussed below. The Consistory should consider a location for this Bible study as soon as possible. Often times, a member of the core group is pleased to host this study in his home. In some cases, the Consistory may choose to rent a facility in a central location where the study can be held.

5. Who would teach this Bible study?

Ideally, the teacher of the Bible study should be an ordained URCNA minister. Where this is not possible, he should be a licensed exhorter, an elder, or a male member of the mother church who is competent to teach, and does so under the direction and oversight of his Consistory. Whoever the teacher is, the council must determine if he is to be paid a stipend and, if so, the amount.

6. How will the Consistory provide oversight for the weekly Bible study?

Ideally, one or two members of the Consistory should be present at every Bible study. If circumstances do not permit this, the teacher of the study should provide regular reports to the Consistory which can be evaluated at their monthly meeting. Whatever the case, the Consistory should take great care to exercise proper oversight of the study.

7. *What would it cost to finance a church plant (i.e. the calling of a pastor, rented facility, etc.)?*

Planting a church will require a significant financial commitment. There is the considerable cost of a rented or purchased facility where the church plant can meet for worship on the Lord's Day, along with all the incidentals needed for worship (chairs, Bibles, songbooks, etc.). The Consistory must call a church planter, that is, an ordained URCNA minister dedicated to the weighty task of establishing a new congregation. The council must see to it that the church planter's material needs are fully met so he can focus on the work of the kingdom without the hindrance of worldly concerns.

The financial cost of a church plant, however, should not immediately deter a Consistory in their consideration of planting a church. First, investments made for the kingdom of God are *never* a loss if done faithfully in accordance with God's Word. Second, as a federation of churches, we have covenanted as a body, and agreed to help one another in the support of our missionaries. A local Consistory should work with their classis and, if necessary, form a joint venture committee (in accordance with the URCNA 2001 report, *Biblical and Confessional View of Missions*) in order to ensure funding for the church plant.

Informational Meeting

At some point in the process of determining these details, the Consistory should hold an informational meeting open to anyone interested in participating in the church plant. At this meeting, complete information about our federation should be given to those in attendance who are new to the URCNA. A member of the Consistory or, if the Consistory requests, a member of the URCNA Missions Committee should explain in detail our history, confessional standards, and principles of worship, as well as the process of how a new URCNA church comes into existence.

Involvement of Classis

It is of the utmost importance that a Consistory inform their classis of a potential church plant opportunity as soon as they are convinced it exists. Since we are not Congregationalists, URCNA Consistories should never operate independently of their classes in the work of church planting. A Consistory must seek the concurring advice of its classis as specified in CO Article 22: "When a congregation is organized within the federation, this shall take place under the supervision of a neighboring Consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis." It would be foolish for a Consistory to follow this article in a perfunctory or superficial manner by waiting until the time of organizing the church to seek the advice of its classis. Advice should be sought as early as possible, since wisdom is found in a multitude of counselors (Prov. 11.14). Classis can review the Consistory's proposal, and offer helpful feedback, as well as financial assistance when possible (cf. CO Art. 47). This is particularly important for Consistories with no experience in church planting.

Phase II: Establishing a Core Group

The purpose of Phase II is to establish and develop a mature core group prior to worship services being called on the Lord's Day.

The Importance of the Weekly Bible Study

No matter how initial interest is established, the most important step in gathering and establishing a core group is to hold a weekly Bible study. This meeting allows the group to get to know one another, learn together about the URCNA, its beliefs, and its approach to worship. Studies of this sort are usually held on a weeknight and run for several months. Among the various wise choices of subjects to be studied by the group are Paul's letter to the Ephesians, which focuses on the doctrine of the church, his letter to the Romans, which unfolds the beauty of the gospel, and the Three Forms of Unity, which allows the group to become more familiar with the URCNA's confessions.

The weekly Bible study is also an excellent opportunity for the group to become more closely knit together. They learn together, pray together, plan together, encourage one another, and even serve each other. This is a key ingredient to solidifying the core group's commitment to the church plant.

Grow the Bible Study in Spiritual Maturity

The teaching of the Bible study should aim to edify believers through instruction in the Christian faith. Some of the indicators by which the Consistory can measure the spiritual maturity of the core group are as follows: their growth in knowledge (1 Cor. 1.4-5; Eph. 1.17; Phil. 1.9-10; Col. 1.9-10); their love for the saints (Rom. 12.10-13; Eph. 1.15; Col. 1.4); their desire to evangelize and invite others (Col. 4.5-6; 1 Pet. 3.15-16); their willingness to give financially (1 Cor. 16.1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9); their possession of potential future leaders (1 Tim. 3.1-13; Titus 1.5-9).

Grow the Bible Study Numerically

As with spiritual growth, the numerical growth of the church plant is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is God who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3.6). Nevertheless, he uses our efforts to that end. For this reason, the Consistory and core group should consider the many ways in which they can spread the word about the Bible study and the plans for a future church plant.

1. Internet

Developing a webpage that advertises the weekly Bible study and indicates plans for a future church plant is an excellent way to inform the public and establish contacts in the targeted area. The webpage should be part of or linked to the mother church's website. It is also recommended that one or two email contacts be referenced on the webpage.

2. *Radio advertisements*

The Consistory should consider making use of local Christian radio stations, especially those that air popular programs with Reformed teaching such as *Renewing Your Mind* or *The White Horse Inn*. A thirty or sixty second advertisement placed before or after one of these programs can be costly, but in many cases it has proven to be a superb method of reaching people in the targeted area who are interested in Reformed theology. Radio stations are often willing to offer reasonable rates to churches, and usually provide professional services in producing the advertisement.

3. *Fliers in public places of interest*

A method less costly (but perhaps also less effective) than radio advertisements is the placement of fliers in strategic places, such as local Christian bookstores, libraries, community centers, and coffee shops. Many of these establishments are happy to grant permission to churches in the community for the posting of a flier. This is an easy way to get information about the work into the public. And with the advancement and accessibility of publishing software, creating attractive leaflets and fliers has become very simple.

4. *Conference*

A one or even two-day conference or seminar on Reformed theology in the community is another way of spreading the word about the church plant. This also has the advantage of offering good teaching on a particular subject of interest to Christians in the area. Eschatology, family worship, or the doctrines of grace are among the many good choices of subjects. The Consistory might consider bringing gifted speakers on the particular subject, perhaps from Reformed seminaries or the various ministers within its classis. At the conference, plenty of information about the church plant should be distributed to the attendees. Moreover, follow-up contact should be made with every attendee, which is possible through registration rosters.

5. *Word of mouth*

While it is always wise for a Consistory to employ as many methods of advertisement as possible, the most effective and time-tested means remains word of mouth. The core group as well as the members of the mother church should do all they can to let their friends and neighbors know about the new work through personal conversation.

It should be pointed out, however, that members of the mother church who live in the geographical area of the Bible study may be encouraged to attend and be part of the core group, but under no circumstances should they be pressured to do so. The numerical growth of the Bible study must be organic in nature, increasing by means of the Holy Spirit's gathering together people who are willing participants.

Determine Level of Financial Support

Before the Consistory proceeds to Phase III, they should determine the amount of financial support required to call and pay a minister (CO Arts. 2 and 47) and whether or not sufficient funds exist. The Consistory should inquire of the core group concerning their commitment to support a minister and work toward financial self-sufficiency. They should also notify their classis of any need they might have for assistance.

Form a Steering Committee

Before proceeding to Phase III, the Consistory should form a steering committee that operates under its direct oversight in the planning and advertising of the church plant, and in assisting the teacher or church planter as needed. Ideally, the members of this committee should consist of the appointed teacher (and later the church planter, once he is called), at least one elder from the Consistory, one deacon, and preferably three or four male members of the mother church who are regular attendees of the church plant. The steering committee should report to the Consistory at its monthly meeting in order to provide updates on the progress of the work.

Secure a Location for Worship Services on the Lord's Day

Before proceeding to Phase III, the Consistory, with the help of the core group, should secure a location for worship services on the Lord's Day. Such places might include the auditorium at a local public or Christian school, a Seventh Day Adventist church, a synagogue, community centers, private theaters or playhouses, or other vacant buildings available for rent. Another option is to rent the building of another Christian church, and to work out a system of staggered meeting times in the shared space.

Wherever the venue, several things should be considered: Is this a good location for the targeted area? Is this building adequately conducive for worship services? How long will this location be available? Is the rent within the council's budget for the church plant? The Consistory should avoid moving the location of the church plant too many times.

Call a Church Planter or Secure Pulpit Supply

Before proceeding to Phase III, the Consistory must either call an ordained church planter or secure pulpit supply. Someone who can faithfully proclaim the Word of God should be leading every worship service.

A Consistory may prefer to hire stated pulpit supply before taking up the responsibility of calling and overseeing an ordained minister to serve as church planter. It might be that the Consistory is hesitant to call a church planter for fear that the church plant may fail. They may want greater assurance that the core group possesses adequate numerical size, spiritual maturity, and financial viability before proceeding with a call. While this is an understandable concern, it should be emphasized that the sooner the core group has a dedicated pastor serving them, the better. In most cases, the success of a church plant depends greatly on having a good church planter. Although church planting is not the work of a sole individual but requires the

involvement of a whole church and its leadership, it necessitates a pastor called and set apart for this weighty task.

If sufficient funding for a minister is lacking among the mother church and the core group, financial aid from the classis should be sought and secured before calling and paying a minister. If a church is unable to hire a pastor as a church planter, it is recommended that a joint venture committee of representatives from at least two additional Consistories within the classis be formed in order to secure needed funds (see URCNA 2001 report, *Biblical and Confessional View of Missions*).

What are the Qualities of a Good Church Planter?

As the Consistory considers calling a church planter, they must look for the right man. It is not as simple as looking for a pastor or seminary student who is searching for a call. The difficult labor of church planting is not for everyone. It is a specialized work of ministry that demands certain qualities and strengths. In addition to the characteristics of godliness listed in 1 Timothy 3.1-7, the church planter should possess, at a minimum, the following eight characteristics:

1. He has a passion for the gospel

While every URCNA minister should exhibit a passion for the gospel, the church planter in particular must be clearly marked by such zeal. He should be a man who is confident that the gospel is the means the Holy Spirit uses to create and sustain the church of Jesus Christ. He should be so gripped by the gospel that he loves to proclaim it every week, firmly believing it to be the message that most glorifies God. He should have a deep conviction that the message of Christ's life, death, and resurrection is not only for the conversion of the sinner but also for the sanctification of the saint. He should be convinced that the gospel is the means for motivating people to do good works and live godly lives. He should be committed to preaching that makes the person and work of Christ central to every sermon.

2. He is firmly committed to the Three Forms of Unity

While every URCNA minister subscribes fully to the Three Forms of Unity, the church planter must be a man who loves these confessions and is passionate about teaching them to others. The Three Forms of Unity form the theological basis upon which the church plant is established, and helps protect the unity of its members. Because the URCNA are confessional churches, the church planter must be able and willing to help the core group understand why we believe and confess the Three Forms of Unity.

3. He has a passion for church planting

The church planter must be a man who is not put off by "the day of small things." He must have a missionary mindset and enjoy the challenge of laboring for the establishment of a new church. He should be a man who understands deeply that church planting is spiritual work from beginning to end (1 Cor. 3.6-7).

4. *He has strong leadership skills*

The ordinary challenges of an established church are usually intensified in a church plant. The church plant is small, fragile, and underdeveloped. It requires, therefore, a strong leader. The church planter must be a good communicator and able to work with a wide variety of people. He should be able to handle stress and disappointment. He should also exhibit a firm grasp of and devotion to biblical ecclesiology and church polity. Given his responsibility to guide and nurture this new work, he should be well studied and well versed in the doctrine of the church and the URCNA Church Order.

5. *He has a vigorous work ethic*

Although the church planter may receive proper oversight and plenty of help from his Consistory and mother church, he will inevitably serve in many different roles. The church plant does not yet have the luxury of its own elders, deacons, committees, or secretary. Church planting inevitably requires a lot of hours and thought. It is imperative, then, that the church planter be an energetic, self-motivated man who is able to manage his time well. He must have the patience and endurance to labor like a soldier, athlete, and hard-working farmer (2 Tim. 2.1-6) even in the midst of a fledging mission work.

6. *He has exceptional gifts for preaching and teaching*

In most cases, the church plant will not survive if the preaching is poor. In fact, few people will be willing to commit to a struggling new mission work which meets in a school gymnasium unless the preaching is above average. While it is the Holy Spirit who makes the preaching of the Word effectual, he also equips men with certain gifts, and does not equip them equally. The Consistory must be honest and loving in their observation of possible candidates for the work. They should find a man who is, among other things, a strong and gifted preacher.

The church planter must also be an exceptional teacher. He must be able to make complicated doctrines clear and easy to grasp. He must also be able to answer with patience and skill the many theological questions people raise. He must be able to help the core group understand why we believe and confess the Word of God as summarized in the Three Form of Unity, why we regulate worship according to Scripture, and why we follow Reformed principles of piety and practice. It often proves to be particularly helpful if the church planter has some background in or exposure to non-Reformed churches and is able to sympathize with those coming to understand Reformed theology for the first time.

7. *He has a genuine love for people and a servant's heart*

Does he initiate conversations and enjoy speaking with people? Does he remember their names and life circumstances? Does he spend time with his congregants? Does he interact well with the youth? These are important observations to make, for the church planter must genuinely love people and serve those in come in a manner which displays that love. In many cases, a church plant is not well served by a planter who is not able or willing to invest time and energy into the people.

8. *He must be a man of prayer*

Is this man notably committed to the practice of “continuing in prayer” (CO Art. 2)? Does he understand that church planting is spiritual work from beginning to end, and thus requires him to labor in prayer? Does he share the apostle Paul’s passion to pray for mission works and the spread of the gospel? (Rom. 1.10; 15.30-32; 2 Cor. 1.11; Eph. 1.16-21; 3.14-19; 6.18-20; Phil. 1.9-11; Col. 1.9-10; 4.2-4; 1 Thess. 5.17; 2 Thess. 3.1-2). A church planter must view and practice prayer as a means of grace, so that he will not expect God to bless his labors apart from continually asking God for the grace of the Holy Spirit (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 116; Luke 11:5-13).

Phase III: Establishing a Church Plant

The purpose of Phase III is for the church plant to hold worship services and continue to grow spiritually and numerically under the oversight of its Consistory until it is ready to organize as a congregation within the URCNA.

Call Worship Services

Once the Consistory has secured a location for Sunday worship services, called a church planter or acquired pulpit supply, and is convinced that the core group possesses adequate spiritual maturity, they are ready to call worship services on the Lord's Day.

The Consistory must decide how many worship services will initially be called on the Lord's Day: evening, morning, or both. While our Church Order mandates that "the Consistory shall call the congregation together for corporate worship twice on each Lord's Day" (Art. 37), it does not prohibit a Consistory from calling only one service for the church plant if it is understood that the members of the church plant will attend worship at the mother church during the other service. Many church plants have found it beneficial to begin with only evening services in order to get things started slowly. This has the advantage of encouraging the core group to attend morning worship together where they can witness a mature Reformed church and become more familiar with their Consistory. On the other hand, some church plants have opted to begin both morning and evening services at once, believing that this provides more opportunity for spiritual and numerical growth.

The Consistory must also approve the liturgy of the worship services. It is not necessary that the liturgy of the church plant be identical to the liturgy of the mother church. Provided that the liturgy is in accordance with the regulative principle of worship and within the bounds of the Church Order, there is room for some variance. The church planter, perhaps after consulting with the steering committee, should bring to his Consistory the liturgy he would like to use, and ask for their permission. The Consistory should keep in mind the circumstances of the church plant and the desires of the steering committee.

Consistorial Presence

It is highly encouraged that at least one elder attend every worship service of the church plant. It is the Consistory who calls and regulates the worship services (CO Arts. 37-38). A Consistory cannot exercise proper oversight of its church plant without having an elder physically present at services on the Lord's Day.

This may be accomplished in at least two different ways. One option is for the Consistory to create a schedule in which the elders rotate in their attendance to the church plant. This has the advantage of allowing all of the elders on the Consistory the opportunity to participate more

intimately in the oversight and shepherding of the church plant. This scenario may only be realistic, however, if the church plant is within reasonable driving distance from the mother church. Another option is to assign one or two elders of the Consistory to be assigned to the church plant and thus always present at its worship services. This has the advantage of the elder(s) becoming more familiar with the members of the church plant so that better shepherding may take place. This scenario is usually more practical for a church plant that is a long distance from the mother church. It may work particularly well when an elder who desires to be a permanent part of the work lives close to it.

It is also helpful if other members of the mother church visit the church plant. This will be a great encouragement to the church plant. It aids their singing in worship and strengthens their fellowship. It also allows those in the mother church to witness what the Lord is doing among his people.

Offerings

Offerings should be collected from the very first worship service, giving the core group the opportunity to participate in biblical giving. The council of the mother church should determine from the beginning how the offerings will be handled at the church plant. A clear and consistent procedure should be followed for collecting and counting the money.

The council must also decide how the collected funds will be processed. Should the money received from the offerings at the church plant be placed in an account separate from the mother church's general fund? Would it be better to put that money toward the mother church's general fund which includes a budgeted line item of support for the church plant? Will the money from the offerings be transported immediately to the mother church each Lord's Day or deposited at a nearby bank? The council should decide what is best for their church and church plant.

For this reason, it may be wise to have a deacon present at the church plant during worship services. This deacon can be made responsible for collecting and processing the offerings received at the church plant. The deacons can also train selected men from the core group (perhaps those on the steering committee) on their procedure for collecting and counting.

Membership in the Church Plant

Because the church plant is not yet an organized congregation within the URCNA, there is no official membership in the church plant itself. When we speak of membership in the church plant, we mean those who attend the church plant but have membership in the mother church. Such membership creates a covenantal relationship between the Consistory and the members of the church plant. It is necessary for the Consistory to shepherd and govern the members of the church plant, as well as exercise discipline when necessary. Without this membership, the Consistory has no official authority over or obligation to those in the church plant. The Consistory should realize that they have just as much responsibility for their members at the church plant as they do with respect to their members in the local congregation of the mother church.

As attendance increases at the church plant, it is likely that many of the gathered group will come from a variety of ecclesiastical backgrounds. Some will be completely new to the concept of church membership. Brought up in the radical individualism common to American Christianity, some may even find the idea of formal membership in an established church to be antiquated, unnecessary, and legalistic. The church planter and Consistory must exercise great care for these sheep and patiently help them come to a biblical understanding of belonging to Christ's church (see Appendix 1).

The church planter, then, bears great responsibility in educating people about church membership and proper oversight. It is critical that he and the Consistory make clear that the church plant is under the oversight of the body of elders from the mother church. This is important for helping those in attendance to avoid the mistake of thinking that the church plant is an independent work or the sole endeavor of the church planter. To that end, the church planter might consider practices such as stating before every worship service, "Welcome to _____ Reformed Church. We are a church plant and mission work of _____ Reformed Church." Similar verbiage should be printed in the bulletin and posted on the church plant's website. Another helpful custom is for the visiting elder to accompany the church planter to the pulpit just before the worship service begins, and then for the two men to shake hands in order to demonstrate fellowship in an official manner. Such practices are not trivial, for they help communicate to those in attendance that biblical oversight is in place, and membership is with the mother church.

It is also imperative that the church planter ensures that those desiring membership fully understand the binding nature of their membership vows before they take them. Ideally, this instruction will occur in a new members' class conducted by the church planter or the pastor at the mother church and will be reiterated by the elders during the membership interview. It should be explained that while bylaws may vary from church to church, there are usually only four ways a member can terminate his membership in a Reformed church: (1) by transfer of membership by the Consistory to another Reformed or Presbyterian church within NAPARC with whom the URCNA has some ecclesiastical affiliation; (2) by death; (3) by excommunication; and (4) by non-disciplinary dismissal to affiliate with a different Christian church. The church planter must explain these details carefully to those pursuing membership. This helps new members understand more fully what they are doing when they take vows and join the church.

The church planter should do all he can to encourage the members of the church plant as they submit themselves to the Consistory and await the day when elders will be ordained in their own church. He should be sensitive to the fact that they have taken some risks in committing to the church plant and are in a somewhat irregular situation. A wise church planter will keep a shepherd's eye on the needs of his parishioners and stay in close contact with his Consistory until the time comes for the plant to organize as a church.

Sacraments

The sacraments are very helpful as instruction to the members of the church plant. The believer's faith in Christ is strengthened by witnessing baptisms and celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Moreover, since the sacraments at the church plant are to be administered by the overseeing Consistory, the attendees of the church plant are able to see proper oversight taking place during worship.

The Consistory must decide how the sacraments will be administered in the church plant. They determine the frequency of observing the Lord's Supper, the policy for fencing the Table, and the kinds of elements to be used. It may not be necessary for the Consistory to insist that the church plant completely conform to the mother church in these practices, provided everything falls within the bounds of Scripture and the Church Order and has received the permission of the elders. In deciding on its sacrament policies for the church plant, the Consistory should seek to do everything in "a manner as is most conducive to the edification of the congregation" (CO Art. 46).

Necessary Criteria for Organizing as a Church

Before a church plant can proceed to Phase IV and organize as an official URCNA congregation, there are three main criteria that must be satisfied:

1. Sufficient Size

While a precise number cannot be given to determine sufficient size, it is fair to say that the church plant should at least be larger than a few families before it organizes. If it organizes prematurely, it runs the risk of failure. For example, if an organized church consists of only three or four families, what will happen to it if one or two of the families move away? Unless the Lord is pleased to add more families to the work, the church will in all likelihood collapse for lack of financial viability. On the other hand, a new church with at least ten committed families is more capable of sustaining unforeseen reduction in their numbers.

Care should be taken by the Consistory, church planter, and steering committee not to push too quickly for organization if the numbers are still very low. Pray that the Lord will provide more families, and wait patiently for him to give the increase. Remember the words of the apostle Paul: "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3.6). At the same time, the church plant should continue to reach into its community with gospel witness.

2. Financial Stability

It is ideal for a church plant to be self-sustaining before it organizes. If the people are to mature as a congregation, they must be committed to the biblical practice of giving, and able to support their pastor, pay the rent or mortgage on their meeting place, and provide for the poor within their congregation without assistance from outside sources. The church plant, therefore, must begin working toward financial self-sufficiency as soon as possible.

3. Suitable Men for Office

A church plant cannot organize as a church until the Lord provides qualified men for office. From the beginning, the Consistory, core group, church planter, and mother church should

commit to praying that God would supply such men. Potential leaders should be identified, encouraged, and nurtured by the church planter and Consistory. As noted above, the steering committee is often where some of this development takes place. It provides the church planter and Consistory with an excellent opportunity to witness the character and competence of potential officers. In addition to this, the church planter and/or Consistory should teach an officer training course.

Once the Consistory, along with the church planter and steering committee, is convinced that the church plant possesses sufficient size, financial viability, and suitable men for office, it is ready to proceed to Phase IV.

**Phase IV:
Establishing an Organized Church**

The purpose of Phase IV is to transition from church plant to organized church in the URCNA. This ordinarily will take place in ten steps.

Step 1: Request Advice from Classis

In accordance with CO Article 22, the Consistory must seek the advice of its classis before proceeding to organize the church plant into a particular congregation. This, however, should not be the first time the Consistory seeks the counsel of its classis. As noted above, the Consistory should seek the advice and involvement of the classis as early as Phase I. The classis should be well aware of the spiritual and numerical growth of the church plant throughout its journey to become an organized church. As much as possible, they should shoulder the burden of establishing this new church with the overseeing Consistory. Nevertheless, the Consistory will need to seek the advice of classis when it believes the time has come for organization. If the classis concurs with the Consistory's desire to organize the church plant into a URCNA congregation, the Consistory may proceed to the next step.

Step 2: Nominate and Train Men for Office

In accordance with CO Article 12, the council of the mother church must nominate male confessing members of the church plant who meet the biblical requirements of the office and indicate their agreement with the Form of Subscription. The council may give members of the church plant opportunity to direct attention to suitable men. If these men have not yet been trained for office, such training should take place as soon as possible, preferably before they stand for election.

Step 3: Elect Elders and Deacons

The Consistory will hold a special congregational meeting for those in the church plant who hold membership in the mother church. At this meeting, the men nominated for office will stand for election. Electing its own officers is an encouraging and vital step in the maturation of the new congregation.

Step 4: Transfer Memberships to the Newly Organized Church

Those in the church plant who hold membership in the mother church must request the Consistory to transfer their memberships to their newly organized church. This can be done in one act by producing a list with all the members' names, having the members sign the list, and attaching this list to a letter requesting transfer of membership, addressed to the clerk of the overseeing Consistory. The church planter and Consistory should explain this process to the members who are being transferred so that everyone fully understands what is happening.

Step 5: Hold an Ordination & Installation Service

After the new officers have been elected and the Consistory has acted on the transfer of memberships, an ordination and installation service should be held. The Consistory should be present at this service. This is an important opportunity for the new congregation to hear the ordination vows of and charges given to their newly elected leaders. They will also receive a charge as a new congregation and give thanks to God for his faithfulness.

Step 6: Establish Bylaws

The newly formed Consistory must establish bylaws for the church as soon as possible. In most cases, these bylaws provide some of the necessary documentation for the church to incorporate and be recognized by the state as a legitimate non-profit organization. They also help the Consistory apply many of the principles of the URCNA Church Order to its congregation in its specific setting. The Consistory of the mother church should assist the new officers in writing these bylaws as needed.

Step 7: Establish Bank Accounts and File as a Non-Profit Organization

The newly formed council should set up a bank account for the church if one does not yet exist. Churches should consider filing as a non-profit organization with the state. In the United States, this status is known as 501(c)(3). The Consistory of the mother church should assist them in these tasks as needed.

Step 8: Call a Pastor

If it hasn't been done already, the newly formed council should have as one of its first tasks the calling of a minister. They should establish a financial package for a pastoral candidate (CO Art. 10) and begin their search for a pastor (CO Arts. 6-8). The Consistory of the mother church should assist them in this task as needed.

Step 9: Be Received Provisionally by Classis

In accordance with CO Article 32, the Consistory of the mother church must make an overture to its classis at its next meeting to receive provisionally the newly established church into the federation. Once the church is received, it is recognized as a fully legitimate and organized church in the URCNA, and enjoys the same rights and responsibilities of every church in the federation.

Step 10: Be Received Officially by Next Synod

In accordance with CO Article 32, classis must make an overture to synod at its next meeting to ratify the reception of the new church into the federation.

Advice for Church Planters

The work of church planting is an exciting and joyous endeavor. Those engaged in this work have the special privilege of seeing a new congregation of Jesus Christ take shape in a particular place, so that the Kingdom of God expands in this world for the salvation of sinners, for their worship of God, and for their discipleship under the Lord Jesus. A church planter will be continually getting to know new people (some of them new believers), and he will be constantly developing new things in the mission work – all of which adds to the excitement. But it is imperative that the church planter not allow these many blessings to make him unrealistic about the great difficulty, potential dangers, and many disappointments that are almost always a part of this work.

Church planters are pastor-teachers who labor in a ministry that has much in common with the work of the average local pastor of an established congregation – praying, studying, teaching, evangelizing, discipling, administrating, worshiping, etc. But he must do all of that very demanding work of the ministry while at the same time working continually on a host of things that the average pastor of an established church may rarely, if ever, have to consider – laying the foundation of a new congregation; shaping its infrastructure, policies, worship services, ministries, and congregational life; identifying and training its first set of ordained leaders; and tending constantly to numerous practical and administrative matters (from the janitorial to the technological, and everything in between). His overseeing Consistory will guide and help him to some degree, and the Lord will provide him with some helpful servants within the church plant. The vast majority of the work, however, will fall to the church planter, who will quickly find that the difficulty of pastoral ministry is virtually doubled in this calling.

Of course, there are also unique dangers that a church planter must be prepared to face. The small group of believers that gather around his teaching and preaching will be especially vulnerable to attack and corruption. Wolves and hypocrites will come, and their purpose will not be to build up the fledgling body of Christ. The church planter himself may become so consumed with his work that the evil one will have no difficulty in sowing seeds of discord and bitterness in the man's family. Because of the relative smallness and immaturity of the plant itself, in addition to the extreme difficulty of the work, there are real dangers involved in church planting.

Finally, there are usually many disappointments that go with this work. After attending for some time, certain people will just stop coming. Not once, but perhaps numerous times, financial support may dip to an alarming degree. Certain efforts will simply fail to materialize. The church planter will never see in the sheep as much fruit as he wants for the praise of his Lord. Moreover, it is possible that the church plant will only last a couple years, and then have to close its doors. On the other hand, it is possible that it may take quite a number of years before it can organize, and when it does so, the church planter may have to leave, making way for a new pastor.

Given the great difficulty and disappointment often involved in this work, it is vital that the church planter be a man not only of exceptional gifting and stamina, but also of abiding faith

and humility. Each and every day he will humbly need to embrace his calling to be a servant, trusting Almighty God to regenerate sinners, to preserve and sanctify his sheep, and to give increase as he determines. But if the church planter is truly humble, he will also take heed to advice about church planting from those who have gone before him and who labor with him. The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to share some advice with church planters about the kind of men they will need to be, and the sort of work they will need to do, in order to be faithful and effective in their calling. Church planters, take heed!²

Maintain a Vigorous Commitment to the Mission of the Church

There are few things more detrimental to a church plant, or to the church planter himself, than confusion about the church's mission, or lack of focus in maintaining it. Without maintaining this clarity and commitment throughout the development of the plant, the church planter can very easily lose his way, so that he begins to neglect what is essential, spends time and energy where he should not, and potentially gives a distorted identity to the future congregation, if one is established at all.

As a church planter, you need in the first place to be clear in your own mind as to the mission of the church of Christ. In whatever terms the church plant will verbalize its own particular mission statement, make sure it is not a mission other than or even supplemental to the mission that the risen Lord Jesus gave his church! Your mission is to make disciples and grow them up to maturity by the faithful and prayerful use of the divinely appointed means (Matt. 28.18-20). This is the mission that our Lord gave to his church; and it is the mission that must define and drive every church plant from the very beginning. If your goal is merely to lead worship until enough disciples have gathered and committed themselves to the establishment of a self-sustaining congregation, you will likely have a very unhealthy congregation, if one ever forms. Remember that a church plant, like any true church, exists to offer God joyful and biblical worship (1 Pet. 2.4-10), to serve as God's ambassadors in calling other sinners to be reconciled to him through Christ (2 Cor. 5.18-21), and to build up these disciples in their Christian faith and in their love for God and each other, until each member of the body attains to that maturity that is in Christ Jesus, its head (Eph. 4.11-16; Col. 1.27-29). Always be clear about the identity and mission of the church.

But you must see to it that you also maintain a vigorous commitment to that mission of the church in everything you do *and* in everything the church plant does. This mission of making and growing disciples of Christ will be fulfilled by the church plant, and then continue to be fulfilled in an established congregation, only if it is your expressed mission statement, constantly held before your people, normative for all your labors as church planter, owned by the leaders you seek to train for church office, and evident in everything that happens in the life of the church plant. If your daily work as church planter does not contribute to this mission, you probably should not be doing it. If you cannot see how your work contributes to this mission, you will probably be executing it poorly.

² A good deal of this material was inspired by "Doing the Work of an Organizing Pastor," chapter 4 of *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (Willow Grove, PA: Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, n.d.), 53-75.

Because this mission of the church is so important and yet so very difficult to fulfill with faithfulness, it is imperative that you recognize not only your inability to carry it out alone, but also your need for accountability in doing your part. For this very reason, God gave you the elders of the overseeing Consistory (Acts 13.1-3), and he will provide you with new elders in the church plant, should it please him to grow and establish one (Acts 14.23). The elders in the sending church must be continually engaged in this work with you – even from a distance. From the beginning, make sure that they share with you a clear commitment to the mission of the church; that they are willing to hold you accountable to that mission; and that they maintain a personal involvement in the discipleship of those who are gathering around your ministry. Finally, do not wait for ordained servants to arrive at the church plant, ready to be installed into office. From the start, you should search for mature men who manifestly love Christ and others. You do not want elders (or deacons) who view themselves primarily as board members. Such officers will only help you execute board meetings! As soon as possible, identify spiritually qualified men who are gifted for serving as church officers, challenge them to aspire to ordained service, and seek to train them for the very personal and spiritual work of elders and deacons. But begin early on to enlist them in helping you maintain the mission of the church plant. Having a plurality of local leaders is essential to an established congregation, but it is also a great benefit to the hard work of planting a church in preparation for the day of its organization.

Devote Yourself Daily to Growth as a Man of God

Making disciples and growing them up to maturity is a task that will elude you if you are not personally holding fast to Christ, and seeking continually to grow more mature in him. Your serving God and others as a church planter will very quickly become stale, potentially false, and dangerous to you and others apart from your daily feeding upon Christ through his Word, resting in who he is and in all he has done, and prayerfully savoring your Triune God and Savior. Remember that the first thing every minister of the Word is called to do is pray (Acts 6.4; CO Art. 2).

But you must not think of your devotion to God as a useful means to achieving the goal of successful church planting, which is an idolatrous exchange of loving the true God for loving your work. Your fundamental calling is to grow in faith as a disciple of Christ and a child of God. It is in Christ alone that you must find your true identity (not in being a church planter). It is in the Lord God that you must find your strength (not in your skill set). It is in the grace and love of the Triune God that you must find your joy (not in the success you will long to achieve).

Men are qualified for this calling as church planters only if they remain above reproach (1 Tim. 3.2). However, your ordination does not somehow guarantee your being or remaining a blameless man of God. “Keep a close watch on yourself and the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4.16). By an active faith in Christ, and prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit, seek at all times to walk in godliness, and to have integrity as a man of God who bears a consistently godly character in the entirety of your life. “Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thess. 5.22), and “give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all” (Rom. 12.17). This is not only about your qualification for office – it is ultimately about the honor of God’s holy name and the wellbeing of the church plant. Remember, as goes the shepherd, so go the sheep.

One particular area of integrity for which you may have to strive early on, and guard throughout your ministry, is time management. This is essential, not only for avoiding burn out from the massive amount of work you will have to do each week, but also for maintaining balance in life for your own wellbeing, and for the health of your relationship with others. With the help of your overseeing elders (and, if you have one, your wife), figure out what amount of time is typically needed each week for the following: your work (all duties that directly affect the church plant and those who are part of it); your rest (relaxing, reading, exercising, as well as adequate sleep each night); service (some time devoted each week to serving people in the community who are not part of the church plant); and last, but certainly not least, family (who are entitled not only to a good deal of your day off and the vast majority of your vacation time, but also to a couple of uninterrupted hours each day). If any of these areas of life are neglected for long, you, your family, and your ministry will suffer. Try to plan out your year, your month, your week, and each day, in order to manage time according to a balanced and workable schedule. And of course, you must always maintain the humble recognition that God alone controls your time, and he will invariably allow countless interruptions.

Church planters have to be committed to a continual process of learning and growing as disciples of Christ. Make a practice of regularly sitting at the feet of those whose teaching (through print and audio, or in person) will help you grow as a godly man and as a church planting pastor. Always bear in mind that you are not the first church planter! Between your own federation and a number of other denominations there is an abundance of resources. Be humble and wise enough to make good use of them. Moreover, your wife (if you have one), your overseeing elders, and a couple mature men in the church plant should all be enlisted in helping you see where you need to grow and how you interact with others. However, a pastoral mentor who knows you well, and has already done this work of church planting, is truly invaluable. As busy as you will be in the care of your family and your fledgling flock, be careful to keep in contact with a few close colleagues in the ministry, and be humble enough to identify one (preferably your senior in years, maturity, and experience) who will help and counsel you in a way that few others can.

If there is one area of your life that requires special attention, it is your loving service to your own family and fellowship with them. You are the Lord's under-shepherd in the care of souls in the church plant, but can any of them be as precious to you as the souls of your own wife and children? Make sure not to give the cold leftovers to this precious little flock. Often ask your wife (and arrange for others to ask her) if she feels you are married to her or to the church plant. The demands of your work can lead you to feel that you must sacrifice time with your family in order to give just a little more attention to your work. It will happen on occasion, but you must not let it become the norm. Your service to Christ and his church can never be any better than your loving service to your own family. "If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?" (1 Tim. 3.5). Shepherd your family each day by teaching and directing them by God's truth, by leading them in the joyful worship of God, and by creating a godly and loving aroma in your household. Realize that your most powerful teaching, among your family especially, will come through your way of life. You must always bear in mind your duty to model before them a consistent faith in God and love for others. Be sure to schedule adequate time with your family, vigorously guard it, and make good use of it by

loving and serving them, enjoying your time with them, and lavishing upon them affection, gentleness, and mercy.

Shepherd Your People by Knowing and Serving Each One of the Sheep

There is a special intimacy and affection that you should have with your wife and children, but the pastoral care that you give to them really is of a piece with that care that you are to give each soul in the church plant. You have the unique calling to establish a new congregation of Jesus Christ, which will require you to focus a great deal of your attention upon evangelizing, organizing, studying, teaching and preaching. But remember that you are also the pastor of each soul that the Lord is pleased to gather around your ministry, and with each one of them you need to strive to be “like a nursing mother taking care of her own children” and “like a father with his children” (1 Thess. 2.7, 11).

Your people need to know that you genuinely love them, not only by your working hard to give them sound nourishment from the pulpit, but also by your declaring to them the whole counsel of God from house to house (Acts 20.20, 27). For that personal teaching to be effective, you have to be a shepherd who knows his sheep, and they have to know that you care deeply for them because of the interest, compassion and service that you devote to each one. In addition to the friendliness that you show to all attendees on the Lord’s Day, also strive to get to know each one of them by inviting them into your home, and making it your custom to visit them where they live and work. This will take continual and very deliberate planning, scheduling, and execution, but it will be well worth it. You can shepherd the people well only if you work to know each one personally, and demonstrate timely compassion to them when they are in need. With most of them, you will eventually become a trusted friend and counselor to whom they look for guidance, and from whom they more willingly receive correction. Of course, this personal knowledge of and connection to each person in the church plant will also greatly increase the effectiveness of your preaching.

Being a loving spiritual parent to each one of those people who attend or become part of the church plant will also require that you make sure that they are enveloped into the life of the church family, that they are loved and served by others, and that they find a way to use the gifts God has given them for the good of others in the church plant. But in addition to all of these very practical matters, you must be especially devoted to an activity that can seem impractical and rarely yields immediate results – prayer. A critical part of your calling is that you pray for each soul; but for the pastor who loves to spend time with his books more than with his people these prayers will be infrequent, perfunctory and vacuous. Make time to pray much for each of the people that become part of the church plant. And in order that those prayers would be regular, personal and specific, reach out to your people, take real interest in each one, and pray often with them.

Love Lost Sinners Enough to Serve and Evangelize Them

As a church planter, you are a pastor-teacher and evangelist (2 Tim. 4.5). Your calling is not only to be an ambassador for God in urging sinners to be reconciled to him through Christ, but also to equip the saints in the church plant to be witnesses for Christ in their own lives (Phil. 2.14-16). In addition to preaching the gospel with regular and explicit exhortations for sinners to repent of their sins and believe on Christ, you must also train your people how to be witnesses for Christ by defending the faith, by commending it to others through loving service, and by sharing the truth with their neighbors in a winsome manner.

However, as important as all your preaching and teaching will be in this connection, you must also make it your common and evident practice to be involved in your community, to reach out to unsaved people, to befriend and serve them, and to share the gospel with them. This way of life should be a model for your people to follow, and an indispensable means of adorning the gospel and spreading it to others because of your love for them, which flows from Christ's love for you. The church plant that you serve cannot ever adopt the attitude that it exists primarily to be a new church home for believers who could not remain at some other church. Numerical growth will happen in this way to some degree, but your people must know that the church plant, like any congregation, is called by God to go and make new disciples, not to attract old ones. We should expect the Lord Jesus to increase the numbers of the church plant as it practices being a community that lovingly serves and witnesses to lost sinners.

It will be important for you to instruct your people continually about church growth. Concern that a church grow in numbers can be a sinful preoccupation rooted in greed, competition, and success. But on the other hand, concern for growth in numbers can and should be rooted in a godly desire to see the Lord glorified through the increase of redeemed sinners who worship him! Teach your flock that its concern and preparation for growth in numbers, and its practice of witnessing to others, are integral to their growth in Christian maturity and faithfulness to God. If he "desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2.4), then his children should share that desire, and demonstrate it through loving service toward our neighbors and through courageous and compassionate witnessing to the unsaved. Model this before your people as a matter of your own faithfulness. And teach them to leave the results to our sovereign God and Savior, who is pleased to bring others into his kingdom through our imperfect love of our neighbors and our feeble witnessing to them.

Strive to Be an Effective Servant of the Word

The church planter is a pastor-teacher, a minister of the Word who says with Paul, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9.16). He knows that he is accursed if he preaches anything other than the one true gospel (Gal. 1.8-9). And while he is under obligation to preach it, he is also very happy and eager to do so, for it is his privilege to proclaim that good news which is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1.14-16). Consequently, as a church planter you will have to spend a great deal of your time and energy studying the Scriptures so that you might faithfully communicate the truth to others. But do not imagine that you have fulfilled your calling by adequate study and clear communication of the truth.

To be an effective minister of the Word, you must always take care that God's Word is actually reaching the people and renewing their minds for the transformation of their lives (Rom. 12.1-2). For an effective ministry, you must strive for your labor in the Word, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, to equip the saints, "until we all attain the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4.12-13). Watch yourself and your teaching, but pay attention to the sheep, and see to it that they are being fed and growing, that the word of the kingdom is bearing fruit in their lives for God's pleasure (Matt. 13.18-23). Here are a few things that will help you effectively teach the sheep of Christ to believe and walk in the truth.

You are to declare to the saints the whole counsel of God, denying them nothing in his Word that is profitable for their walking in faith and repentance (Acts 20.20-21, 27). But if God regenerates sinful hearts and brings them to faith through the word of Christ (Rom. 10.17), and this faith is then nourished and sustained by that same word (1 Cor. 2.2-5; Rom. 12.1-2; Eph. 4.11-16), it is absolutely critical that you preach Christ and his gospel from all Scripture (Luke 24.27). This task will require that you carefully plan out a preaching and teaching schedule in advance, so that you may provide the sheep of God with a balanced diet in the Word. You ought to teach through your favorite doctrines and books of the Bible, but avoid an unhealthy preoccupation with your interests. God's children will grow up to maturity only if they are fed with the regular and robust preaching of the gospel, and trained under the whole counsel of God.

Most helpful in this connection will be your firm commitment to the practice of being a confessionally Reformed minister of the Word who continually labors to commend our doctrinal standards to the people involved in the church plant. Whether or not you begin with two services on the Lord's Day, make sure to incorporate the Three Forms of Unity into all of your teaching and preaching – even into the very life of the church plant. It would be foolish to expect all new converts and visitors to take up and read the Three Forms of Unity with adequate understanding, but find helpful ways of commending the confessions to them as well. Provide all the people with their own copies of the confessions, and encourage use of them in their homes. Indeed, these documents are old, but they are not boring or intellectual. By your wise and winsome use of our doctrinal standards, convince your people that our confessional Reformed identity is not about being traditional or intellectual, but rather about being a true church of Christ that is captive to the all-sufficient Word of God. Make good use of these treasures in all that you do, not only to give the church plant a confessional Reformed identity, but also to give your people a steady and healthy diet in the whole system of God's truth.

Finally, make it your ambition every week to prepare a delicious feast in the Word for God's sheep to enjoy each Lord's Day. Do not think that they are going to come in droves and stick with you to the end on account of good sermons alone. They will not! But you must prioritize your preparation for and delivery of sermons in such a way that the people will know this is the single most important means of God's grace for their nourishment and growth. Seek to be a servant of the Word in a very practical way each day of the week, opening up and applying the Scriptures at every opportunity. But guard your time for sermon preparation, study thoroughly, soak the whole process of sermon writing in prayer, and give as much attention to how you will deliver the sermon as you give to studying the sermon text. Christ Jesus is the manna from heaven, but you will have to do more work than Moses in providing God's people

with this true food. Preach the Word, but pray much and study hard to preach it well. Moreover, remember that you are a minister of the Word not only during the sermon but in the way that you lead the congregation through the whole worship service. Do the work necessary to crafting a service that is rich in the use of Scripture, that is intelligible to the people, and that moves smoothly from beginning to end. Your leading the saints in the worship of God is a crucial aspect of an effective ministry of the Word. Remember, *lex orandi, lex credendi* – the law of praying through the church’s liturgy is the law of believing.

Make Sure that All Things Are Done Decently and in Good Order

While Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 14:40 apply most directly to the public worship of God, the church planter will have integrity in his ministry and peace among the people only if he gives constant attention to the many details of administration and communication. In an established congregation these details naturally receive the pastor’s attention to some degree, but in the early phases of church planting you will be required to do almost all of it yourself. This may not be what you consider the most enjoyable aspect of the ministry, but make no mistake – it most definitely is a major part of church planting. The church plant will suffer if you are careless here; but careful attention to detail will make for order and peace, all to the glory of God who “is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33).

Give thought especially to worship services, but also to every other meeting of the people, whether for study, fellowship, planning, outreach, evangelism, or leadership training. With a clear purpose in mind, carefully plan out what should take place at each meeting, so that it might be most productive and honoring to the Lord. But do not neglect your personal decorum. However good your content might be, packaging and delivery are also important. Be thoughtful about your mannerisms, your attire, your voice, and even your mood. In every way, you should strive to be a servant who honors the Lord and reflects well upon him. Of course, these things must also be a concern for all those in the church plant who are appointed to greet or serve in a similar capacity.

Communications within the congregation and to those outside of it are also a matter of great importance for a church plant. In addition to the weekly bulletin announcements, church planters will want to develop the use of a website, email, possibly social media, as well as a number of printed forms of communication (brochures, newsletters, etc.). Be clear in your own mind, and make it clear to your people, what the purpose of each form of communication is and how it is to be used, received, and processed. Do not be haphazard with any of your words that are sent through electronic or printed means, but choose and use them carefully. Also, be sure to give adequate opportunity for the people to communicate with you, with their other leaders, and with each other. The people need to be kept informed, and deserve to know how decisions affect them; but they also need a way to practice healthy communication with others, everyone speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:16).

Another key element in administration is orderliness and soundness in the church plant’s meeting place. Always bear in mind (and impress upon others) that the church is not just a place. It is where God’s people gather to serve him. Cleanliness and functionality, safety and comfort, bathroom accessibility and supervision of children, food and drink, tasteful and appropriate

décor, sound and lighting, as well as any set-up and clean-up are all important concerns. In many instances, these items will not be all that you would like them to be or even what you need, but be sure to attain an adequate measure of good order in these details. In a word, virtually everything about the church plant, its being and doing, should communicate as much as possible that you are the church of Jesus Christ, engaged in the worship of the Great King and the discipleship of His royal children.

Introduction to the Appendices

The following appendices are included for the benefit of church planters and new members. Frequently, new members come into a church searching for answers to important questions that many people in our Reformed churches have not necessarily raised. For example, “Why must I become a member?” “What is tithing?” or “What is Reformed worship?” We have included these five appendices to assist the church planter in providing answers to these common questions. We recommend that these appendices be published into separate booklets to distribute to visitors, or that this material be used in an inquirer’s or new members’ class.

Appendix 1: What Is Church Membership and Why Is It Necessary?

“What is the point of church membership? I am already a Christian and have a personal relationship with Jesus. Why do I need to become a member of a church?” Chances are, we asked those very questions when we first encountered a Reformed church. Church membership is a foreign concept to many. Due to the radical individualism common to American Christianity, many today find the idea of formal membership in an established church to be antiquated, unnecessary, and maybe even legalistic.

Church membership also goes against the popular notion in our culture that “organized religion” is inferior to “spirituality.” The former is disparaged as passé at best and hatefully intolerant at worst, while the latter is readily embraced as chic and healthy. Organized religion is viewed as something very particular that manifests itself in narrow doctrines, liturgical customs, and exclusive tradition. Spirituality, on the other hand, is seen as something universal that can express itself in a wide variety of personal faiths and individual practices that generally seek one common goal: self-improvement. Influenced by this mode of thinking, many professing Christians believe they can have membership in the invisible church while opting out of membership in the visible church.

Sadly, things do not appear to be improving. According to some market research gurus, established churches are becoming a thing of the past. Some of the so-called experts project that in the future many Americans will derive all their spiritual input through the internet. If this is true, some may not see the point in being inconvenienced by attending (let alone becoming a member of) a church when they can get the same spiritual benefits in private. Why then do Reformed churches require membership? What exactly is church membership and why is it necessary?

What Is Church Membership?

Church membership is a formal and binding covenantal relationship between a family or individual and Christ Jesus, the Head of the church, through incorporation of this family or individual into the visible body of Christ in this world, namely the church. It begins with the understanding that Christ, who possesses an invisible church composed of all those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev. 13.8; 20.15; 21.27), established a visible church on earth, that community where the elect of God are normally gathered, protected and preserved (Matt. 28.18-20; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54).

God first instituted the visible church immediately after the fall, when he separated the seed of the woman from the seed of the serpent and established them as a people united by his promise of salvation (Gen. 3.15). He further established his community when he made his covenant with the patriarch Abraham and his offspring (Gen. 12, 15, 17). He fulfilled his promises to Abraham first in the nation Israel and the land of Canaan but then more fully in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3.16, 29). Throughout the unfolding drama of redemptive history, from Abraham to Christ, God kept his people as a visible covenant community marked by the covenantal sign and seal of circumcision.

With the completion of Christ's earthly ministry and the inauguration of the new covenant, however, God no longer confined his visible church to one people (national Israel) and one place (the land of Canaan). Having satisfied the Law of Moses in his life, death, and resurrection, Christ commissioned his apostles to preach the gospel, baptize, administer the Lord's Supper, and make disciples to the ends of the earth. As the book of Acts reveals, the apostles fulfilled this commission by planting churches (Acts 2.42). Beginning in Jerusalem, Christ added daily to his church those who were being saved (Acts 2.41, 47; 4.4). The visible, covenant community became a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession" (1 Pet. 2.9; cf. Exod. 19.6), made up of people ransomed "from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5.9).

After the apostles died, the visible church did not cease to exist. The New Testament makes very clear that Christ intended for his visible church to continue until the end of the age. He ordained the office of pastor to feed his flock with the preaching of the gospel so that his sheep will be healthy and grow to maturity (Rom. 10.14-17; Eph. 4.11-16; 2 Tim. 4.1-5; Titus 1.5-9). He has supplied his church with the tangible elements of ordinary water, bread, and wine in the sacraments, which the Holy Spirit uses to nourish our faith (1 Cor. 10.16; 11.17-34; cf. John 6.41-58). He gave the office of elder so that his people will have guardians over their souls and governors who keep order (Acts 14.23; Phil. 1.1; 1 Tim. 3.1-7; 5.17; Heb. 13.17; 1 Pet. 5.1-4). He maintains the purity and peace of his church through the exercise of discipline (Matt. 18.15-20; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3.6, 14-15; Titus 1.10-14; 3.9-11). He has provided the office of deacon for the care of the poor and needy in the congregation (Acts 6.1-7; Phil. 1.1; 1 Tim. 3.8-13; 5.3-15). He pours out gifts upon his church so that each believer will use them for the benefit of others (Rom. 12.3-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4.15-16). The New Testament reveals that Christ established His church to be an observable, identifiable society with its own organization and structure, and composed of real flesh and blood members.

Church membership, therefore, is about belonging to this visible community as manifested in a local congregation. The church is not a store frequented by loyal customers. Nor is it a voluntary association of individuals who are loosely united by consumer preferences or cultural practices. Rather, the church is the *people* who belong to Christ, and the *place* where Christ meets them through the means he has ordained.

When a family or an individual pursues formal church membership, they are saying, "We are Christians, and therefore belong to Christ and his body." They and their children pass through the waters of baptism, acknowledging that they are part of something much larger than their own private, spiritual experience. They recognize that Christ has set them as living stones in his one temple (Eph. 4.19-22; 1 Pet. 2.4-5) and has gathered them as sheep in his one flock (John 10.1-29; Acts 20.28). They take public vows in the holy assembly of God's people, in which they profess their faith in Christ and their willingness to submit to his Lordship and the government of his church. Likewise, the congregation receives these disciples of Christ, and acknowledges their own obligation to these new members as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Why Is Church Membership Necessary?

“All of this sounds great,” one might say, “but I just want to *attend* this church. Why is it necessary that I become a member?” Some people recognize the visibility of Christ’s church and enjoy attending worship services, but view membership as little more than an unnecessary formality. The Bible, however, gives us at least three reasons why membership in a local congregation is essential.

1. Spiritual Nurture through the Word

Christ is the Head of his church (Eph. 1.22-23; 4.15), the King of his kingdom (Matt. 28.18; Heb. 2.8-9; 1 Cor. 15.25; cf. Ps. 110.1). He was not only crucified and raised from the dead, but also exalted to the right hand of the Father in heaven. In other words, Jesus saves but also rules. And the way he rules his citizens is through his Word and Spirit, chiefly through the officers he has appointed at the local congregation. Consider the exhortation the writer to the Hebrews gives at the end of his sermon-letter: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb. 13.17). This is Christ’s design. As his subjects and possession, we must submit to what *he* has ordained.

This can only be done through church membership. Membership in a local congregation creates a formal relationship between the elders and the congregants. This formal relationship is a covenant that obligates the elders to watch over the souls of those who belong to Christ. It is part of our submission to our Lord. We never mature beyond the nurture of the church. No Christian can sustain himself as a self-feeder. We cannot be our own pastors. Rather, God has commanded us to submit ourselves to the preaching, teaching, and oversight of those shepherds whom he has placed over us in his love.

It has been the historical practice of Reformed churches to require a public vow to that end. For example, the fourth and final vow of Public Profession of Faith, Form Number 1, in the *Psalter-Hymnal* (used by the United Reformed Churches in North America) asks: “Do you promise to submit to the government of the church and also, if you should become delinquent either in doctrine or in life, to submit to its admonition and discipline?”

According to the command of God, elders are responsible to care for the souls over which they have been appointed (Heb. 13.17). One of the ways that elders care for church members is through family visitation, the historic practice of ministering the word to families in their homes (Acts 20.28). Family visitation is a blessed opportunity for Christ’s servants to bring his word close to the hearts of his children, and for the elders to help bear some of the burdens of the family which are communicated in the personal setting of the home. Surely, elders will do their best to care for occasional or even frequent church attendees. But they are bound to care for those church members who have been entrusted to them. Those who absent themselves from God’s plan for the spiritual nurture of themselves and their family take great risk in doing so.

Spiritual Nurture through Accountability and Discipline

One of the ways in which Christ watches over our souls through the leaders in the local church is by the exercise of church discipline. Church discipline is the practice of applying the Word of God to members of the congregation who are in rebellion (i.e. unrepentant of a particular sin) or involved in some public scandal that affects the health of the church as a whole. The purpose of church discipline is the restoration of wayward disciples, the preservation of the church's doctrine, the peace and purity of the congregation, the protection of the church's reputation in the eyes of the unbelieving world, and the honor of God's holy name.

Christ gave his church the authority to exercise formal church discipline when he said to Peter, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16.19). Reformed churches have understood these keys to be the preaching of the gospel and the exercise of church discipline. The Heidelberg Catechism puts it like this:

83. Q. What are the keys of the kingdom?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline toward repentance. Both preaching and discipline open the kingdom of heaven to believers and close it to unbelievers.

84. Q. How does the preaching of the gospel open and close the kingdom of heaven?

A. According to the command of Christ: The kingdom of heaven is opened by proclaiming and publicly declaring to each and every believer that, as often as he accepts the gospel promise in true faith, God, because of what Christ has done, truly forgives his sins. The kingdom of heaven is closed, however, by proclaiming and publicly declaring to unbelievers and hypocrites that, as long as they do not repent, the anger of God and eternal condemnation rest on them. God's judgment, both in this life and in the life to come, is based on this gospel testimony.

85. Q. How is the kingdom of heaven closed and opened by Christian discipline?

A. According to the command of Christ: If anyone, though called a Christian, professes unchristian teachings or lives an unchristian life, if after repeated brotherly counsel, he refuses to abandon his errors and wickedness, and, if after being reported to the church, that is, to its officers, he fails to respond also to their admonition – such a one the officers exclude from the Christian fellowship by withholding the sacraments from him, and God himself excludes him from the kingdom of Christ. Such a person, when he promises and demonstrates genuine reform, is received again as a member of Christ and of his church.

Reformed churches confess this because it is what the New Testament teaches. Jesus gave instruction on discipline and public excommunication in Matthew 18.15-20. Paul wrote a whole chapter to the church in Corinth describing how sexual immorality amongst Christians defiles the

church, and that the offender, if unrepentant, is to be excommunicated and delivered to Satan (1 Cor. 5). See other examples in 1 Tim. 1.18-20; 2 Tim. 2.14-18; and Titus 1.10-14; 3.10-11.

Without church membership, however, the church cannot fully use the keys which Christ has given to her. The elders cannot excommunicate an unrepentant offender who was never in communion with the church in the first place. Church membership, therefore, provides every member of the congregation – including the minister and elders – with accountability. It allows the elders to fulfill their duty of ensuring that purity of doctrine and holiness of life are practiced (Titus 1.9; Heb. 1.17); it permits the deacons to care for the needy within the church (Acts 6.1-7; 1 Tim. 5.9); and it makes every member in the congregation responsible for his doctrine and life.

2. *Spiritual Nurture through the Sacraments*

Church membership allows a disciple to participate in the sacraments and thereby receive the spiritual benefits which the Holy Spirit provides through them (1 Cor. 10.16). A person who does not join a true congregation of Christ's church, however, does not have this privilege. Christ's sacraments are inseparably related to membership in his church.

For example, one does not have the right to be baptized without joining the visible church. Christ instituted Christian baptism as a one-time, initiatory sacrament that not only signifies the washing away of sins with his atoning blood, but also identifies the baptized person as a member of God's visible covenant community, much as circumcision did in the old covenant (Matt. 28.18-20; Acts 2.39). Thus, one is to be baptized *into* church membership, and in this way placed under the oversight of a local body of elders. Baptism cannot be separated from church membership (Eph. 4.4-5).

Likewise, one does not have the right to partake of the Lord's Supper without church membership. Christ established the Supper as a holy meal for the members of his church. It not only signifies his body and blood offered on the cross, but also nourishes the faith of repentant sinners (1 Cor. 10.16; John 6.22-60). As the governors and overseers of the church (Rom. 12.8; 1 Cor. 12.28; 1 Tim. 3.1-7), the elders have the responsibility of supervising participation in the Lord's Table, and ensuring, as much as possible, that people do not partake in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11.17-34). The Heidelberg Catechism summarizes the New Testament's teaching in this way:

81. Q. Who are to come to the Lord's Table?

A. Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their continuing weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life. Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however, eat and drink judgment on themselves.

82. Q. Are those to be admitted to the Lord's Supper who show by what they say and do that they are unbelieving and ungodly?

A. No, that would dishonor God's covenant and bring down God's anger upon the entire congregation. Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ and his apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people, by the official use of the keys of the kingdom, until they reform their lives.

In the URCNA, we have sought to apply this teaching by requiring a public profession of faith and membership in good standing for all who come to the Lord's Table.

The bottom line is that participation in the sacraments requires biblical church membership. While Christ has appointed the sacraments as visible signs and seals of the gospel for the nourishment of our souls, he did not design them to be individualistic practices. The sacraments are acts of divine service to his assembled people on the Lord's Day. He condescends to his flock so that he can feed them with his means of grace.

Thus, we confess in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession, "We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and outside of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself." The fact that in this life the visible church is imperfect and mixed with hypocrites gives no Christian the right to depart from it. Except in otherwise extraordinary cases, a person cannot belong to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church without also belonging to a visible manifestation of the same, which, according to the New Testament, is the local congregation that preaches the gospel, administers the sacraments, and exercises church discipline.

If we profess to be Christians, we must practice the Christian faith according to the Word of God, not according to our opinions. The New Testament makes it clear that every Christian is to be baptized into the body of Christ and held accountable for his doctrine and life. It tells us that for our good God has provided us with pastors, elders, and deacons, as well as the communion of saints in the local church.

If you have been baptized but you are not a member of a true congregation of Christ's church, you are living an irregular life that the New Testament does not recognize as Christian. The Lord calls you to repentance. He calls you to come home to the safety and benefit of his sheepfold. We urge you to join a true church, a body of believers that confesses the truth, submits to the authority of Christ as delegated to elders, and meets each week to worship God and receive Christ through Word and sacrament. You are not free to roam as a spiritual drifter on the internet or as a perpetual visitor from church to church. Find a good church and join it, for in this life we can do no better than to take up our place in the body of Christ, receive the means of grace, and enjoy the communion of saints.

Appendix 2: Why Do We Need Creeds and Confessions?

A Reformed church is a confessional church. That is to say, it stands with the historic Christian faith and Protestant Reformation by confessing certain doctrines to be true. Those doctrines are summarized in ecclesiastical statements known as creeds and confessions. Without those creeds and confessions, a Reformed church loses its identity. Indeed, without creeds and confessions, no church can avoid an identity crisis.

For some, such an emphasis upon creeds and confessions might seem a little strange, perhaps even alarming. Why should a Bible-believing church hold so firmly to uninspired and fallible documents written by men? After all, we have the Bible, which alone is the inspired Word of God and only rule for our faith and life. Why should Christians bother with things like the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort?

Those are fair questions. What follows is a brief explanation of why we use creeds and confessions in the URCNA. In short, we do so because they serve Christ's church by preserving, protecting, and providing: They *preserve* the church's unity in the truth, *protect* the church from heresy (false teaching), and *provide* the church with instruction.

I. Creeds & Confessions Preserve the Church's Unity in the Truth

It is often said, "doctrine divides, but love unites," or "doctrine divides, but practice unites." The idea behind both of these statements is that an emphasis upon theology will cripple Christ's church by leading her into debates over theology. Instead, the church should focus on loving each other and doing good works. In fact, one of the most popular evangelical leaders in America recently said, "The first Reformation was about doctrine; the second one needs to be about behavior... We need a reformation not of creeds but deeds."

To pit doctrine against love or practice, however, is to create a false dichotomy. Paul repeatedly commends the churches for their faith in Christ and love for one another (Eph. 1.15; 3.17; Col. 1.4; 1 Thess. 1.3; 3.6; 2 Thess. 1.3; Titus 2.2; 3.15; Phlm. 1.5). Our unity as Christians is based on the truth we confess (i.e. doctrine). Our responsibility to love one another and perform good works is always to be done in response to that truth. To divorce doctrine from love and good works is to profess a religion different from Christianity, for Christianity is based on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, our love for one another and duty to perform good works are commanded of every Christian (John 13.34-35; 15.12; Eph. 2.10; Titus 3.8; 1 John 3.10-23; 4.7-5.3). But the gospel is a message to be believed, not a mode of behavior. The gospel is the message of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ who alone saves sinners from the wrath of God. This message is received through faith alone in Christ alone. When that message is believed with true faith, a change in behavior will be the result. To elevate deeds above creeds, however, is to distort Christianity into mere pietism and moralism. Indeed, it is to base our unity on something *other* than the truth.

This is why we must confess essential doctrine. To neglect essential doctrine is to neglect the foundation of our unity. In the church, our unity is not based on our ethnicity, political party, or consumer preferences. Our unity is based strictly on the gospel and the biblical truths we confess. That is why we call our confessions the Three Forms of *Unity*. We stand as a diverse people from every tongue, nation and tribe, but united in our confession.

Moreover, unity is not something we can produce artificially. Only God can create this unity, and he has done so in Jesus Christ. We are simply called to maintain this unity. Writing to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul tells Christians to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4.3). In the very next verse he says, “there is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph. 4.4-6). He states these seven articles of the Christian faith in what some New Testament scholars believe was a creed that new converts recited just before they were baptized and received visibly into the church. The point that Paul makes is very clear: there is no unity apart from the truth.

Someone might ask, “Why not use the Bible alone? The Bible is the only written authority and inerrant rule for the faith and life of the church. Creeds and confessions, on the other hand, are documents that are capable of error. Why don’t we just say, ‘No creed but Christ’ or ‘No creed but the Bible?’” The answer is very simple. Creeds and confessions are necessary because they are ecclesiastical statements about what we believe the Bible to teach. Statements like “No creed but Christ” or “No creed but the Bible” are actually self-contradictory. Those statements are creeds in themselves.

The word “creed” comes from the Latin *credo*, which simply means, “I believe.” A creed is simply a summary of what one believes. And a confession is similar. A confession is a more detailed explanation of the Christian faith. The word “confession” comes from the Latin *confessio*, which means “I acknowledge.” Virtually every Christian has a creed and a confession of some sort, whether he realizes it or not.

Let’s say you asked a Christian friend about his beliefs. Your friend, wanting to be faithful to the Word of God, says, “I believe the Bible.” This, of course, is a good answer, but it is very general and broad – the Bible is a big book! You then ask, “But what do you believe the Bible teaches? What does it teach about God? What does it teach about Christ? What does it say about salvation?” At that moment, your friend is forced to make a credal statement. He is forced to make a confession. As soon as he begins to summarize what the Bible teaches about God, Christ, salvation, or any other doctrine, he has made a confession! This is what Peter did in Matthew 16 when Jesus asked him, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” He made a confession.

A personal confession is a good and important thing. But as one body of Christ, we ought to confess the same things. We need to be in agreement on the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. Especially those churches which hope to be obedient to God’s command to demonstrate practical unity must make a unified confession if they are to walk together (Amos 3:3). Creeds and confessions are an aid to that end. They summarize essential apostolic doctrine and allow us

to stand united as Christ's church with one believing heart and one confessing tongue. They help preserve the church's unity in the truth.

II. Creeds & Confessions Protect the Church from Heresy

It is interesting to note that creedal statements often appear in Scripture. For example, in Deuteronomy 6.4 we find the great Shema: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one." Jews have recited this creed since the days of Moses. It was an important creed because it protected the Israelites from the heresy of polytheism, the belief that there are many gods. When Israel received this creed, they were in the process of being brought out of Egypt where they had lived for hundreds of years. Egypt was a culture steeped in polytheism. There were deities for virtually every conceivable area of the universe. There was a god for fertility, a god for agriculture, a god for rain, a god for the sun, etc. Coming out of Egypt and into the promised land of Canaan, it was vital for Israel to know that there is only one true and living God. He alone is the Creator of the sun, moon and stars, who filled the air with birds, the sea with fish, and created all animals and mankind. He is sovereign over all. This simple creed, the Shema, helped to protect Israel from the falsehood of polytheism.

We also see creedal statements in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul sought to correct the terrible heresy circulating in the Corinthian church which denied the bodily resurrection. The first thing he does is quote a creed with which they were familiar. He says, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15.3-4). He then unpacks that little creed throughout the rest of the chapter, explaining that one cannot deny the resurrection of the body without also denying the resurrection of Christ (and thus the gospel!). Essential doctrine, therefore, had to be stated briefly and clearly in order to protect the flock from wolves who would lead Christ's sheep astray.

This pattern is pervasive in the New Testament. The apostles had to state the truth unambiguously in order to protect the church from heresy and harm. This is a pastoral responsibility that has continued in the church throughout the ages. Each time a new heresy has threatened the purity of the truth, the church has had to respond by clearly stating the essential doctrine that Scripture teaches.

For example, in the fourth century the church faced a great crisis when the heretic Arius attacked the doctrine of the eternality and divinity of Christ. Arius said he believed the Bible. He was even trained at one of the best schools of his day and ordained. Yet, thinking he was acting in the interest of the truth, he denied essential Christian doctrine and led many people astray. Thus, the church responded to this situation by looking carefully at Arius' teachings, and then rightly condemning them as heresy. The church, represented by ecumenical delegates, wrote a creed in response to Arius' doctrine in order to protect believers. That creed is the Nicene Creed.

As heresies arise and attack the church, it is necessary for the church to respond by summarizing particular doctrines in Scripture in order to refute false teaching. This is a charge given to the church. Paul told young Pastor Timothy, "Preach the Word; be ready in season and

out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will heap up for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into silly myths” (2 Tim. 4.2-4).

Likewise, the apostle John says, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4.1). Creeds and confessions are an aid to that end. By believing and confessing a clear system of biblical doctrine, the church is better equipped to protect Christ’s sheep.

Furthermore, creeds and confessions protect us from ourselves. Each of us reads the Bible with philosophical presuppositions. We are fallen people. We bring baggage to the text we are interpreting. While creeds and confessions do not guarantee that we will have an infallible interpretation of Scripture, they nevertheless provide a safeguard. Like rails upon which a train runs, our confessions keep us on track. Take away the rails, and you have a disaster. Likewise, when an individual Christian tries to read the Bible completely detached from the historic Christian church, and refuses to check his interpretation with what the church has confessed through the ages, he is bound for disaster.

III. Creeds & Confessions Provide Instruction on the Essentials

Creeds and confessions help us “connect the dots” of the Bible. They instruct us on the doctrine which arises from the story of redemption. They are one of the ways the church fulfills her responsibility to “Go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that [Christ has] commanded” (Matt. 28.18-20). The church has the responsibility to teach apostolic doctrine, which has been laid as a foundation for our faith (Eph. 2.20). This is why it is named the Apostles’ Creed – not because the apostles themselves wrote it, but because it is a faithful expression of apostolic doctrine which Christ commanded his church to teach.

Additionally, this is why the Reformation gave us rich catechisms. The Heidelberg Catechism goes through the Apostles’ Creed and explains it, line by line, so that we are instructed in what we believe and why we believe it. It teaches us what God requires of us in each of the Ten Commandments, and what it means to pray each line of the Lord’s Prayer. It educates us about the law and the gospel, and how we are to live in gratitude to God with a life of good works. It organizes biblical doctrine and teaches us in a question and answer format so that we will know the basics of Christianity.

When we understand the creeds, confessions, and catechisms, we should be able to confess them as our own. In 1561-62 the Reformed churches sent a copy of the Belgic Confession to the Roman Catholic King of Spain, Philip II, along with a letter that said that they were ready to obey the government in all lawful things, but that they would “offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to fire” rather than deny the truth expressed in their confession. To the glory of God, and for the good of his church, we should have such a commitment to the truth.

Reformed Christians are confessing Christians. That is to say, they are members of confessional churches that hold to the faith once and for all delivered to the saints and confessed during the Protestant Reformation. In our confession, we are, by God's grace, "standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1.27).

Appendix 3: Biblical Principles of Tithing & Giving

Most Christians are familiar with the offering in worship. Plates or baskets are passed down the pews and filled with money that comes from the pockets of worshipers. This should not be an uncomfortable experience for Christians, but a joyful opportunity to express our love for God and commitment to make disciples in the world. But what does God require of us in the offering? How much and how often should we give? To answer these questions, we must consider what the Bible says about our duty in financial giving.

The Tithe of the Old Testament

We begin with the Old Testament and what it calls the “tithe.” The word tithe means a tenth. Today it is common for many Christians to speak of “tithing” or “giving a tithe” to describe their financial giving even though the amount they are giving is not a tenth of their earnings but some other amount which they have determined for themselves. The tithe, however, is a tenth. It was an ancient form of worship, predating the Mosaic Law.

The book of Genesis tells how the patriarchs practiced tithing as an act of worship. Abraham paid a tithe to Melchizedek, a priest of God Most High, giving him a tenth of all the spoils from battle (Gen. 14.17-24; cf. Heb. 7.1-2). Later, we read of Jacob vowing to God, “of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you” (Gen. 28.22). These tithes were not given in response to any specific laws about tithing. They were simply expressions of gratitude to God for his mercy and grace. Abraham and Jacob were pleased to worship the Lord by offering a tenth of their income.

Later in redemptive history, God commanded his people to give a tenth of their income for the support of the ministry. As part of the Mosaic Law, God commanded the Israelites to provide for the maintenance of the temple and the Levites. The Levites were the one tribe of Israel who did not receive a portion of the land which God graciously gave to Israel. For the Levites, the priesthood was their inheritance (Num. 18.24; Josh. 18.7). As priests, they were to serve the other tribes. In order to provide for their survival, God appointed the tithe: “To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do” (Num. 18.21). A tenth of one’s regular agricultural increase – the means of survival and gain for the Israelite – was to be set apart as an offering to the Lord: “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD’s; it is holy to the LORD... And every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman’s staff, shall be holy to the LORD” (Lev. 27.30, 32).

Deuteronomy 14.22-29 points out that when these tithes were taken to the tabernacle, a portion would be eaten before the Lord in joyful fellowship with the Levites and the poor. Far from being a burdensome obligation, the tithe was meant to be an occasion of jubilant worship and fellowship.

Tithing, therefore, was an important part of Israel’s covenantal life with God. It was also a great sin to withhold tithes. To do so was to steal from God. Through the prophet Malachi, God

indicted Israel for the sin of withholding tithes: “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you” (Mal. 3.8-9). Conversely, if Israel would show their trust in the Lord by obeying him with the tithe, they would have their needs met and be blessed. “Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need” (Mal. 3.10).

Giving in the New Testament

The New Testament gives no explicit command for tithing. The strict tithe seems to be linked to the old covenant, that is, God’s covenant with the nation of Israel. Nevertheless, there is some continuity between the old and new covenants when it comes to giving. Just as Israel was to provide for the priests in the old covenant, the church is to provide for the ministry of the gospel in the new covenant. Paul makes it very clear that the ministry of the gospel is to be supported with the resources of the church. The apostle gives very straight-forward teaching on this topic in 1 Corinthians: “In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (9.14).

Writing to Timothy, Paul quotes some general laws from the Old Testament and applies them to the ministry of the Word: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and ‘The laborer deserves his wages’” (1 Tim. 5.17-18). Likewise, writing to the Galatians, Paul says, “One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches.” (Gal. 6.6)

But it is not only the pastor’s livelihood that a congregation is to support. A congregation must also express the communion of the saints in its use of financial resources. Near the end of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul tells of his plans to deliver collected funds for the poor Christians in Jerusalem:

At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. (Rom. 15.25-27; cf. 1 Cor 16.1-4)

To this end, every Christian should be mindful of his responsibilities in supporting the budget of the congregation to which he belongs, so that the aforementioned needs are being met. Giving to worthy para-church organizations, such as Christian radio programs or sound Reformed seminaries, can be a noble use of our resources, but such giving should never replace the support of a Christian’s local church and its missionaries. The support of the local church must always come first, for it is only the church that baptizes, administers the Lord’s Supper, and exercises discipline. God has ordained the local church as the primary means for making disciples and establishing the communion of saints.

So, How Much Am I to Give?

If the compulsory Levitical tithe was particular to the Levitical priesthood and the New Testament does not explicitly command a strict ten percent of one's income, just how much should the believer give? Paul gives us at least three important guidelines. But notice that, for Paul, the question of *how much* we should give is never to be separated from *how* we should give. Giving is an act of worship and a spiritual matter. Thus, we should consider carefully the following three principles.

1. Give freely and cheerfully

Paul says that "Each one must give as he has made up in his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9.7). In the New Testament, there is no prescribed amount that one must give. The amount that you contribute is something that only you can decide. But however much you give, do it with joy! Do not give to the work of the kingdom out of any sense that you have been pressured to do so. Give cheerfully or do not give at all. As one writer has put it, "God loves the one who gives cheerfully, and if God has not yet cheered your heart with the gospel, so that you delight to think you can contribute to the gathering and the perfecting of other saints, work on that issue first."

2. Give consistently

Again, in his correspondence with the Corinthians, Paul gives us direction. He says, "On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper" (1 Cor. 16.2). Establish the practice of setting aside a certain amount of your resources for the work of the kingdom, just as you would anything else in your monthly budget and financial planning. While ten percent is not a strict requirement for the new covenant, it is nevertheless an excellent guideline. Christians do well to make ten percent of their income the minimum of their giving, as it is expression of their joy in the Lord and gratitude for salvation. Once again, we look back to the example of Abraham and Jacob who were both pleased to give in this way. But whatever amount we decide to give, we are, according to the apostle Paul, to do so with consistency on a weekly or monthly basis. The support of the local church is not dependent upon the state, but upon the regular giving of the members of the congregation.

3. Give as the Lord prospers you

Notice those last words in Paul's command above: "as he may prosper." In other words, our giving should be in proportion to what God, in his providence, has given us. As God is pleased to increase the amount of our income, our giving should increase accordingly. Again, we see how the old covenant practice of tithing can be applied wisely in the new covenant. Setting aside ten percent of our income, whether we make a little or a lot, helps us to give as the Lord prospers us.

We must remember that all of our resources come from God and are properly his, while we are stewards of his resources. As Paul says, "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" (1 Cor. 4.7). Likewise, Jesus

warns in Luke 12.48, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.” The question every Christian must ask himself in this regard is, Am I being faithful with what God has entrusted to me?

In his Sermon on the Mount, our Lord said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6.19-21). What we do with our resources is a telling sign of what we value.

Do we consider our giving an investment in the kingdom – not an investment to reap financial reward here on earth, or hope for a bigger mansion in heaven (as the health-and-wealth preachers would have us believe), but an investment in the advancement of the gospel and in the edification of God’s people until the Lord returns? As those who have been justified and adopted by virtue of the person and work of Christ, we are already most abundantly blessed! We already have “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven” for us (1 Pet. 1.4). We are, therefore, to be heavenly minded with our resources in this life.

Thus, as we have opportunity to worship the Lord with the offering each week, may each of us experience the joy of giving, and seek to bring him glory with everything he has entrusted to us.

Appendix 4: What is Reformed Worship?

We live in a place and time of unparalleled individual freedom of choice. We choose how we dress from an almost endless number of options. We decide whether we want our books in paper or digital format. Young people graduating from high school or college enjoy a host of vocational opportunities. Our culture trains us to think that we should be able to have things our way. In the 1990s, Burger King advertised its menu with the slogan, “your way, right away.” In the 1980s, AT&T advertised themselves as “the right choice” for telecommunication and technology needs. Since the 1970s, abortion advocates have referred to their movement as pro-choice, a very clever appeal to that value which seems to enjoy sovereignty in our society.

This emphasis on choice and individual freedom has significant implications for how we view worship. With the combination of personal mobility and the increasing smorgasbord of church flavors, Americans today have almost limitless latitude in terms of how, where, and when we worship. To be fair, these worship options are not necessarily bad or avoidable, but they do challenge us to sift through the options with biblical wisdom.

Many people seem to weigh their worship options on the scale of personal preference and emotional attraction: “I like more energetic worship, so I attend church X.” “I prefer more contemplative worship, so I go to church Y.” Too seldom do people reflect on worship by asking the following kinds of questions: “Does God have anything to say about how I worship? Should something more than my feelings and preferences determine how and where I meet with God? Is there an authoritative guide to Christian worship? What kind of worship pleases God?” To answer these questions, we must turn to Scripture.

Worship Is Standardized by Scripture

God reveals in his Word that he is deeply concerned about how he is worshiped. He reserves for himself the right to decide how his people will worship him. In the old covenant, he made this supremely clear to his people when he gave them his law. The first two of the Ten Commandments require that we worship God alone, and only in a way that conforms to his will (Exod. 20.3-4). The Second Commandment in particular reveals that Israel was not free to worship God any way they pleased, but only in a way that pleased God. The Heidelberg Catechism explains clearly what God requires of us in this commandment:

Q. 96. What is God’s will for us in the Second Commandment?

A. That we in no way make any image of God nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word.

In other words, not everything that moves us emotionally (like an image) is appropriate for worship. The governing question in many modern churches is: “What will produce a stimulating spiritual feeling?” The question ought to be: “What does God want worship services to look like?” While no single church or tradition answers that question perfectly, many churches today are no longer asking the question.

Nadab and Abihu should have asked that question. God commanded them to worship him in a particular fashion. Ignoring the details about acceptable worship, they offered “strange fire” to God, for which he consumed them with his own holy fire (Lev. 10.1-2).

This principle that God regulates worship flies in the face of much of what passes for worship today. Instead of being regulated by Scripture, much worship nowadays is regulated by personal preference, and driven by an itch for innovation. But our lawgiver governs our worship with full authority. He still says to his people, “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it” (Deut. 12.32; cf. Matt. 28.20). We are not free now in the new covenant to offer God our own strange fire in worship. Rather, we must “offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12.28-29).

The regulative principle of worship is often perceived as a confining and stifling thing that would remove joy and vibrancy from the worship of God. But the truth is, when our worship is regulated by the Scriptures we have the assurance that our liberty to worship God in an acceptable way is protected from the attempts of man to bind our consciences to do in worship what is designed only to please man. To be ruled in worship by the all-sufficient Word of God is not confining and limiting but actually something that liberates us from the false rule of man, and liberates us for the true worship of God.

Worship Is Structured by Scripture

Not only does the Bible stipulate what particular elements of worship are acceptable to God, but it also suggests to us the overall covenantal structure that worship should have. A covenant is a binding relationship between two or more parties. Worship is a formal covenantal meeting between the Great King and his subjects.

God delivered Israel out of Egypt so that his redeemed people could meet and renew covenant with him (Exod. 6.2-9). Contrary to contemporary opinion, worship is not meant to be an evangelistic crusade. The gospel must always be faithfully preached with both unbelievers and believers in mind. But the worship service is primarily a holy convocation between God and his covenant people, namely professing believers with their children.

Though it is often unrecognized, Scripture clearly assumes the involvement of the whole family in worship (Deut. 31.10-13; Eph. 6.1-4; Col. 3.18-20). It should not surprise us that God’s commandment regarding the manner of proper worship should contain generational curses and blessings (Exod. 20.5-6). Our worship services give our children an early and often unshakeable impression of who God is and how we must relate to him. Services which suggest that we can approach God on our terms, governed only by the limits of our imagination, give our children a dreadfully defective impression of who God is and how we must find him. Seeker-sensitive worship can even threaten one’s commitment to the biblical Christ, by whose merits alone we can approach God (Heb. 10.19-22).

Another aspect of covenantal worship that the Bible reveals to us is the dialogical nature of our meeting with God, so that the two covenant parties are drawn together in conversation

with one another. While Scripture does not provide us with an explicit liturgy for a worship service, it nevertheless reveals the basic elements. The books of Acts tells us that the first new covenant congregation “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2.42). As the rest of the New Testament makes clear, these are the essential elements of a worship service: the preaching of the Word (“the apostles’ teaching”), the communion of saints (“fellowship”), the sacraments (“the breaking of bread”), and prayer and singing (“the prayers”).

These elements help form the dialogue between God and his people. God speaks to us in his Word and sacraments, and we respond to him in prayer and song. He calls us to worship, and we respond by pledging our dependence upon him (Ps. 124.8). God then announces his greeting of grace and peace to his covenant people (Rom. 1.7; 1 Cor. 1.3; 2 Cor. 1.2; Gal. 1.3-5; Eph. 1.2; Phil. 1.2; Col. 1.2; 1 Thess. 1.1; 2 Thess. 1.1-2). We confess our sins (Ps. 51), and cry out with our needs (Ps. 18.6). God responds with forgiveness (Ps. 32; Ps. 130.3-6) and with his provision for us in his Word and sacraments (2 Cor. 5.18-20; Heb. 12.25; 2 Tim. 4.1-5; 1 Cor. 10.16; Rev. 12.6, 14). We worship him for his goodness (Ps. 147). He sends us forth with his blessing (2 Cor. 13.14). This historic and sound pattern of worship helps to make our covenant meeting with God a spiritually rich one, as God’s gracious word to us enlivens us to respond in accordance with his will.

Worship Is Saturated with Scripture

Contrary to the practice in some churches, Christian worship is inherently verbal, not visual. The Second Commandment explicitly condemns making images of God, not just because it is impossible for God to be adequately represented by an image, but because God will not permit us to draw near to him by the use of images that will distract us from his word. The golden calf was not another god but Israel’s attempt to serve Jehovah by visual means, when they should have waited for his Word (Exod. 32.4-5; cf. Deut 4.9-19). By implication, the historic Protestant church has been critical of the use of images to represent any of the three persons of the Trinity, including Christ.

Images give a biased impression of God based on the artist’s creative abilities and theological proclivities. A beautiful image of Christ would stand in contrast to his description in Isaiah 53.2 – “he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” An Anglo-Saxon image of Christ, apart from being historically inaccurate, would communicate an ethno-centricity. A cartoonish image of Christ runs the risk of stripping the second person of the Trinity of the dignity which he deserves. It is not simply that a visible image of Christ would fail to communicate his divinity (thereby implying a separation of his two natures), but that every image of Christ is necessarily an attempt to make an image of God. For a time, God saw fit to send to earth his Son as his fleshly image (Col. 1.15; Heb. 1.3). But then, after taking this image back to heaven, he gave us his written Word, which sufficiently reveals God to us. At this present time we do not see the Word made flesh, but we are to hear him (1 Pet. 1.8-9). Not by crucifixes and paintings are we to see Christ, but through the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, those “pictures” of Jesus which have been prescribed by the Lord himself.

When God called Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, it was abundantly clear that he had center stage, and that his speech should stop every mouth (Deut. 5.4-5, 23-27). When the church gathers for worship God still speaks (Heb. 12.25-27). We honor God's Word the way Cornelius received Peter: "Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord" (Acts 10.33). This means Scripture must be read (1 Tim. 4.13), preached (2 Tim. 4.2), and sung (Col. 3.16). God's revelation should even permeate our prayers (Matt. 6.9-13).

Worshippers Are Sanctified by Scripture

In the worship service, God serves his people with his Word and sacraments. These are God's ordained means of grace to sanctify his people. Before he went to the cross, Jesus prayed to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17.17). The preaching of the gospel is the means God uses not only to produce our faith (Rom. 10.17) but also to strengthen it (Rom. 16.25). Likewise, the Lord's Supper is a real communion and participation in the body and blood of Christ in heaven (1 Cor. 10.16; cf. John 6.51-58). These means of grace are indispensable to the sanctification and spiritual growth of every Christian.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God revealed that our very lives depend on hearing and receiving his Word: "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live" (Isa. 55.2-3). In the new covenant, God feeds his people with this food for the soul. This is why Jesus commissioned Peter with the words, "Feed my lambs...Feed my sheep" (John 21.15, 17). Just as physical food provides nourishment for the body and gladdens the heart, the spiritual food God provides in Word and sacrament gives the believer spiritual nourishment and everlasting joy.

Curved in on ourselves in selfish introspection and idol worship, we need an external word, a voice that comes from outside of ourselves to interfere with our make-believe worlds and to tell us the truth. We need to hear that surprising message of a holy God justifying the wicked through Christ. The "living preaching of his Word," as the Heidelberg Catechism puts it in Question 98, is God's ordained means to accomplish this. It is an intrusive act by the Holy Spirit, driving us out of ourselves and directing our faith to the promises of God, which are all "yes" and "amen" in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 1.20).

The primary purpose of going to church, therefore, is not to serve God, but to be served by Him. The same Lord who once rose from supper, laid aside his outer garments, tied a towel around his waist, and washed the feet of his disciples, continues to condescend to his followers, and to serve them in Word and sacrament. He summons us to a corporate, festive event in the call to worship. Each week, through the Ministry of the Word, he spreads a table in the wilderness, setting before us excellent food and drink for the soul.

Our response to this feast is to worship God with reverence, zeal, and joy. In the worship service, God does not bring us to the terror of Mount Sinai but to the festal gathering of Mount Zion above (Heb. 12.18-24). Yet, he is still a holy God and a consuming fire, and must be worshiped with both gratitude and awe, and in full accordance with his Word (Heb 12.28-29).

Appendix 5: What about Infant Baptism?

“Why does your church baptize babies?” This is a common question asked by visitors to a Reformed church. Since the historic practice of baptizing the children of believers has fallen on hard times, what used to be the norm among Protestants is now a foreign concept to many. Consequently, the doctrine of infant baptism can be a difficult hurdle for a person who is interested in joining a confessional, Reformed church.

So why *do* Reformed churches baptize children? The answer is simple: *We baptize the children of believers because they belong to the covenant and people of God.* While this answer is simple, it nevertheless requires some explanation. As with many doctrines, such as the Trinity or the deity of Christ, the doctrine of infant baptism requires a broader approach to Scripture than reading a few proof-texts. In order for us to understand this doctrine, we must first think about God’s covenant of grace with his people, and the nature of his church.

Perhaps the simplest approach to understanding this doctrine is by beginning with the Heidelberg Catechism’s concise explanation of infant baptism:

Q. 74. Should infants, too, be baptized?

A. Yes. Infants as well as adults are in God’s covenant and are his people. They, no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin through Christ’s blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith. Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism.

There are four parts to this answer which we should consider carefully: (1) there is one covenant of grace; (2) in the old covenant, God included children in his church; (3) in the new covenant, God still includes children in his church; (4) there is a promise made in baptism that must be believed.

1. There is one covenant of grace

The Heidelberg Catechism makes the claim that the children of believers, “are in God’s covenant and are his people.” What is this covenant to which the Catechism refers?

The concept of covenant is important for Christians to grasp because it is the organizing framework of the Scriptures. A covenant, simply defined, is a formal agreement, with oaths and promises, creating a solemn relationship between its parties. Most of us are in a number of different covenants. Marriage, for example, is a covenant between one man and one woman. A mortgage is a covenant between the lender and the borrower. In Scripture, we find covenants between God and humans throughout redemptive history. Anyone who has read through the Bible even once knows that God’s covenant-making is central to the story. God makes covenants with such key figures as Noah, Abraham, the nation of Israel, and David. While there are many

different covenants of various natures and purposes recorded in the Bible, there is ultimately one covenant in which the benefits of redemption are bestowed upon God's people, a covenant we rightly call the "covenant of grace." In this covenant, God promises salvation to sinners through faith in Christ, who merited salvation for his people through his life, death, and resurrection.

The covenant of grace begins in Genesis 3.15, just after Adam and Eve were expelled from the holy garden as punishment for having sinned against God. Although Adam, our federal representative, plunged the entire human race into sin and death (Rom. 5.12-19), he subsequently received a promise from the Lord that a Champion would come to bruise the serpent's head, and merit eternal life for his people (Gen. 3.15; Rom. 5.14-21; Rev. 12.4-11). That is to say, Christ would be sent as the second Adam to fulfill the work that the first Adam failed to do (1 Cor. 15.21-22, 45). In this promise, we see the beginning of the covenant of grace. God promised to send a mediator, and to take for himself a people, the offspring of the woman, separating them from the offspring of the serpent.

The covenant of grace continues as the Bible traces the lineage of God's redeemed people (the offspring of the woman) from Seth to Abraham (Genesis 4-11). Once Abraham is brought into the picture, the speed of the story slows down. God then expands upon his covenant of grace by making particular promises to Abraham. He would make of Abraham "a great nation" (Gen. 12.2), and in him "all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (12.3). He would give Abraham an offspring numbered as the stars in heaven (15.5), and a land for them to possess (15.7). God then sealed these promises with a solemn covenant ritual involving the shedding of blood. He passed between severed animals, swearing an oath that he would fulfill his promises to Abraham (15.8-21; cf. Jer. 34.18-19).

God fulfilled these promises later in redemptive history. From Abraham came the twelve tribes of Israel, who grew in number like the stars in heaven (Deut 1.10). After freeing them from slavery in Egypt, God brought them into the Promised Land. In Joshua 21.43-45 we read,

Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.

As the Bible moves from the Old Testament to the New Testament, God fulfills these promises in an even greater way. In Galatians, the apostle Paul tells us how one becomes a true descendent of Abraham. In Galatians 3.7-9 he says,

Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

What does all of this show us? It shows us that there is *one* plan of salvation for the *one* people of God, whom the Bible describes as the seed or offspring of Abraham (Gal 3.29; cf. Rom. 2.28-29; 11.17-20). There is no other way to be a child of God than to be included into Abraham's covenant. Thus, when Reformed people speak of "*the* covenant," we are speaking of the one covenant of grace that was first promised in Genesis 3.15, was expanded in detail to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17, was finally fulfilled in Christ, and continues until the consummation of all things. Anyone who ever has been or will be saved, during any period of human history, is a member of this one covenant of grace. Salvation is always the same: by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, the one Mediator of the covenant.

2. In the Old Covenant, God included children in his visible church

Having looked briefly at the covenant of grace in redemptive history, we must now ask the question, *if believers participate in the covenant and people of God, what is the status of their children?* The Old Testament reveals that God not only allowed the children of believers to be brought into his covenant and visible people, but that he also commanded them to be included. In Genesis 17.6-8 we read of God reminding Abraham of the promises he made in his covenant, which extended to his offspring:

I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.

God then commanded that a covenant-sign be given to Abraham and his descendants. That covenant-sign was circumcision. In Genesis 17.9-14 we find God's direction to Abraham:

As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

Circumcision was a "sign of the covenant." The bloody ritual of cutting the flesh in the male reproductive organ signified the covenant that God made with Abraham and his descendants when he walked between the bloody animal halves. This was no mere formality; to be circumcised meant to receive a sign of the deepest spiritual significance. Circumcision even pointed to the realities of regeneration and justification (Deut. 10.16; 30.6; Rom. 4.11). It was a sign carved in flesh as a constant reminder of God's promises to Abraham and his descendants.

While this covenant sign did not guarantee that every recipient of it possessed the spiritual realities that it signified, it nevertheless functioned in every case as the official act of consecration, so that each recipient was made a member of the covenant community. Every male in Abraham's household, whether sons or servants, as well as every male in the covenant community thereafter, was to receive this sign in his flesh if he was to be identified with God's covenant people. Conversely, anyone who rejected the sign of the covenant was to be cut off from the covenant community. To reject the *sign* of the covenant was to reject God's *promises* in the covenant. Ultimately, it was to reject fellowship with the God who walked between the severed animal halves as a guarantee of his promises to Abraham.

3. In the New Covenant, God still includes children in his visible church

Regarding the children of believers, the Heidelberg Catechism says in Answer 74, "Therefore, by baptism, the mark of the covenant, infants should be received into the Christian church and should be distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism." The covenantal sign that is administered upon initiation into the visible church is no longer circumcision, but baptism (Col. 2.11-12). Like circumcision, baptism is a one-time, initiatory sign and seal of God's covenant promise, which marks out an individual as belonging to God's visible covenant people. Like circumcision, baptism is for the believer *and his children*.

Our Baptist brothers often argue that the children of believers should not be baptized until making a credible profession of faith because the New Testament never gives an explicit command or example of infant baptism. To this we must ask: Where in the New Testament do we find an example or command to *exclude* the children of believers from the visible church? Defending the doctrine of infant baptism in his day, the great Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield put it in the most straightforward of terms when he said, "The argument [for infant baptism] in a nutshell is simply this: God established his church in the days of Abraham and put children into it. They must remain there until he puts them out. He has nowhere put them out. They are still then members of his church and as such entitled to its ordinances." Clearly, no such command to remove the children of believers from God's covenant exists. On the contrary, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19.14).

More importantly, however, is the obvious trend in the New Testament of including those who once were excluded from the church. The greatest example of this is the gospel going out to the Gentiles. People who formerly were not of the physical family of Abraham but were "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2.12) are now in Christ Jesus "no longer strangers and aliens" but "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2.19). We also see this in the fact that baptism was applied to females as well as males (Acts 8.12), in contrast to circumcision, which was only for males. Thus, Paul says, "there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3.28). While there is still a distinction between men and women with regard to their assigned roles in the family and the church, baptism shows that men and women are the same in terms of

personal worth to God, for both are created in His image (Gen. 1.26-28) and equally redeemed in Christ. Christian women, therefore, are not to worship in a separate courtyard as they did at the Jerusalem temple. They are to worship alongside men in the congregation (Col. 3.18-19).

Considering these things, are we really to think that while God includes Gentiles into his covenant people and includes women more fully by extending to them the covenant sign just as he does to males, that he also takes an opposite position with regard to the children of believers? While God extends his grace more abundantly in the New Covenant by including those who once were excluded, why would he then *exclude* children who once were *included*? Indeed, first-century Hebrew parents that became Christians would have been horrified at the suggestion that their children were now outside of the covenant of grace.

On the contrary, the apostles brought good news to parents. Preaching on the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the gospel to a large audience of Jews and Gentiles and told them to repent and be baptized in Jesus' name. He concluded by saying, "For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself" (Acts 2.39). Those who are "far off" are the Gentiles, now included in God's covenant. But notice that Peter specifically points out that the promise is still "for your children." Children of believers are not excluded from membership in God's covenant community but included, just as they were from the beginning.

For this reason, Paul addresses the children of believers as members of the covenant of grace: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord" (Eph 6.1). He reminds them of the Fifth Commandment in the very next verse, showing that new covenant children have the same responsibilities and privileges as old covenant children. They are to be raised as disciples of Christ: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6.4; cf. Deut 6.4–9). Clearly, these children are considered members of the visible church no less than they were in the old covenant. As such, they should receive the sign of the covenant and be baptized.

4. There is a promise made in baptism that must be believed

The promise to which Peter referred in his Pentecost sermon is mentioned in Heidelberg Catechism, Question and Answer 74. It says that our children, "no less than adults, are promised the forgiveness of sin through Christ's blood and the Holy Spirit who produces faith."

For this reason, parents must take great care to catechize and pray for their children, bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6.4). It is why parents are required to take vows at the baptismal font, promising to the utmost of our power to teach our children and have them taught the doctrine of salvation. Baptized children must not only grow up with the understanding that they have been "received into the Christian church" and "distinguished from the children of unbelievers" (HC 74), but must – in light of their baptism – be asked the questions, Do you believe the gospel? Do you trust that Christ's blood alone washes away your sins as certainly as you see water washing away dirt from the body? Do you believe what is signified in your baptism?

If he rejects the gospel, then the waters of baptism are not a sign of blessing, but a sign of judgment. Like the unbelieving Israelite whose circumcision symbolized the cursing of being “cut off” from the favor of God, the New Covenant child who rejects what is signified in his baptism will become like those unbelievers who perished in the floodwaters of God’s judgment while Noah and his family were brought safely through water (1 Pet. 3.20-22).

On the other hand, the covenant child who believes the gospel, embracing Christ with a true faith, is able to see in his baptism God’s pledge and token that gives us assurance that we are as really washed from our sins spiritually, as our bodies are washed with water (HC 73).

We baptize the children of believers because they belong to the covenant and people of God.

Glossary of Terms

Church planter: The organizing pastor of a church plant.

Classis: An ecclesiastical assembly of churches in the URCNA within a particular geographical area.

Consistory: The elders and minister(s) in a local church.

Core group: The beginning nucleus of families and individuals within a church plant.

Council: The term used to describe the Consistory and deacons meeting together.

Joint Venture Committee: A group of two or more congregations partnering together to support a particular mission work.

Mother church: The overseeing and primary supporting church of a church plant.

Recommended Resources for the Church Planter

On Church Planting, Missions, and Evangelism

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The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. *Planting an Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. Willow Grove, PA: The Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension, n.d..

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Nevius, John. *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1958.

Packer, J.I. *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2009.

On Education of the Core Group

On creeds and confessions:

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Hyde, Daniel R. *With Heart and Mouth: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession*. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2008.

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On worship:

Hart, D.G., and Muether, John R. *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002.

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Hyde, Daniel R. *What to Expect in Reformed Worship: A Visitor's Guide*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007.

Payne, Jon D. *In the Splendor of Holiness: Rediscovering the Beauty of Reformed Worship for the 21st Century*. White Hall, WV: Tolle Lege, 2008.

On Pastoral Care of the Core Group

De Jong, Peter Y. *Taking Heed to the Flock: A Study of the Principles and Practice of Family Visitation*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948.

Murphy, Thomas. *Pastoral Theology: The Pastor in the Various Duties of His Office*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1877.

Poirer, Alfred. *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*. Grand Rapids: Bakers, 2004.

Sittema, John R. *With a Shepherd's Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder*. Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1995.

On the Training of Officers

Allison, Archibald Alexander. "Biblical Qualifications for Elders." *Ordained Servant* 3.4 (1994): 80-86, available online at <http://www.opc.org/OS/pdf/OSV3N4.pdf>.

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Witmer, Timothy Z. *The Shepherd Leader*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2010.

VI. Recommendations

1. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Rev. Michael Brown (chair) and Rev. Kevin Efflandt (clerk) as well as any other members of the interim Missions Committee present during the discussion of this report.
2. That synod adopt this report.
3. That synod authorize the Committee to publish the manual, “How to Plant a Reformed Church” in electronic format for free distribution and in printed format for purchase.
4. That synod consider the nominations received by the classes for the position of the missions coordinator and elect a missions coordinator accordingly.
5. That synod continue to grant the committee an annual budget of \$7,000. In the event that no coordinator is elected, the committee would request an annual budget of \$14,000 in order to compensate for the work still mandated to the committee to be done without a coordinator.
6. That synod adopt the following amendment to policy II.A.3.d.2.a from “Fulfilling the Great Commission: A Proposed Shared Strategy in URCNA Missions,” by adding the following:
 - iii. In the following manner, nominations for the missions coordinator may also be made by the synodical pre-advice committee which considers the missions report.
 - A. In its synodical report, the Missions Committee will recommend qualified men who have been nominated by their respective Consistories. Recommendations will be preceded by committee interviews regarding credentials, history, office and salary requirements. All of this information regarding each nominee will be included in the committee report to synod as a “calling plan.”
 - B. Synod will vote on the nominations which are presented by the pre-advice committee. The number of votes received by the top three nominees shall be recorded.
 - C. The nominee with the most votes will be eligible to be called by his respective Consistory to assume the position of syndical missions coordinator. If the nominee declines the opportunity, the privilege will be extended to the nominee with the next highest number of synodical votes.
 - D. If a man accepts, he will begin serving immediately in the capacity of synodical missions coordinator under the authority of his Consistory, though employed and paid by the federation as outlined in his calling plan. The basic budget should be

approved by Synod with some leeway for cost of living differences associated with housing and insurance, etc..

(n.b. In Acts of Synod Nyack 2012, the numbers would read II.A.3.d.4.a, where the 4 is a mistake for a 2. See p. 531)

7. That synod encourage the churches to support through synodical asking the salary of a future missions coordinator with the goal to have funds in place for his first year of work by Synod 2016.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Michael Brown (chair), Classis Southwest US
Rev. Kevin Efflandt (clerk), Classis Pacific Northwest
Rev. Richard Anjema, Classis Western Canada
Rev. Bill Boekestein, Classis Eastern US
Rev. Harry Bout, Classis Ontario-East
Rev. Greg Bylsma, Classis Southwestern Ontario
Rev. Jody Lucero, Classis Central US
Elder Paul Wagenmaker, Classis Michigan

United Reformed Churches of North America
AD-Hoc Committee Compensation and Retirement Assessment
Synod Visalia 2014

Introduction

The committee commenced its work by reviewing its mandate of Synod 2012 and assigning portions of the mandate to various members. Early on, we determined that a survey of pastors and councils would be necessary to gauge how ministerial retirement needs are being met in light of the guidelines established by prior synodical decisions. Considerable care was taken to formulate the survey questions, which were then sent to the ministers and councils of the federation. While we had hoped for a higher response rate, the results were sufficient for our review of ministerial retirement needs in the context of our mandate. Furthermore, we reviewed similarly situated Reformed and Presbyterian denominations' approach to retirement needs. Summaries of the URC survey results, sister denominational retirement plans, and past URC Synodical decisions are found in appendices to this report.

The committee conducted its work via regular telephonic conference calls and through exchanging various proposals via email. On February 13, 2014, we held a lengthy telephone conference to examine and approve each part of the report. Under our chairman's able leadership, various viewpoints were coalesced into a uniform consensus on the recommendations. We believe the recommendations will guide the churches in their obligations as well as strengthen the accountability among the churches. It should be noted that we were mindful of the limits of our mandate regarding any changes to Article 10 and that prior synodical decisions had indicated reluctance to establish a federation retirement plan. Thus, it is our hope that this report will also encourage the churches to take that first principle step of endorsing a necessarily separate study of possible federation retirement plans for future synodical consideration.

Mandate (Acts of Synod Nyack 2012, Article 93, p.69)

That Synod establish a new ad hoc committee mandated to give advice concerning the compensation and retirement concerns faced by URCNA ministers, to determine if the present course of action of the URCNA churches sufficiently addresses these matters with undue hardship on either the congregations or its ministers. This mandate ought to include, but not be limited to:

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

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

Rev. Hank Van der Woerd – chairman

Rev. Henry Van Olst – reporter

Robert Huisjen

Pam Hessels

Steve Tjapkes

Mark Van Der Molen

Huibert Den Boer

A. BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Scripture mandates congregations to financially support the minister of the Word and sacraments so they can best serve their congregation by being fully dedicated to the work of the Lord without the distraction of financial stress and/or having to supplement their income from other employment. Consistent with the principle that ministers ought to be honorably compensated for their labors, they also ought to be adequately provided for that they might also be able to retire with sufficient funds so as not to require diaconal assistance.

1. Old Testament:

a. Deuteronomy 18:1-8

“The Levitical priests, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel they shall eat the Lord’s food offerings as their inheritance. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers; the Lord is their inheritance, as he promised them. And this shall be the priests due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach. The first fruits of your grain, of wine and of your oil, and the first fleece of our sheep, you shall give him. For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons for all time.”

In the Old Testament the Levitical priests were to be provided for by the other tribes of Israel. God did not want the priests distracted from carrying out their duties by having to worry about the necessities of life.

2. New Testament:

a. Luke 10:7

“And remain in the same house eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages.”

As Jesus sends out His disciples He does not deny their right to be provided for the necessities of life. The laborer, especially those called to the ministry, deserve their wages.

b. 1 Corinthians 9:1-14

“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not my workmanship in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you, for you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord. This is my defense to those who would examine me. Do we not have the right to eat and drink? Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife, as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Chephas? Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the

same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.' Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.

This entire passage speaks to the claimed right of Paul to be compensated by and through the preaching of the Word. It is Paul's privilege to waive that right if he so desires, but it is not the right of others to shrink or revoke his share.

c. 1 Timothy 5:8

"If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

d. 1 Timothy 5:17-18

"Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox when he treads out the grain,' and, 'The laborer deserves his wages.'"

This passage does not only refer to respect one should have for the office, but includes the matter of remuneration. Churches also have an obligation to provide for their pastors as they minister in the congregation in such a way that the minister should have/receive the means to be able to set aside properly for retirement.

SUMMARY: Biblical Principles:

God's Word makes clear that financial compensation for the work of a minister is not to be based on benevolence but rather as a laborer in the kingdom he is to be honorably compensated for his work while called to a church and for his retirement.

B. CONSIDERATION OF PAST SYNODICAL DECISIONS

Previous synodical decisions (Escondido 2001, and Calgary 2004) are included in the Report in Appendix D. It becomes evident from our survey and experience that these recommendations are not being carried out with any degree of consistency. While these recommendations represent a noble attempt to address the matter of providing retirement funds for the pastors of the URCNA every indication is that ministers are running far short of funding for their retirement.

C. FUTURE NEEDS

Future needs of URCNA ministers relative to their retirement needs will vary greatly from person to person. Additionally it is difficult to anticipate changes to the economic climate or to project with any certainty the rates of inflation, or future costs. As concerns the future we trust that the Lord will provide and so He does. It is our task however to be prudent and to make necessary adjustment where we are aware that future needs may be significant. In light of present costs relative to retirement living, old age care and medical / prescription factors we believe many ministers are being underfunded. It is not uncommon for monthly care costs to be in the range of \$2000.00 to \$3500 per month, or \$24k to \$42K per year. While some ministers may benefit from government pension income this will not significantly contribute to the aforementioned costs. Retirement saving contributions, coupled with present market rates of return, are estimated to be much lower than the anticipated need.

Recommendation #1. That all churches should, as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister, make provision for a government approved retirement plan or equivalent in an amount ranging from 10% to 20% of gross remuneration, which remuneration includes any housing allowance or the equivalent thereof and medical benefits. This percentage amount should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent thereof.

Grounds:

- a) The survey results suggest that the current percentage for church contribution appears insufficient to provide honorably for the retirement needs of ministers.
- b) The survey results suggest churches need to consider that the retirement provision should be an addition to base salary, and not seen as something which would ask the minister to take away from his current base salary.

c) The survey results suggest that in determining the percentage contribution within the 10- 20% range, churches need to better consider the financial effect and value of a parsonage vs. home ownership on the minister's retirement needs. These needs can vary depending on the remuneration package.

d) The survey results suggest that retired ministers will be inadequately prepared for the significant costs of potential nursing home care, which will vary depending upon location and level of service.

Recommendation #2. That the following questions be included for both the church visitors and on the Classical Credentials

a) As part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for your minister, are you making provision for a government approved retirement plan or equivalent in amount ranging from 10% - 20% of gross, which remuneration includes any housing allowance or equivalent value thereof, and medical benefits?

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

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

d) Does your church provide assistance to a retired pastors or widows?

e) Does your church need assistance to comply with Synod's retirement provision guidelines?

f) Does your church need assistance to support a retired pastor or a widow in need of financial assistance?"

Grounds:

a) The responses to these questions are not always reported or duly noted in the church visitors report.

b) Church visits are made every other year whereas reporting annually on the classical credentials will be current, which is especially helpful if a new need should arise or the financial ability of a church should change in the meantime.

c) Our current survey of ministers indicates that far too many churches are not in compliance with providing the required retirement contributions.

d) Our current survey of retired pastors indicates that they are experiencing difficulties in meeting their financial obligations.

e) It is consistent with the recommendation of Synod 2004 (Article 99, p.41) that there be greater accountability among the churches that we are fulfilling our financial obligations.

Recommendation #3. That the Minister's Assistance Fund be discontinued in any Classis that might still operate such a fund.

Grounds:

The operation of such a fund is in violation of the Canada Revenue Agency and United States Internal Revenue Service.

Recommendation #4. That an Ad Hoc Committee be appointed to study and make recommendations on specific feasible retirement plan options so the churches may consider whether to establish a federation-wide retirement fund/plan.

Grounds:

- a) Our survey results indicate an interest in and need for a federation retirement plan.
- b) A federation retirement plan could bring more uniformity in practice among the churches in making honorable provision for ministerial retirement needs.
- c) Similarly situated sister denominations have found such denomination plans feasible and desirable.
- d) Providing specific recommendations for a particular type of plan, with its attendant costs, benefits, contribution levels, etc. were viewed by this committee as beyond our present mandate.
- e) In Canada, the income tax act (ITA) limits the amount Canadian registered charities can give to individuals. Ministers (and their spouses) may not be given preferential treatment over other church members. Benevolence rules will dictate the amount that can be given.

D. OTHER FINANCIAL ISSUES

Other financial issues facing our ministers concern the question of adequate insurance. In the event of death or disability, most of our congregations would experience financial hardship or may even be unable to survive financially. In recent years there have been several cases where as a result of inadequate insurance being in place a significant financial burden was placed upon the surviving spouse and the church. While it is certainly the responsibility of the church to provide in these instances, the burden can be alleviated by means of insurance.

Some churches continue to supply their minister with a parsonage, while many others now own their own homes. We make no comment as to which option is the most desirable, however we note that those who are housed in parsonages are compensated at lower amounts than those who are not. As a consequence, their annual retirement contributions will be less each year and these

will compound to a lower amount over the long term, in contrast to those who own their own homes. Additionally home ownership will result in equity for the homeowner and lower housing costs for them in the long term.

Recommendation #5. That congregations verify that ministers have adequate life, disability, and health insurance so as to minimize a potential financial burden upon the surviving spouse and church.

Grounds:

a) Just as members of the congregation normally carry life insurance to provide for their surviving spouse and at home children it is not unreasonable to expect ministers to provide for their families.

Recommendation #6. That Synod approve an increase in the minimum annual retirement contribution for ministers who live in a parsonage. Churches must ensure that ministers in this category are at the 15-20% range of the guidelines established by Synod.

Grounds:

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

E. CHURCH ORDER ARTICLE 10

1. Church Order Article 10: Prior to Synod 2012

“Each church is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of his minister. Those who have retired from the active ministry shall retain the title and dignity of the office of minister of the Word.”

2. Church Order Amended at Synod 2012 (Acts of Synod p.68) & Ratified January 2013

“Each church is to provide honorably for its minister and his family while he is serving that church, and shall provide for the retirement and disability needs of its minister. In the event of a minister’s death, adequate provision shall be made for the support of his dependent wife and children.

A minister who has emeritated due to age or who is unable to perform the duties of his office due to age, sickness or other personal disabilities, shall retain the honor and title of Minister of the Word and his ministerial credentials shall remain with the church he last served, which shall provide honorably for his support, with the assistance of the churches of classis if necessary.

The emeritation of a minister shall take place with the approval of the council and with the concurring advice of classis. After emeritation a minister’s credentials may follow a membership transfer but only with the consent of both councils that are involved.

In the event of a dissolution of the church to which the minister (emeritus or otherwise) is officially bound, the consistory and the minister shall promptly request the advice of classis for the purpose of having his credentials held by another church of the classis in a manner consistent with Article 7 of the Church order.”

Our committee was directed to clarify the meaning of the first sentence of Church Order Article 10, “either by way of explanation or by amendment of Article 10”. In order to do so, we will compare the changes made to that first sentence of Article 10 and then provide a clarifying explanation of the language.

The first sentence of Church Order Article 10 prior to Synod 2012 read:

*“Each church is to **provide adequately** for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and should **contribute toward** the retirement and disability needs of his minister. “*

The first sentence of Church Order Amended at Synod 2012 (Acts of Synod p.68) & Ratified January 2013 reads:

*“Each church is to **provide honorably** for its minister and his family while he is serving that church, and shall **provide for** the retirement and disability needs of its minister.”*

We believe this change from “provide adequately” to “provide honorably” is consistent with our summary of biblical principles, which we restate here from page 4 of our report:

*“God’s Word makes clear that financial compensation for the work of a minister is **NOT** to be based on benevolence but rather as a laborer in the kingdom he is to be honorably compensated for his work while called to a church and for his retirement.”*

This wording change in Article 10 clearly indicates that the churches do not view ministerial compensation as providing what is just “adequate” or providing simply a subsistence existence. Surely, we have agreed that compensation should not fall below subsistence levels such that a minister would find himself needing benevolent assistance. Rather, the term “honorably” reflects the sense of the esteem and value we place on the gospel ministry. At the very least, by this 2012 Church Order change, the churches recognized that they are blessed and well served when ministers are not overly entangled in worldly concerns about their support. In summary, the honor of office should be maintained both during *active ministry* and during the *time of emeritation* when ministers can continue to serve the churches as seasoned and wise fathers.

Also, the wording change from “contribute toward” to “provide for” is significant in that it reflects a more comprehensive and fulsome view of the responsibility a church toward its minister. The idea of “contributing toward” can suggest one has simply fulfilled their duty by being just one contributor at any level among many contributors, including the minister. This could tempt a church to think it does not have the *primary* responsibility for the *overall care* of the minister in accord with the dignity of the office. It is our view that “providing for” the retirement needs of the minister is an acknowledgment of a responsibility beyond just making a “contribution” that does not realistically provide for the actual retirement or disability needs of the minister. Additionally, it is good to be reminded that the guideline retirement provision level (currently 5-10% ; 10-20% recommended herein) is what the *church* should be aiming to provide *above* any ministerial contribution.

Having explained this changed emphasis on the responsibility of the church towards its minister regarding compensation and retirement, we still believe an amendment to Article 10 is needed to clarify the minister’s responsibility to obtain life insurance to make provision for his dependents after his death.

Recommendation #7. That the first sentence of Article 10 be amended to read (italicized language added):

Each church is to provide honorably for its minister and his family while he is serving that church *to meet all his financial needs including ensuring the minister obtains his own sufficient life insurance*, and shall provide for the retirement and disability needs of its minister. In the event of a minister’s death, adequate provision shall be made for the support of his dependent wife and children.

Grounds:

1. The obligation is still with the church to provide honorably which means assistance upon death or disability should not even be necessary.
2. The obligation is with the minister to obtain sufficient insurance to provide for his family upon his death (not unlike members of the congregation)

3. Eliminate the ambiguity as to what is expected of both the minister and the church. A minister bears the primary responsibility to provide for the support of his family upon his death.

Recommendation #8. That Synod receive the report of this committee with thanks and discharges the committee as having completed its mandate.

Submitted by,

Rev. Hank Van der Woerd

Rev. Henry Van Olst

Robert Huisjen

Pam Hessels

Steve Tjapkes

Mark Van Der Molen

Huibert Den Boer

APPENDIX A - Retirement Plan Survey

Summary of Results – URCNA – Canadian Ministers

12/14/2013

Overall Support

Out of the 31 responses received from the Canadian Ministers, 74% were in favor of a federation sponsored retirement plan, 10% were against, and 16% responded “unsure”.

General

77% of the pastors responded that their church has made no plans to support them past their current employment relationship. This lack of provision was echoed by the retired ministers who responded:

“I found (find) it humiliating after serving the churches that I now need to go to the deacons of my home church in order to provide for my wife and myself. While I am still able to preach we can get by but when I am no longer able or there are no more opportunities, I will again have to look for diaconal assistance.”

“As indicated above, I have not received any provision from any church for any of the above; ever. As a matter of fact, no church has so much as inquired about my financial situation; ever. To my mind, the message is clear: Once a pastor in the URCNA has reached retirement age (or must retire because of circumstances beyond his control) he is on his own. And, were he (thereafter) to become desperately needy, he must be able “to prove that” before he will be ‘granted’ diaconal care.”

Retirement Savings

The overall average salary is \$55,025 and average housing allowance is \$17,704 for an overall total of \$72,729.

The average salary and housing allowance for a minister of a church with less than 20 families is \$52,438. The average salary and housing allowance for a minister of a church with 21 to 100 families is \$63,938. The average salary and housing allowance for a minister of a church with more than 100 families is \$84,075.

80% of churches are currently contributing to their pastor’s retirement in the average amount \$4,854 per year. 48% of the ministers reported making personal contributions to their retirement plan. The personal contribution to their retirement averages \$1,125 per year.

68% of the churches responding are meeting the 5% of gross salary test established in Synod 2001.

Approximately 55% of the churches meet regularly with their pastor to determine if they are able to save adequately for retirement.

39% of the ministers responded that their ability to save for the future was never discussed.

55% of the ministers responded do not consult with a financial planner about their retirement needs.

65% of the Canadian ministers are 15 years to retirement (two are currently at retirement age). Of those ministers who are 55 years old or older, 58% of them have less than \$80,000 invested in RRSP's (42% less than \$40,000). Of those ministers who are 50 years old or older, 58% of them have less than \$80,000 invested in RRSP's (37% less than \$40,000).

100% of the pastors plan to continue working after retirement, and 23% of those reported they will either need to or want to supplement their retirement income (100% of these respondents were ministers over the age of 50).

61% of the ministers plan to retire between the age of 65 and 70.

Own House vs. Parsonage

77% of the ministers reported owning their own home. 4 ministers reported living in a parsonage.

The average salary for ministers living in a parsonage is \$55,425, which is \$400 more than the average for all ministers. However, ministers who own their own home receive an average additional \$17,700 per year for housing allowance. This "extra" money represents additional income / equity accumulation that ministers who live in a parsonage do not have.

23% of the ministers responding stated they would not be able to purchase their own home when they are ready to retire.

Long Term Disability

9 ministers (29%) reported that they do not have a disability policy. 5 of them were pastors to churches with less than 20 families.

Medical Coverage

16% of the ministers reported that they do not have any medical coverage.

APPENDIX B Retirement Plan Survey
Summary of Results – URCNA – US Ministers
12/14/2013

Overall Support

Out of the 31 responses received from the US Ministers, 51% were in favor of a federation sponsored retirement plan, 29% were against, and 20% responded “don’t know”.

Retirement Savings

The average salary is \$42,831 and average housing allowance is \$22,749 for a total of \$65,580. 84% of churches are currently contributing to their pastor’s retirement in the average amount \$4,774 per year, or 7.2% of the avg. salary and housing allowance. Pastor’s personal contribution to their retirement averages \$3,267 per year, or 5% of the avg. salary and housing allowance.

75% of the churches responding are meeting the 5% of gross salary test established in Synod 2001.

Approximately 65% of the churches meet regularly with their pastor to determine if they are able to save adequately for retirement.

87% of the pastors plan to continue working after retirement, and 22% of those reported they will need to in order to supplement their retirement income.

The avg. age the respondents plan to retire is at 68.5 years old.

Own House vs. Parsonage

65% of the ministers reported owning their own home, while the other 35% reported living in a parsonage. 13% of the ministers responding stated they would not be able to purchase their own home when they are ready to retire.

Long Term Disability

29% of the ministers responding stated they are inadequately provided for in regard to long-term disability.

Social Security

Approximately 50% of the respondents reported they have opted out of social security. Of those respondents, only 2 of them are failing to put away at least 5% of gross salary towards retirement.

APPENDIX C – Summary of other Churches regarding Pension

Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church Retirement Equity Fund (Pension) provides a supplement to any retirement plans or other provisions made by individual ministers (e.g. Social Security). This "supplementary" plan has grown from its original 61 participants into an established retirement plan with over 275 current participants and over \$19 million in assets. In addition, the OPC has established a Pension Supplement Fund to provide supplemental benefits for ministers and their spouses who were over 65 with twenty years of service prior to December 31, 1988. That plan currently provides benefits to 13 ministers and surviving spouses.

The OPC also established a Group Voluntary Life plan to provide additional life insurance coverage for ministers, ruling elders, deacons and licentiates of OPC churches, and full-time employees of churches and denominational agencies.

Reformed Presbyterian Church North America

The RPCNA provides a supplemental pension plan funded through employer contributions and optional employee contributions. The employer contribution targets are set by Synod. The employer currently contributes approximately \$4000 per year, and the employee has 5 investing options to choose from. The plan is intended to be supplemental to Social Security, not an exclusive retirement plan. The RPCNA has about 70 churches and the plan has been well received since it was established in 1976. The plan also provides an option for disability payments, spouse survivor benefits, and withdrawals of employee contributions.

Canadian and American Reformed Churches

The Canadian and American Reformed churches have a Superannuation Fund ("Fund", for short) that operates similar to a defined benefit pension but is not in any way a pension fund. The Fund assesses the member churches (all of the Canadian Reformed Churches as well as the American Reformed Churches) based in part on whether they have an active minister or not and the monies collected are professionally invested. The Fund does not accrue benefits for anyone and it does not deal with the retired ministers or their widows whatsoever. Collecting the assessments this way recognizes that most ministers serve several congregations during the span of their career but it is the last one that they serve that is financially responsible for them when they retire. The Fund does not distinguish between Canadian and American churches/ministers. The Fund "transacts" in Canadian funds so if one of the American churches becomes responsible for a retired minister that church will receive exactly the same benefit as would a Canadian church. The churches, in turn, are responsible for making their own arrangements with the retired minister or widow.

When a minister officially retires or becomes incapacitated or passes away, the church that is responsible for him makes a claim against the Fund and the amount given does not take into account length of service, past income, etc. There is one monthly payout amount for a retired married minister and a slightly lower payout figure for a widow or widower. In all cases, the benefit is paid to the church and ***not*** the minister. They pool all of the money received and it is not earmarked for anyone or any church.

Free Reformed Church of North America - Minister's Emeritus Fund

The congregations of the Free Reformed Churches of North America have over many years amassed a pool of funds intended to supplement the income of retired ministers. This fund pays out an annual amount to an emeritus minister or his widow in addition to the government pension amounts received. The congregations are assessed on a per family basis to maintain the viability of the fund. A standing committee reports on the health of the fund and makes recommendations to Synod annually. Intended as a benevolent fund, a minister who has his own financial means at retirement may have the allotment reduced, on a case basis. The committee also makes recommendations concerning minimum salaries and pulpit supply stipends.

APPENDIX D: PAST SYNODICAL DECISIONS

1. SYNOD Escondido 2001, Article 36 (p.18).

A. Observations:

1. Observations and conclusions based on Canadian Survey results obtained by Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto:

- a. Many churches do not assist their ministers with retirement planning
- b. None of the churches surveyed are directly supporting a retired minister at this time.
- c. None of the churches surveyed are participating in any group plan.
- d. The majority of the ministers participate in a private RRSP program. Two reported that they do not have any provision for their retirement.
- e. Ten churches do not contribute to the minister's private RRSP program, whereas 16 stated they did. The contributions vary from \$1000 CDN per year to \$6,600 CDN per year.

2. The Walker URC report recommended that Synod not attempt to set up a denominationally run pension plan on the following grounds"

- a. Such a pension plan would yield lower returns;
- b. It would require centralized administration;
- c. Most URC pastors would prefer to administer their own retirement plans.

3. Both reports (Covenant and Walker) agreed that a denominational plan is not feasible, but that the churches do have a joint responsibility to provide adequately for the retirement of their ministers in accordance with Article 10 of the CO.

4. There is a significant disparity within the churches in providing adequate retirement funds for their ministers (from no provision to adequate).

B. Recommendations:

That the recommendations of the two committees (Covenant and Walker) be harmonized into the following recommendations to Synod to be adopted as a uniform standard of practice by the churches:

1. All churches should, as part of the annual remuneration and benefit package for their minister, include an allowance for a contribution to a government approved retirement plan or equivalent in amount ranging from 5% to 10% of gross remuneration, including any housing allowance or the equivalent value thereof. This contribution should be designated by the church to the minister's personal retirement plan or equivalent.
2. That the churches establish a Co-operative Saving Fund (two separate funds for Canada and the USA, if necessary) to assist the churches in supporting retiring ministers in need. Such a Fund should be established through regular free will offerings by the churches. Guidelines shall be established to assist the churches in determining the amount of the Fund required from time to time.
3. That an American and Canadian church be appointed to implement recommendation #2, who in turn shall appoint trustees to administer the Fund. The committee recommends the appointment of Lynden United Reformed Church of Lynden, WA (failing which First United Reformed Church of Chino, CA) and Immanuel Covenant Reformed Church of Abbotsford, B.C. (failing which Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge, AB).
4. That all churches be encouraged to contract for disability insurance for their ministers, in an amount equivalent to at least 50% of the gross remuneration (including any housing allowance or the equivalent value thereof).
5. That the church visitors, as part of their duties, inquire concerning the visited church's response to recommendations 1 and 4.
6. That these recommendations constitute a complete response to Reports 9a and 9b.
7. That Covenant Reformed Church of Toronto and Walker URC be thanked for their reports, and that the Committee on Voluntary Retirement Pension Plans be disbanded.

Grounds:

1. The churches must share in the responsibility of ensuring that all retiring ministers are provided for adequately.
2. The disparity within the churches should be addressed.
3. The establishment of a Co-operative Savings Fund financed by all of the churches will assist the needy churches in meeting responsibilities pursuant to Article 10 of the CO.
4. Article 9 and 10 of the CO, Deuteronomy 15:7-11, Galatians 2:10, and 1 Timothy 5:17-18.

C. It is moved that the churches appointed to implement Recommendation 2 be asked to present to our next synod a report presenting guidelines as to how the money in the co-operative Savings Fund is being disbursed. ADOPTED.

2. SYNOD Calgary 2004 – Article 99 (p.41)

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

Grounds:

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

Recommended Guidelines:

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

B. Each Classis establish their own Minister's Assistance Fund as necessary.

Grounds

1. The need to assist pastors and /or their widows who have left other denominations who may have lost part of their pensions.
2. The need to assist retired pastors and churches where a special need has risen.
3. Free-will offerings may be stronger due to the closer relationship between the church of Classis
4. Because each church meets at least every 12 months it will allow Classis to respond better to the needs of a local church.
5. Churches in the same Classis are typically more aware of each other's needs.
6. There will be more flexibility within each Classis to address the needs.

Recommended Guidelines:

1. The Church visitors should be instructed to ask the following questions: Does your church need assistance from the Ministers Assistance Fund:

1. To support a retired pastor or a widow of a former pastor of a URCNA
2. To help pastor who have left other denominations, to join the URC federation, who may have lost part of their pensions?
3. To assist widows or retired pastors in need who left other denomination to join the URC Federation?

2. If the local congregation is unable to meet the needs as described in grounds 1 and 2 of recommendation B, their Council may petition their Classis for assistance from the Ministers Assistance Fund.

3. Classis should appoint a church in the Classis to administer the Ministers Assistance Fund.

**Report on Presbyterian and Reformed Commission
on Chaplains and Military Personnel (PRCC)
[formerly PRJC]
to Synod 2014**

Synod 2012 adopted the following three recommendations:

1. *To appoint one consistory to serve indefinitely as the URCNA liaison to the PRJC, and to request this consistory to submit reports on the PRJC to future synods.*
2. *To authorize the appointed consistory to send one or two observers to PRJC meetings occasionally, at URCNA expense, leaving it to the consistory's discretion whether and when such observers will be sent. Costs should not exceed an average of \$500 per year.*
3. *That Synod appoint the Consistory of Faith URC of Beecher, IL, to serve as the URCNA liaison to the PRJC.*

The consistory of Faith URC (Beecher, IL) sent an observer to attend the PRCC meeting in February, 2014, in Atlanta, GA. Minutes for the other PRCC meetings have been received and reviewed. (The name of the Commission has changed slightly and the PRJC is now the PRCC.) We report our observations below.

I. Brief Review of PRCC Function & URCNA Involvement

Synod Schererville 2007 voted to apply for affiliate membership in PRCC (PRJC) since no one may serve as a U.S. Military chaplain without an ecclesiastical endorsement from “a qualified Religious organization.” The PRCC’s Mission Statement declares, *The Presbyterian and Reformed Joint Commission on Chaplains and Military Personnel is a ministry of member denominations dedicated to obeying Christ’s Great Commission by providing men to serve as chaplains in military and civilian organizations. The Commission endorses and ecclesiastically supports ordained, qualified chaplains; approves chaplain candidates; and helps presbyteries and congregations in biblical ministry to military personnel and their families.*

The Commission is governed by representatives or *commissioners* from its five member denominations: the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARPC), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA). It is also the endorsing body for two associate member (non-voting) denominations: the Korean Presbyterian Church in America (Ko-Shin) (KPCA), and the URCNA. Membership in the PRCC is limited to NAPARC denominations.

The Commission meets together once a year in person and at other times by electronic means. The Commission oversees the work of the full-time executive director, (ret) Chaplain (Brigadier General) Douglas E. Lee, who is assisted by an administrative assistant (Gary Hitzfeld) and some associate directors who help with visiting the chaplains. The executive director actively attends military and endorser meetings, attempts to visit the chaplains annually (assisted by the associate directors), conducts training for the chaplains, leads various retreats and seminars, oversees a quarterly newsletter with reports from the chaplains, serves as a liaison in a variety of ways, and among other duties, intervenes when issues arise between a superior officer and one of the PRCC chaplains.

The PCA has the most prominent role in the PRCC, yet the Commission is governed jointly by member denominations whose commissioners work well together and serve to influence positively one another. The total number of military chaplains currently endorsed by the PRCC is 200 (this includes: 17 ARPC, 22 KAPC, 6 KPCCA, 16 OPC, 135 PCA, 3 RPCNA, and 1 URCNA). The PRCC also endorses 81 civilian chaplains (including 1 ARP, 11 OPC and 69 PCA).

There is currently one URCNA military chaplain who is endorsed by the PRCC. Rev. Andrew Spriensma continues to serve as a U.S. Army Chaplain under the oversight of Faith URC (Beecher, IL). From 2012 to 2013 he was stationed in Wiesbaden, Germany, where he served as the pastor of the traditional Protestant worship service and the rear-detachment chaplain for a unit deployed to Afghanistan. During that time, he also deployed to Afghanistan for two months. He is now stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky and assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. His primary role is to provide pastoral care and counseling to the seven hundred fifty soldiers within his infantry battalion and their families. He is scheduled to deploy to Afghanistan with them this Fall.

II. Recent Decisions & Actions of the PRCC

A. Homosexuality in the Military

Our Synod 2012 report on the PRCC addressed the issue of open homosexuality in the U.S. military connected to the repeal of the so-called “Don’t Ask – Don’t Tell” policy, noting the steps the PRCC has taken to advise and protect their chaplains. Since Synod 2012, the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) has also been repealed. Whereas the repeal of the so-called “Don’t Ask – Don’t Tell” policy allows homosexuals to serve openly in the military, the repeal of DOMA affords homosexual military personnel the same rights and privileges afforded to heterosexual, married soldiers. In addition to what is written in the Chaplains’ Manual: Policy and Guidance Handbook <http://pcamna.org/chaplainministries/chaplainmanual.php>, the PRCC continues to give practical, pastoral, and the legal advice to its chaplains as they deal with the impact of these changes.

B. Civilian Chaplaincy

Although the PRCC currently endorses 81 civilian chaplains, the PRCC historically has been primarily focused on military chaplains. In June of 2013, the PRCC hired Del Farris as a part-time associate director to oversee civilian chaplains. Rev. Farris served for 22 years as a chaplain for the Arkansas Children’s Hospital. He is exploring a new strategy of utilizing chaplains to plant churches in smaller communities. The key benefits of this arrangement might include financial support in a situation where finances for a church plant are lacking, as well as the important community contacts and credibility established through the chaplaincy work. Rev. Farris is encouraging seminaries to offer and pastors to obtain clinical pastoral education (CPE), which is required to work in most hospital settings.

C. Women in Military Service and Sexual Assault

One of the constitutional responsibilities of the PRCC is to keep member denominations informed of significant developments, trends, issues, and problems concerning both chaplains

and also members of the armed forces. Therefore, it is the painful duty of the PRCC to inform its member denominations of the growing problem of sexual assault within the U.S. Armed Forces. In 2013 there were more than 5000 reported cases and many more unreported cases. Of further concern is the consideration of allowing female soldiers into combat units; the PRCC anticipates that such action will worsen this problem. The PRCC will write a letter of pastoral concern regarding this matter and send it to the stated clerks of each member denomination, requesting it be disseminated to all the churches.

D. Budget, Dues & Contributions

The 2013 budget of the PRCC is \$447,622. The PRCC is supported primarily through the contributions of member denominations and donations from interested individuals and churches. Income is supplemented by the dues of endorsed chaplains. Military chaplains are required to pay dues calculated as a percentage of their base pay. For active duty military chaplains dues range from \$348 to \$996 per year.

The dues required of full/associate member denominations has been in the amount of \$500 per endorsed chaplain per year. In February 2014, the PRCC voted to increase these dues to meet growing budget requirements. The increase will come at the rate of \$200 per year for the next five years. This incremental increase will raise the dues each denomination must pay per endorsed chaplain to \$1,500 by the year 2020. Individual and congregational gifts would be counted toward this total. Currently, the PCA's giving rises to the level of about \$1,750 per PCA chaplain endorsed, supplying a disproportionately large percentage of the PRCC budget.

III. Evaluation

The PRCC continues to be of faithful and relevant service to the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This Commission is made up of men of confessionally Reformed, NAPARC churches who are eager to encourage and protect ministry that is faithfully Reformed. Most of them have significant military experience and many are retired chaplains in the U.S. Armed Forces. They carry with them a wealth of ministry experience and military knowledge. They demonstrate a deep-seated love for the Lord and for the men and women of the Armed Forces, especially the Presbyterian and Reformed chaplains they oversee. The PRCC is dedicated to helping its chaplains remain faithful to the Reformed faith while working in an increasingly challenging pluralistic atmosphere.

The PRCC is steadily growing in the number of chaplains it endorses. While this growth is a great blessing, the Commission recognizes the challenge that this brings as they seek to care for over three hundred chaplains and their families stationed all over the world.

IV. Recommendations

The Consistory of Faith URC (Beecher, IL) is willing to continue as a liaison to the PRCC. It perceives no need for any recommendations to be brought to Synod 2014.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Todd Joling
Rev. Andrew Spriensma
For the Consistory of Faith URC (Beecher, IL)

Report from the Board of Directors for the URCNA Corporation (Canada)

To the Synod of the URCNA meeting in Visalia, CA

Since our last Synod the Canadian Corporation of the URCNA continued to serve the churches of the Federation. The primary service offered concerns the financial activities for the Federation. Along with the URCNA Corporation (USA) we maintain the financial obligations undertaken by our Federation at our last Synod. These obligations include but are not limited to paying the stipend for the Clerk and related costs for his work, the Website costs, and administering the budgets of the various Committees appointed by Synod (CECCA, CERCU, etc.). To this point we are thankful to say that our financial obligations have been well provided for by the churches according to our Synodical commitments.

Since our last Synod the Canadian Corporation has taken on a greater role in providing for the financial commitments for the Federation. This is due to the ongoing demands placed upon us by the Canadian Revenue Agency. In order to satisfy the CRA it is far simpler to have the money move from the USA Corporation to the Canadian Corporation and then to the Clerk, Website, Committees, etc. We anticipate this responsibility will continue in the coming years, particular with the appointment of our Mission Coordinator.

It is worth noting that at our last Synod the churches were encouraged to enter into Joint Venture Agreements. In order for Canadian funds to move across our shared border, the CRA requires a JVA. There are specific responsibilities for such Agreements that churches are better able to perform than the Corporations, principally because they have access to more participants. We would encourage the Canadian churches to partner with American causes (church plants, etc.) in order to facilitate the movement of money across the border. Those churches who are interested in taking up this opportunity are encouraged to contact the Canadian Council of Christian Charities for further information. It is wise to undertake these opportunities with a full appreciation of the CRA's requirements.

As the Board of Directors we are thankful for the opportunity to serve the churches in this respect. We look forward to providing this service for the years to come.

On behalf of the Board of Directors,

Rev. Joel Dykstra

**United States Board of the United Reformed Churches in North America
546 24th Ave., Hudsonville, MI 49426**

Report from the U.S. Board of Directors of the URCNA to Synod 2014

Dear Brothers,

The U.S. Board of Directors has met on ten occasions since Synod 2012

The U.S.-URCNA Treasurer, Mr. Bob Huisjen, provides quarterly financial reports to the U.S. Board for our review and approval.

The U.S. Board Chairman and the U.S. Treasurer report that the U.S. Corporation papers are current and are being updated annually for our federation.

The Chairman and the Treasurer of the U.S. Board are members of the Joint Venture Agreement Board (International Board of Directors). We have not met with our Canadian counterparts since Synod 2012.

The U.S. Board has experienced conflicts because individual consistories have contested and interfered with the decisions and actions of the U.S. Board while doing their official business. The U.S. Board believes the board members are mandated by the Acts of Synod 2007 to report conflicts they have experienced to the Convening Consistory. On July 31, 2012 the U.S. Board passed a motion to write a letter to the Convening Consistory of Synod 2014 concerning the decision of Synod 2012 to not reappoint the Chairman of the Board for unspecified “pastoral reasons” without grounds provided. The Acts of Synod 2007 clearly state that the U.S. Board of Directors and the Canadian Board of Directors are under the oversight of the Convening Consistory. (Acts of Synod 2007, page 40, Article 74, 5-3.2)

On December 27, 2012 the U.S. Board made a formal request to the Convening Consistory of Synod 2014 for a written authorization to the URCNA-US Board of Directors to retain legal counsel to defend the federation in the Bandstra vs. URCNA lawsuit occurring in Pella, Iowa and to grant authorization for the disbursement of funds for that purpose from the General Fund of the URCNA-US and the URCNA-Canada pro-rata.

At the time of the writing of this report, for the present, we are thankful the URCNA Federation has been dismissed from the lawsuit (after dispensing \$5,000.00 to an Iowa attorney to defend the federation).

The U.S. Board encourages Synod to take more seriously the Canadian and U.S. Directors’ Reports to Synod.

A.) In both the Provisional and the Adopted Agenda of Synod 2007 (Acts of Synod Schererville 2007, page 97), the Canadian Board of Directors had reported regarding the International Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) legal document which they had recently completed for our federation, *“All that is required for this document to be enacted is the signature of a member of the Corporation of the URCNA (USA) with signing authority.”* However, the newly organized U.S.

Board of Directors was directed simultaneously by Synod 2007 to retain an attorney to develop a JVA legal document for the U.S Federation which would be compatible with the Canadian-URCNA Corporation and the Canadian Revenue Agency. Only after completion of this document at the expense of \$5,300.00 to the federation was it brought to the attention of the U.S. Board Chairman that the Canadian brothers had already completed this task!

B.) At Synod 2010, the Synod failed to act upon the U.S. Board's request to reappoint two of its Directors (for lack of time?). Between Synod 2010 and Synod 2012 the two U.S. Directors agreed to continue to function on the U.S. Board sans Synod reappointment.

C.) At Synod 2012, one of the U.S. Directors was not reappointed and no record of this action was recorded in the Acts of Synod.

The Vice Chairman of the U.S. Board resigned from the board in November, 2013.

Three of the remaining four board members are resigning effective Synod 2014. The one member remaining would be the capable and conscientious URCNA-US Treasurer, Mr. Bob Huisjen.

Recommendations:

The U.S. Board of Directors respectfully recommends that Synod take the following action:

- 1.) Synod 2014 encourage pastors, elders and other church leaders be trained in biblical conflict resolution as an aid in maintaining harmony and unity within our federation. By so doing our federation would also enhance the prevention of legal action among the brothers and sisters of the federation.**
- 2.) Synod 2014 encourage the Acts of Synod 2007 be followed in respect to overseeing the U.S. and Canadian Board of Directors and advise the member consistories of the federation to deal directly with the Convening Consistory of Synod when questioning the decisions and actions of the Board of Directors of our Federation.**

Request to Synod:

The U.S. Board of Directors requests that Synod appoint four new members of the U.S. Board at Synod 2014.

Respectfully submitted,

Glenn Hop

Secretary of the U.S. Board of Directors of the URCNA

Date: February 6, 2014