



Lux Mundi

37:3 September 2018

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world." John 8:12



In this Issue

Issues of our time

Overviews of various broadcast assemblies

Magazine published by the
International Conference of
Reformed Churches



CONFESS YOUR GUILT BEFORE GOD

Author: Rev. Dr. E.J. (Edmund) de Beer

Rev. Dr. Edmund de Beer is a minister of the Reformed Church in South Africa in Laeveld.

*O Lord, the God of Israel, you are just,
for we are left a remnant that has escaped,
as it is today. Behold, we are before you in
our guilt, for none can stand before you
because of this. (Ezra 9:15 ESV)*

Ezra experienced shame. For some of his fellow believers had been unfaithful to God and had married unbelieving women. They had done so after God had been gracious to them and after He had brought them back from exile. They had thrown God's grace to the wind.

Are you still shocked when you hear what terrible things happen in our world? Often those terrible things are done by people who claim to be Christian. Such may twist the truth, commit physical and spiritual murder, are unfaithful in marriage, practise sexual licentiousness, are into drug abuse, exploit others, the list goes on.

It's easy to place the blame for moral degeneration in our world at the door of governments or other people. Ezra does not do so. Even though he was without guilt, he

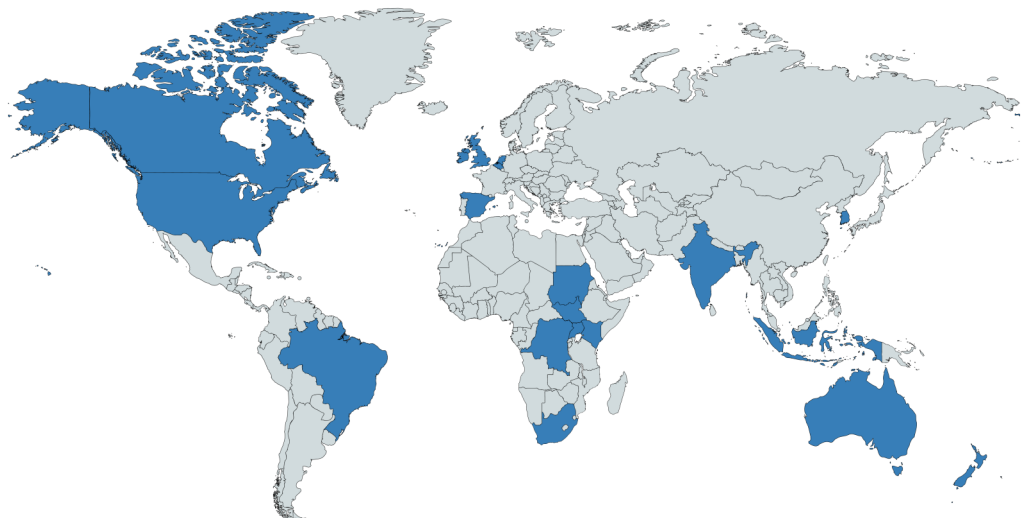
associates himself with unfaithful Israelites, speaking of "we" who have transgressed the commandments of God and had married into the nations who live shockingly. Ezra joined the guilty in their confession of sin.

When you point your finger at another, you are inclined to forget your own guilt. It is important to know and confess your own guilt, to receive and grace, and to live out of grace. Then you can also pray for others, especially for children of God who are trampling upon God's grace. Through the Lord Jesus we may come before God and receive grace. If we do not confess our guilt and do not come before God in the Lord Jesus, we could not stand before Him even one day. ✱

From *Dagstukkies*, a devotional published by the Reformed Church in South Africa on its website.
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The logo combines the ICRC logo with the Lux Mundi monogram, an early Christian symbol combining the initials of Jesus Christ (in Greek I and X), referring to Him as the Light of the World (Lux Mundi).



Front cover picture: sign outside the Calvinist Reformed Church in Karfao, Rote Island, Indonesia. Photo: K. Janssen



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ON STATUS AND ASSEMBLIES

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“Status is not everything, unless it is one's status in Christ before God.” (1Corinthians 1:26-31).

In August I had the privilege of travelling to Indonesia, to visit the Calvinist Reformed Churches on the islands Timor and Rote.

My eye, and then my camera, caught what you see on the front cover of this Lux Mundi edition. The picture is of the sign outside the GGRC of Karfao, where I attended a classis; the green behind the sign is the church building.

Status

It struck me how the sign boldly proclaimed affiliation with the ICRC. I asked why this is done and was informed: it bolsters the standing of the church in the eyes of Indonesians. Churches will advertise their international associations to have credence in society. Most churches will proclaim their affiliation with the World Council of Churches. A Bible-believing Reformed church will not do that: the WCC is unwilling to be faithful to God's Word. However, a Reformed (or Presbyterian) church need not be an island or an orphan. There is a solid confessional alternative to the WCC: the ICRC. With gratitude the GGRC of Karfao expresses how it is part of an international network of churches faithful to God's Word.

It shows that an organisation such as the ICRC can mean a variety of things to different churches, depending on one's culture. There is no need to indicate affiliation with the ICRC on a church sign in North America (though it would be a good touch). However, in other societies ICRC membership is not just functional bringing information and networks within one's reach. It also provides

status, freedom and opportunities to reach out.

Mind you, one should not overestimate this. The GGRC had hoped to use the gathering of church leaders in Karfao as a way to reach out to the community. While many church members came out, I was told that when government officials got wind of the plans of the GGRC, they quickly organized a civil event which outsiders felt obliged to attend.

Status is not everything, unless it is one's status in Christ before God (1Corinthians 1:26-31). May the comfort of all be belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ!

Assemblies

Late spring and early summer form a convenient time for church assemblies. As most of the ICRC member churches happen to be in the northern hemisphere, several have recently had their broadest assembly. Thus the Lux Mundi before you an overview, mostly written by “insiders” of member churches, of what keeps member churches engaged and busy.

Often these are matters not just relevant to one church, but to many, if not all. This is clear from the moderator's address to the PCEA, which we gratefully republish in our pages. May Rev. Yoa's insights serve to encourage all God's people throughout the world to strive for the faith as we confront today's problems. I'm sure they will: it's a testimony to Pentecost to hear an ethnic Sudanese preacher speak within what was an immigrant Scottish church context as pastor in what is considered to be Australia's most multi-cultural city. ✱



CONFRONTING TODAY'S PROBLEMS: MODERATOR'S ADDRESS, PCEA GA 2018

Author: Rev. Tut Wan Yoa

Rev. Yoa has served the Sudanese community in Melbourne since August 2005 and pastors All Nations PCEA, Mulgrave.

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia is a small church that is declining as are many other denominations. There are a number of causes, some of which I wish to discuss, but the very secular mindset, and the emphasis on individualism in Australia at present are major factors. Many people have shifted away from their Christian roots, hardly 10% of the population are church attenders and only a proportion of these are real believers in Christ. Church membership is becoming less and less meaningful, and denominational commitment is less and less. The current generation shops around until they find what they want - and they are not worried about the denomination providing it. Large charismatic- type churches provide music and a sensory experience that appeals to the young and restless. This affects us as a small church which wants to maintain purity of worship and to follow what God wants rather than our own desires. In 1999 51.3% of marriages were overseen by civil celebrants; today the figure is over 76% reflecting the reduced church impact on the cultural life of Australia.

I: SOME PROBLEMS

The Sunday or Lord's Day

The Christian church used to be one of the major institutions in Australian life. It shaped the culture of the country. Sunday was a distinctive day of the week because no work could be demanded from workers on it. Now, on Sunday trading are open as they are during weekdays and sports commences at noon. Previously, there was no cable TV or video games; Sunday was a time reserved by many Christians for attending worship services, but new research indicates the extent to which churches today are competing against other activities- the biggest competition being children's sports. Unlike the past, shops are now open, the population at large expect to be at home and sports has staked its claim. With many of our youth participating in some sport or another, parents are adding another item on their to-do list.

This was once not such a nuisance to the church as most sporting activities were allocated to Saturdays or even spread out across during weekdays - the children of Christian parents deciding on creating their own division on Saturdays. However, with the growing passion our youth hold for furthering themselves in the sporting world, parents have now been confronted with something they never expected: Sunday sports. This new rise and demand



of higher grade sporting commitments has provided a confrontation: do we of the older generation force them to quit so that they may hear the word of God, or do we allow them to compete and, in turn, leave the church? It is a dilemma best solved. Most parents feel guilty if they push their children to sacrifice their personal activities for the need of their salvation; hearing and learning about the Lord and Our Father - and rightly so. If we are too aggressive in our demands, kids are likely to resent their parents, and even further, resent the Church for being the reason they can't perform in their sport of choice. On the contrary, if we are too lenient, we allow our children to progress in their sport at the expense of their faith and the future of the congregation. After all, a church cannot prosper if there is no one for us to pass the baton to. Churches generally do not seem to bother opposing Sunday sport or preaching about the importance of Sunday as a day of worship only.

Sexual scandals

Recently, the evidence of sexual abuse in religious institutions has been highlighted. Although sexual abuse is higher in the general community, the extent to which churches have ignored or tried to hide abuse, or shifted perpetrators to other parishes is a scandal. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse revealed 7% of Australian Roman Catholic priests between 1950–2009 were accused of abusing children. All

major religious bodies have had cases of sexual abuse, generally not to the extent of the Roman Catholic Church, although that is little comfort. In any case, all the Christian bodies have suffered reputational damage because of what has occurred, and a secular media has exploited this moral failure to the full. There is evidence of decline in attendance in some churches due to the scandal which overrides recognition of the good that is done by the churches.

Internet problems

As congregations age, there are few younger people interested in filling the pews and participating in traditional forms of worship and church life. While there is a decline in participation in traditional forms of church, there is a growing interest in the use of the internet to advise oneself. Now and here, the internet has been and is still a source in being a big distraction and challenge to the growth of congregations and the church. An example of this, is the vast and varied information provided about spirituality and spirituality revolution. The term 'spirituality', however, is difficult to define and the exploration of spirituality plays out in many forms in popular culture. Where the Christian Church used to be the primary reference point about matters of the spirit, there are now many reference points for spiritual exploration. The church appears to play an insignificant role; Christianity, however, has a rich spirituality tradition and provides a lens through which people can articulate God's encounter with them and their encounter with God. Without a frame of reference, there is no context for spirituality. It can become whatever people want it to be. Clearly the church is challenged, with its rich heritage and resources, to participate in the dialogue about spirituality.

This in and of itself has presented a major obstacle for the church itself, as with less of the younger generation participating, the demise and end of generations encountering church nears. Our youth have found themselves researching, teaching and ministering to themselves on matters they are not experts on, and encouraged by the internet. Through the internet, our youth are privy to secular ideologies veiled with false premise. The idea that our children can delve into the world wide web and find missing information regarding spirituality while discarding where, how and by whom the spirit is given to us by, is blasphemous. This leads our younger generation to believe the church is no longer relevant for themselves, and is more likely going to drive them and any future offspring away from receiving salvation from our Lord. The spirituality practice raises the belief that

all power, peace and might rests solely within oneself; if only one can achieve it. This intention in turn is very harmful to the preaching of the Word as it allows the minds of the youth to believe they are their own saviour, their hearts to turn away from God almighty and their souls and spirits to be far from redemption.

However, spirituality is not the only detracting information provided to our younger generation through the internet. The ever-growing shift to a digital world has made it easier for all of us, especially our teens, to access anything and everything at the end of their fingertips. We no longer need to go into the library, consult with a neighbour or search through databases for in-depth information; it is all available to us at the touch of a button. Of course, the internet is great for seeking further understanding and differing perspectives to broaden faith, but it also a tool for sinful intent.

One of our biggest problems is free access to worldly advice and instructions far from faith. Pornography, secular teachings and diverting entertainment are only some of the dominating content provided. Pornography, to begin with, is one of the biggest distractions our youth face today. It is almost impossible to not encounter a webpage without lustful ads presented in your search. Such blatant and obvious exposure to sexual stimuli to such young people who are still learning to not be creatures of the flesh is detrimental. It allows our children to become desensitized to not only our instructions, but to God's command to abstain and not partake in adultery. Our children are misled into believing it is a normal occurrence to watch and become exposed to sins of the flesh. Further, the internet has become a place for cynics and disbelievers to run amuck with their uninformed opinions and incorrect teachings, blaspheming against our Father, freely stating that faith is not only a waste of time, but that it is for nothing. With such a large majority able to continually provide negative and false content with most of the population in agreement, it becomes easier to influence naïve minds. If our children are not firm and strong in their faith, or even just simply constantly exposed to misleading secular beliefs, it can spark the downfall of our children into questioning their faith, and in turn, give up their faith.

II: CONFRONTING PROBLEMS

Biblical teaching

First and foremost, we need to ensure adequate Biblical teaching. Our congregations need to be well instructed. Expository preaching is normal among us and that is good. However, we must not neglect adequate and relevant

application of God's word to life in the 21st century, nor in stressing faith neglect repentance. Preaching styles may need to be reviewed so that we may capture the minds and hearts of the congregation without changing the substance of the contents of worship. Further, we need to provide systematic teaching as well. This is where our Confession and Faith and Catechisms have a very important role. At my church in Melbourne we include these in what might otherwise be called a Children's Address. We have gone through the Shorter Catechism, the Confession of Faith and are currently half-way through the Larger Catechism. Obviously, this segment of the service is at a fairly basic level but with everyone repeating the answer and given a brief explanation, exposure to the great truths of the faith occurs. It needs to be supplemented in other ways, but its value in anchoring the people is important.

Family worship/relationships

Just as important is a healthy family life including time for family worship which can include opportunity to discuss questions the younger ones may have. Pastors need to be alert to the needs of families and give guidance on helpful Christian literature. It is difficult in migrant communities as the children are thinking in English at school and parents can be holding on to the ways and language of the country from which they have come. This contributes to the alienation between the generations. It is a challenging issue in my own congregation and your prayers are valued as a means through which God helps us.

The internet, however, is and will remain a prominent tool in not only our children's lives, but our own. One cannot simply ban internet use or remove all computers, that would only become counter-productive. Parental block is a great tool which allows parents to choose which content their kids can view, as well as blocking all ads and web page content that disagrees with our Christian beliefs. Nonetheless, parental ad block is simply not enough. If we do not warn our children about all the malicious material available through the wide web, their curiosity could simply get the better of them when they are not under our watchful eyes or away from home. Emphasis on the high call of Christ on our lives is important. Educating our children to know the consequences of viewing such vile activities online, will not only allow them to be better informed in their decisions, it will further warn them against wishing to partake in the sins of the flesh and to better discern what is, and isn't right to view or believe when they come across opposing opinions and acts. Even more so, teaching our children the difference between Christian faith and practice and what is commonly

called 'spirituality' is important: that one stems from man's need to fulfil their ego and pride and the other a gift from the Holy Spirit, allows for a lesser chance of them being persuaded.

Encouraging involvement

As already mentioned, the decline in many churches is mostly among the young people who are engaged in sport which then becomes their prime principle of life. This suggests weakness in spiritual teaching and a lack of appreciation of the importance of the organised church. More attention to this aspect of God's Word is needed. We also need to encourage ministry involvement. Many members become less frequent attendees especially among the young adults, because they are not encouraged to recognise that they have a ministry role as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12).

Participation is attached to preparation so we must become intentional about building relationships. Too often, our insecurity leads to micro-management expressed in such terms as, "if I want something done right, I have to do it myself." This can overburden ministers at the same as members' gifts are under-utilised. But under the overall wise care of the elders opportunity needs to be given to church members. The saints need to be equipped for their work of ministry (Eph 4:11).

Small Groups


Emphasis on small groups may be one of the most neglected areas of our church life. Groups of all kinds, including home groups, youth and young adult groups. Such groups are perhaps one of the greatest influences for commitment to the local church. The importance of groups should begin with the pastor and all the other key leaders in the church. There should be a clearly defined process or strategic plan for multiple groups so that they contribute to building up the body of Christ. As well as the midweek study and prayer meeting common in our churches, a Pastoral Care group of suitably qualified women members can assist in mentoring the young and visiting lady members who are on their own. Another group can visit in nursing homes or be involved in community help. There are many avenues of service. A church organised along these lines glorifies God and already conveys to children the importance of the Church as a community of Christians serving the Lord, where they too have a valued place.

The difficulty of mid-week meetings in our cities, given long working hours, may also suggest a better use of the Lord's Day for spiritual fellowship. The unique calling of believers

needs to be clearly evident so that the claims of Jesus are seen as indeed more precious and valuable than sport.

We must always have heart for individuals, because each person is precious and unique in the sight of God and needs to be given a role in the church appropriate to their gifts before they wander off. In our cities especially, the church needs to follow the movement of the people to newer suburbs and regions and not the people follow the church, otherwise, declining numbers will continue to be a reality in our own congregations if only because of distance.

The need is extremely demanding for the ministers, elders and deacons. Office-bearers need to take time to reassess priorities and to work together as a team. Sessions

(consistories) need to plan together sharing the same vision on how efforts at church revitalisation and growth will be carried out. We need to focus on the vision, mission, values and shared teachings of the church. That means what we do must be God-centred, holding to the whole counsel of God but being much in the main things. We can too readily be preoccupied with our own status and putting others down. This should not be, must not be. Rather, we need to acknowledge our failures, and open our minds fully to the work of the Lord. Proverbs 16:9 reminds us: "The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps." But we cannot use God's sovereignty as an excuse for failure in faithful obedience to the Gospel. 

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PCEA SYNOD 2018


Synod 2018 (of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia) was held at Taree 1-3 May and commenced with worship conducted by the retiring moderator, Rev. Dennis Muldoon of Mt Druitt. Rev. Tut Wan Yoa, of All Nations PCEA, Mulgrave was the new Moderator and delivered an appreciated address (found elsewhere in this issue of Lux Mundi).

Most business was relatively routine. Law and Advisory always seems to have something given the increasing civil legislation affecting churches. Synod already requires mandatory reporting to police of sexual abuse and has in place protections for interviewing children and vulnerable adults. A Policy and Code of Conduct was adopted as an Interim Act and will be further considered in Presbyteries in the coming year.

Training of Ministry also had attention. Our only student Duncan Hickey has done very well indeed in his MDiv studies but the issue of practical and pastoral preparation for him and future students received significant attention with both the Committee and the Central Presbytery having important responsibilities.

Two retirements were announced. Mr Alex H. Steel has been Treasurer of Synod since 1991, and has been meticulous in discharge of his duties. He was warmly thanked for his work. He retires on 30 June and Rev. Peter Smith replaces him. Rev Trevor Leggott who was ordained in

Melbourne in March 1989 and served at Narre Warren and Armidale, joined Aborigines Inland Mission (now Australian Indigenous Ministries) in November 1986 and has been supported by Synod ever since. Trevor has done a marvelous job and is the ideal example of multi-cultural engagement as the report elsewhere in this issue shows. We hope for a further report on AIM's future in the next issue.

Inter Church Relations was a highlight this year. Rev Jack Sawyer from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA was with us, a most encouraging presence he was too. We were sorry that Rev David Torlach of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Brisbane had to leave before his opportunity to speak arrived. We should have picked this up, but we were delighted at this first visit from our EPC brothers. Rev David Lachman from the Southern Presbyterian Church in Hobart was a new face and it was a pleasure to meet him. Rev Graeme Hart from the Reformed Presbyterian Church gave a detailed update of their work in Victoria and much encouraged us to pray for increase in our congregations. Last but not least was a return visit from Mr Graeme Mitchell representing the Presbyterian Reformed Church with seven congregations, mainly in NSW. The evident desire for greater unity among the smaller Presbyterian bodies was encouraging. 

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FCS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018

Following is an overview of the Free Church of Scotland General Assembly held in May 2018.

Board of Trustees

In the Board of Trustees' report to the General Assembly, it was conveyed that there had been an increase in congregational remittances and other donations over the 2017 period with an overall 'positive net movement in funds'.

The Board wished to 'record its gratitude to those who gave generously to the work of the Church and commended congregations that have worked hard to meet the remittance requirements.'

In response to the financial report, The General Assembly 'acknowledged with humility and thanksgiving the provision made by the Lord for the work of the Church.'

Appreciation was also given for those who 'gave in a regular, responsible and liberal manner' and for the legacies received over the last year.

The Board expressed their pleasure that earlier this year a Communications Oversight Group was established to research the fundamental communication needs of the Church and how it presents itself to the wider public. It is hoped that from the review and research carried out a new strategy will be implemented.

The Board was also delighted to have recently started a partnership with the online book retailer, 10oftthose.com, and open a new store in this way. The new store will allow people to browse and purchase a range of affordable titles including some favourites from Free Church authors.

A new Free Church Book Club will also run in conjunction with the store, which will provide reviews and recommendation from members across the Church.

Recognition and appreciation were given to Miriam Montgomery, who had taken the lead to establish the new online facility and continues to administer the store.

Psalmody & Praise Committee

This past year the Psalmody and Praise Committee focused efforts on their digital presence online through social media as well as the introduction of new iOS and Android apps.

The Committee was approached by Christian Hymns, a hymnody app, and the Evangelical Movement of Wales to incorporate the text and tunes from Sing Psalms. Successfully launched in August of last year, the Committee said they were grateful for this new partnership.

A standalone Sing Psalms app was also launched in December of last year providing people with a single resource that includes the words and melodies in one place. Both the Sing Psalms and Christian Hymns UK apps can be downloaded from the iOS and Android app stores.

In October last year, the Committee held a Praise Workshop in Dundee. The workshop focused on singing technique, accompaniment, precenting and harmony. They observed, 'It is always good when people get together across the Church to sing praise.'

It is hoped that various digital resources will also be made available at a future date, including a tune parts app, PDFs of tunes and a manual for precentors.

Mission Board Report

In his introduction to the Mission Board Report to the General Assembly, Mission Board Chairman Rev. Dr Bob Akroyd said, 'The task before us is immense. Our resources are limited. Those opposing us are many. Our time is short. At key junctures, the church has been given passionate enthusiasts. If ever a time was needed for renewed passion, vigour and enthusiasm in the Church and among her leaders that time is now.'

In 2017 the General Assembly approved the Mission Board's strategy document, which outlined a positive practical vision for the future of the Church. As part of this, the process has begun to plant thirty new congregations by 2030.

Currently, there are eight church



plants around the country under the oversight of the Board: Govan G51, Stirling, Cornerstone, Esk Valley, Charleston, Christ Church Glasgow and Haddington Community Church. These plants are showing positive signs of growth and momentum within the communities they serve.

The Board expressed its desire to see church plants eventually become self-sufficient and grow into healthy congregations. This year's General Assembly granted two previous church plants, formerly described as Church Extensions, with the status of a fully sanctioned charge. The Board said they were 'tremendously encouraged by the spiritual, numerical and financial developments' with the Dunfermline and St Andrews Free Church congregations.

As part of the continued deliverance of the Mission Board's strategy, a decision was made to review how best to communicate the vision and aims to the Church and beyond. Working alongside an external company called Monumentum, a new visual and verbal identity was created called 'Generation'. A recognition was made that this was a new concept but 'the board feels that this will be a powerful tool to help the denomination fulfil some of its aims within mission.'

The Mission Board undertakes and supports both domestic and overseas ministry activities. Part of the latter takes place in Dumisani Theological Institute, a seminary in South Africa's Eastern Cape. In 2017 various parts of the campus infrastructure were successfully renewed and refurbished, allowing the institute to provide student and visiting lecturer accommodation.

The General Assembly acknowledged and thanked the Mission Board for their continued work, as well as the 'members and adherents of the Church who (support the church) by their prayerful interest, financial contributions and ongoing interest in the sharing of the Gospel throughout the land and overseas.'

Ecumenical Relations Committee

The Ecumenical Relations Committee, now independent of the Mission Board, has aimed to pursue more active relationships with churches in the UK over the past year.

In the report, Convener Rev. David Meredith said, 'There is a fragrance that comes from the "precious oil" which anoints the process of international efforts at maintaining unity.'

Inter-church contacts have developed through fostering relationships with denominations across the globe including churches in Ireland, Australia, India, South Africa, Sudan and North America. The Committee was pleased to

send Rev. Iver Martin as a delegate to several American General Assemblies last year, where he was warmly welcomed and thanked for the Church's renewed contact.

Over the last year, the Committee has continued to build



St. Andrews FCS, Edinburgh

relationships with other Christian organisations such as Affinity, the International Conference of Reformed Churches, the World Reformed Fellowship and the Evangelical Alliance. They thanked these organisations for their continued partnership and look forward to working with them in the future.

Edinburgh Theological Seminary Report

The Edinburgh Theological Seminary (ETS) Board were pleased to report that the Seminary 'has continued with its work of faithfully instructing students in the truth of the Scriptures in a relevant manner.'

The Board is currently developing a Mission Centre, located within ETS, in order to 'to meet [the] current needs of the Church in its mission within Scotland.' It is hoped that a wide range of people will benefit from the centre, including local congregations, outgoing pastors and missionaries, current ministers and postgraduate missiological programmes. The General Assembly commended ETS for the progress made so far and encouraged the Board to build on what has been achieved.

In February of this year, ETS welcomed Dr Alistair Wilson to the position of full-time lecturer in Mission Studies and New Testament. Since then he has undertaken many tasks, including the development of short courses for the Mission Centre in partnership with Prof. John Angus MacLeod.

Dr Wilson has also taken over as Director of Postgraduate Studies from Dr McIntosh, who has retired from the position. The Board expressed their 'appreciation of the expertise he brought to the Seminary in the area of Scottish Church History.'

The Board recorded their great 'appreciation of the work of Principal Rev. Iver Martin in his running of the Seminary and in his many efforts at home and abroad to increase awareness of the Seminary.'

Prof. John Angus MacLeod was also singled out by the ETS Board for his day-to-day running of the Seminary and its academic affairs.

In the report's closing, Mr Martin said, 'We are grateful for our accountability and inseparable connection with the Free Church; and in turn, the support and encouragement which the Free Church continues to give, denominationally and congregationally. I would be more than happy to speak about the work of ETS in any Free Church congregation, big or small.'

Board of Ministry Report

In their report to the General Assembly, The Board of Ministry made special mention of those students who had graduated this year: 'The Board congratulates all those who have recently completed their theological studies and obtained licence to enter the ministry. We pray God's blessing on all those about to begin in ministry as well as those who are preparing for future ministry.'

The Board was pleased to report the admission of two new ministers to the Free Church of Scotland from other denominations: Rev. Roger Crooks (formerly Presbyterian Church of Ireland) and Rev. Jonathan de Groot (formerly Church of Scotland).

Applications have been welcomed from those wishing to take part in a Ministry Apprenticeship Programme and postgraduate studies. The Board said they can 'advise individuals and congregations interested in organising an apprenticeship and can also point to other sources of funding'.

Applications have been made available on the Free Church

website.

Lord High Commissioner


His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry, who was appointed as Her Majesty's Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, was invited to address the Assembly by Moderator Rev. Angus MacRae.



Glasgow City FCS

In his address, he thanked the Assembly on behalf of HM The Queen for their continued work and commitment. It was his pleasure to assure Her Majesty of the Free Church of Scotland's 'loyalty and affection'.

The Moderator then presented His Grace with several gifts from the Assembly and asked His Grace to pass on the Church's prayer support.

The Lord High Commissioner first addressed the General Assembly in 1925. The position has a role within proceedings due to the symbolic connection between the secular and sacred through the Free Church's adherence to the Establishment Principle. 

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FRCNA: SYNODS IN REVIEW

Author: Rev. John Procee

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You may wonder: “What does 1618 have to do with our recent 2018 Synod?” And why is this article titled: “Synods in Review”, in the plural? Four hundred years ago this year, the historic Synod of Dort met in Dordrecht, the Netherlands. Some of our church documents and practices today trace back to this Synod and its decisions, most notably our Canons of Dort, our Church Order, and an established principle of preaching through the scriptural doctrines contained in the Heidelberg Catechism. I'd like to use this article reviewing our recent Synod to also provide some interesting information and comparisons to that Synod which took place 400 years ago. You'll be surprised at some of the similarities!

Calling, Convening, & Openings

The congregations take turns by alphabetical order of location in being the “calling church” that is responsible for receiving all the agenda items and calling the synod meeting to gather. Synod 2018 was called by the St. Thomas consistory. Did you know that Synod 1618 was called by the Dutch government? In those days, the State had far more jurisdiction over the Church and had power to convene Synods. The authorities attended the Synod with a cohort of 20 officials representing the various Dutch provinces, complete with their own executive. The government also paid all the expenses for the Synod! Today the churches pay for the travel, lodging, and food costs.

On Monday evening, June 4, 2018, the pre-synodical prayer service was held in the Maranatha Free Reformed Church of Hamilton. Rev. John Procee (Bornholm FRC) led the first part of the service, including the prayer for Synod and then Rev. Pieter van der Hoek (Burgessville HRC) preached on Zechariah 4:6, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.” He noted the mountains of impossibility we may face in our lives and ministries. He then brought out that our strength does not lie in numbers and having the right people, nor in our own abilities, but in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is given based on the finished work of Jesus Christ and is indispensable for us to do the Lord's work the Lord's way.

After the prayer service, the delegates met to elect by ballot the following executive of Synod: Rev. J. Koopman as Chairman, Rev. D. Kranendonk as Vice-chair, Rev. J. Overduin as 1st Clerk, and Rev. J. Schoeman as 2nd Clerk (the executive of Synod 1618 consisted of 5 men). Elder Ray

Pennings also served Synod as Assistant to the Clerks, taking minutes of each session, and Mr. John Wilbrink continued to serve as Treasurer of Synod. We are thankful for the contributions of these men.

The remaining sessions of Synod 2018 were held at a historic location, as it was the first time an FRC Synod was held in a non-FRC church: the Jordan HRC. We are thankful to their local congregation for the hospitality shown.

Synod was again held concurrently with the HRC Synod, which met in a separate room. Each day was opened in a joint session, with memorable devotions led by Dr. Michael Barrett on Tuesday morning, Dr. David Murray on Wednesday morning, and Rev. J. Wullschleger on Thursday morning.

Delegates

Again this year at Synod, mention was made of the time-sacrifice our delegates make to spend a week at Synod. Some delegates spend precious vacation time, others are away from their young families, and still others cannot be on hand for their businesses. The sacrifices our delegates make are much appreciated. Synod 1618, however, was a different story. It lasted 29 weeks and some had to travel long distances by boat, horse, or walking. As with our Synod, some delegates were relieved by others, but usually after many weeks of meetings! On the other hand, the Dutch government did pay them a daily allowance while they were present at synod.

With that length of time, you can well imagine that many delegates fell ill in 1618-1619, including the English Puritan, Joseph Hall. More than this, at least two delegates passed away during Synod 1618! Can you imagine our Synod having to adjourn, not once, but twice, to follow a delegate's funeral procession? While one Synod 2018 delegate was hospitalized to undergo a successful emergency surgery, thankfully none were taken out of this life. The Lord be praised for His protection and provision, also during our delegates' many combined miles of air and ground travel!

It was noted multiple times that delegates need to speak up while addressing the body of Synod. Soft speech keeps our delegates and advisors from hearing clearly. The importance of this is reinforced by what is written of one delegate at the Synod of Dort: “The decision of Lubbertus will unfortunately always remain unknown to us: he spoke so softly, that practically nobody could understand him.”

Thankfully, today we have microphones. Synod 1618 had foreign delegates from various countries, including Germany, Switzerland, England, and Italy. Synod 2018 saw fraternal delegates from Scotland (Rev. G. Beers from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)), the Netherlands (Rev. J.W. Wullschleger from the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken), and Rev. M. Kelderman and Elder C. Les from the Heritage Reformed Congregations. We were privileged to hear addresses from our fraternal delegates, who brought cordial greetings on behalf of their respective federations.

While speaking of other denominations, Synod accepted our Interchurch Relations Committee's recommendation that we re-establish a limited contact relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The purpose of this relationship is to explore what we have in common and where we differ. Profitable discussions with their delegates at NAPARC and the ICRC have led to this decision.

Peaceful Meetings

We may be very thankful for the peace and harmony present at our Synod gatherings, Synod 2018 being no exception. The Lord has given us brotherly love and unity. Synod 1618, by contrast, was not always so peaceful. In fact, turmoil and tensions, both in church and society, were the reason the Synod of Dort was called in the first place. Certain Arminian ministers disagreed with the doctrines of grace (reprobation, among others) and the Heidelberg Catechism. That led to some fiery and hurtful exchanges on the Synod floor, before the chairman, with the backing of the Dutch State authorities, threw them out of the Synod. Many were later tried and imprisoned.

Professor and Students

Back to 2018. The Chairman interviewed Dr. David Murray in

light of our Theological Education Committee's recommendation that Synod request a congregation to call him as a full-time Free Reformed Professor of Theology. When he became Free Reformed, he was installed as a (part-time) Free Reformed pastor of the Grand Rapids congregation some years ago. Since being full-time professor and part-time pastor proved to be too demanding, he requested some months ago to be released of his pastoral duties. That meant he needed a new call to ministry, namely, serving the churches in training students for ministry. The interview with him at Synod 2018 was refreshing to hear, and Synod instructed the Grand Rapids consistory to officially call Dr. Murray to this work. Synod conducted candidacy examinations with two ministerial students, student Young Jae Lee and student Kenneth Hutton. After each preached a sermon to delegates (and a class from Heritage Jordan Christian School and a class from Rehoboth Christian School, Copetown) and underwent a lengthy set of interviews, both brothers were accepted and declared candidate. Rev. Kranendonk read 2 Corinthians 5:18-22, encouraging them that Christ as King calls, commissions, and entrusts the greatest message of reconciliation to ambassadors, through whom He is pleased to speak and work. Brother Lee is now callable, but brother Hutton still has an internship and some coursework to complete before being eligible for call (hopefully before the end of this year). Three of our students received license to (continue to) speak an edifying word in the churches: Student Mark Wagenaar, Student Ben Van Liere, and Student Benjamin Hicks. If Synod 1618 had to make such decisions concerning students and candidates, it would have had to meet a lot longer since there were hundreds of theological students connected to the Dutch Reformed



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Church of the time. That is why they decided that student preaching permission be determined by the classis.

Synod also accepted two new students for the ministry: Mr. Chris Mourik and Mr. Geoff Otten. Brother Mourik (age 27) is a deacon in the Monarch congregation and works as a Corrections Officer in a correctional centre. He and his wife, Connie, have received two boys and one girl. Brother Otten (age 31) is an elder in the Oxford County congregation and has a concrete business. He and his wife, Gerjanne, have received three boys. We wish these brothers God's blessings as they move to Grand Rapids this summer to begin their studies in the fall.

Psalter

Reports were considered from both the Inter-denominational Psalter Revision Committee (Blue Psalter revision) and the making progress.

The back of our Psalter was also in focus this Synod, with a report from the Confessions and Liturgical Forms Revision Committee. Synod gave permission for a revised "Form for the Installation of Elders and Deacons" to be used on a one-year provisional basis with the understanding that the Committee receive feedback and present a modified version to Synod 2019. In 1618, the Synod of Dort also dealt with "the back of the Psalter", namely, the various forms as well as the confessions. Most of the forms we still have were adopted by the Synod of Dort, showing they are classic expressions of what we believe and have stood the test of time. By the way, when the Synod of Dort adopted the Heidelberg Catechism, the authorities considered this matter so important to public peace, they moved the Synod from its standard meeting room to the nearby large church so that the public, young and old, could be present (at this point I am reminded of the school students from Heritage Christian School and Rehoboth Christian School in Copetown that joined our Synod for some hours, which was nice to see). The first clerk at Dort then read the entire Heidelberg Catechism aloud, so all could hear it! Let us pray that our authorities would come to such convictions, also through the work of organizations like ARPA, which set up an information / publication table at our Synod to interact with delegates regarding their work and mission.

Growing Sense of Unity with the HRC

Unity with the HRC has been a growing topic at Synod year over year. This is evident in the fact that not only do we hold opening devotions and meals together, but also several joint synodical sessions. In one such session, Dr. Adriaan Neele gave a presentation on the strategic vision for Puritan

Reformed Theological Seminary. Another session discussed the HRC-FRC unity Committee Report, which generated open and healthy discussions concerning differences and potential challenges.

Among other things, it was agreed that local churches need time for unity to grow organically. Synod encouraged increased interaction and combined events among the grassroots of our two denominations. The HRC-FRC unity Committee will continue its work and report to Synod 2019.

Missions and Outreach

The Foreign Mission Committee reported that Nico Kattenberg and his family are preparing to return to Canada mid-2019. We pray the Lord to bless them as they continue to serve the churches, education, and other projects in Guatemala and guide them as they make plans to return to Canadian life. It was also encouraging to hear that the Achi Bible translation will be ready for printing and release within a year, DV. What a difference compared to the time of Dort, when the Synod commissioned a large translation of the Bible into their own language (the Dutch State Bible). Today, we have the privilege of being involved in the translation of the Bible into other languages. What a testimony this is of the Lord's growing gospel work. May the Lord richly bless the Achi people through this monumental work, fulfilling His promise that His word "shall not return unto [Him] void" (Isa. 55:11). Let us, in turn, value our Bibles more every day!


The Banner of Truth Radio Broadcast is seeing some changes in this coming year. While radio broadcasting in the Philippines and Africa has been part of this ministry for many years, the committee recommendation to shift the focus to North American stations which have a Free Reformed Church in their listening area was approved by Synod. The ministry will also have a dedicated website complete with a podcast and archive to better facilitate interaction with listeners. May the Lord's blessing rest on the ongoing, valued work of our radio pastor, Rev. J. Schoeman.

Youth and Education is effectively reaching out to our youth, with thousands of downloads and webpage hits on their new plantsandpillars.net.

Combined Consistories & Perspective

As usual, reports were heard from the three combined consistories. These reports deal with the heart of church life as they give an overview of the condition of the local churches. Notes of joy and concern were expressed. Our churches are made up of sinners, and struggles exist in every

church. Let us be humble and realistic about ourselves, as the apostle says, that no man “think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly...” (Rom. 12:3). We need to be kept by the Lord in so many ways. One such way was highlighted in the pastoral letter that Synod distributed with the News Release, dealing with concerns about church attendance at the second service. Let us hear the apostle's word: “...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). But neither let us grow discouraged when we see these things. We tend to look into the past with rose-coloured glasses on. Think of the days of Dort: who wouldn't wish them back! Be careful what you wish for. Many congregations came to that Synod with

similar reports of not only absentees at Sunday worship, but many places having no second worship service at all and reports of farmers tilling their fields on Sunday afternoon! Instead of wistfully looking back at the past, we should expectantly look up to the God of the past, who is also the God of today and of the future. He has done great things in 1618, in 1834, and in many other times. He can do great things also today, for our denomination, for our congregations, for our families and His international Church. May we seek Him and His grace, to labour in His church by His strength, for it is “not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts” (Zech. 4:6). 

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HRC SYNOD 2018

Unity with the FRCNA was a top priority at the Heritage Reformed Churches Synod. According to Clerk Bartel Elshout, delegates discussed a possible merger in the future and adopted the following statement:

While we have different histories with each producing its own ethos, and while we certainly have our weaknesses which need ongoing reformation, we believe there are many reasons why we as denominations should unite. Our Lord prayed for the unity of His people in John 17:21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. In an effort to manifest that unity that we have in Christ with all believers, we are committing ourselves to attempting to forge organizational unity.

New Hope Reformed Fellowship Church in Dorr, MI, was accepted into the federation on a two-year provisional basis, under supervision of the HRC consistory in Grand Rapids. It is understood that the small congregation of about 20 members will fully integrate the Psalter into worship services during this provisional time frame.

Synod adopted the Nashville Statement on Biblical sexuality to guide members on challenges in today's culture. The name of the Advisory Committee on Cybersex and Biblical

Divorce Synod was changed to the Committee on Biblical Sexuality.

Although the HRC did not adopt the FRC marriage form for alternative use, it suggested that the FRC participate with it in a committee to “review and enhance” the current form. The revision could then be presented to a concurrent synod in 2020. Should the FRC decline to participate, the HRC will pursue the matter with the following committee members: Revs. Elshout, Klaver and Paul Greendyk.

Several matters of business pertained to Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, which functions under the full oversight of the HRC Synod. Synod adopted strategic goals for the Seminary and accepted the ministerial credentials of Dr. Adriaan Neele, director of the new PhD program. Synod also rejoiced as some of the federation's own young men become students at the Seminary after a five-year stint when none began studies.

“After not having admitted any students for ministerial training, five men were accepted to begin their training at PRTS in September,” Pastor Elshout said. “Though we did not admit any HRC students during this five-year period, we annually admit students from a variety of denominations from the world-wide church community.”



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Synod determined that the Lord's Supper can be administered only within the public worship context, but not to persons confined to a private setting.

The churches were reminded to set up retirement accounts for their pastors and provide matching contributions of 3 percent of his annual gross salary.

The Domestic Outreach Committee was directed to change wording in its handbook to removed language about financial support being "diminished based on an expectation of eventual financial independence."


Synod granted emeritus status to Dr. Arthur Miskin, a missionary in South Africa, who recently was diagnosed with cancer and underwent successful surgery.

Officers for the HRC Synod were Rev. D. Lipsy, Chairman; Rev. J. Neels, Vice Chairman; Rev. B. Elshout, Clerk; and Elder M. Fintelman, Treasurer. Recording Clerk Rev. D. Overbeek is responsible for preparing minutes for the Synod Clerk, while Standing Clerk Jim Beeke prepares and distributes the Synod agenda. Rev. Bartel Elshout is slated to serve as next year's Chairman with Rev. J. Neels as alternate.

In addition to joint worship services and times of fellowship, a report from the FRC-HRC Unity Committee was discussed

in a joint session. The official FRC news release described this as "a frank, helpful, and loving conversation." As the two denominations experience a growing sense of unity, the FRC-HRC Unity Committee will continue to meet. In addition, an Ad-hoc Church Order Committee will begin examining the possibility of producing a combined Church Order. Plans are underway for the two federations to meet concurrently again from June 3-6 in 2019.

The HRC website lists ten churches, located in Florida, Michigan, Arkansas, Iowa, New Jersey, and Wisconsin of the United States as well as in Ontario and British Columbia of Canada. According to the FRCNA website, its 21 churches are found in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario of Canada as well as in Michigan and New Jersey of the United States.

Pastor Elshout noted, "Though the HRC and FRC are rather small federations, we continue to be amazed how God has positioned us, and continues to open doors, to minister to the world-wide church." 

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RCUS SYNOD 2018: TWO REPORTS AND MORE STUDY

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Delegates for this year's Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) met from May 21-24, 2018, at Redeemer Reformed Church, which has the picturesque address of Lilac Drive in Golden Valley, MN.

In contrast, the drive home for Rev. Robert and Polly Grossman became grim when another vehicle struck and totaled their van. Rev. Maynard and Marsha Koerner providentially arrived on the scene just five minutes later. The Koerners waited three hours for the Grossmans to be released from the emergency room with only minor injuries. They then drove the Grossmans to their daughter's home in Sioux Falls.

"Amazingly, no broken bones," says Rev. Grossman. "But it was the Lord Himself who kept us from far greater injuries by controlling the finest details of the encounter."

New Ministers

The 272nd meeting of Synod welcomed four new ministers.

Rev. Chris Campbell, a son of the Northland Reformed Church in Kansas City, has been serving that congregation as his first charge following his recent graduation from Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Rev. Chris Moulton formerly ministered to a Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly congregation in Sheboygan, WI, and underwent a colloquium doctum in April. South Central Classis has called him to pastor a new mission work in Denver, under the supervision of Trinity Covenant Reformed Church in Colorado Springs.

Covenant East Classis has called Rev. Chuck Muether to be a church planter in Oskaloosa, IA, under the supervision of Covenant Reformed Church in Gettysburg, PA. Rev. Muether, a former URCNA elder, most recently pastored Hope Presbyterian Reformed Church, an OPC church plant in Pella. He teaches occasionally at Heidelberg Theological Seminary in Sioux Falls, SD, and serves as its Director of Advancement.

Rev. Ruben Zartman, a recent graduate of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, serves Ebenezer Reformed Church in Shafter, CA. He works primarily as pastor for the English-speaking congregation, but also assists Rev. Valentin Alpuche with the church's Spanish-speaking ministry. At a later point during Synod, it was noted that Rev. Alpuche has translated the Three Forms of Unity into Spanish.

Constitutional

The Judicial Committee presented a report explaining Article 35 of the RCUS Constitution, which covers the process of receiving ministers from other denominations, although the Committee did not recommend any changes to the Article. The process would normally include two examinations, the first to establish credibility as a candidate, and the second after he had received a provisional call from a church. The first step may be dispensed in rare cases, such as that of a retired minister or someone who desired to affiliate with the RCUS but did not have a specific church in view.

Cremation

Synod 2017 had given the Special Committee to Study the Implications of Cremation another year to complete its work. But when the report came before this year's Synod, delegates expressed opinions for and against it. Some felt it conveyed a less than pastoral tone. Others felt it failed to adequately support its findings.

"Essentially, I didn't think the committee made the case that cremation was forbidden," Rev. Matt Powell says. "If we are going to tell people that something is absolutely forbidden, then we have a high burden of proof, and I don't think the paper met that."

After much discussion on the floor, Synod changed the composition of the Committee, primarily by adding new members, and gave the Committee an additional year. In the meantime, consistories are asked to provide feedback on this issue to the Committee. Current members are: Revs. Joe Vuisch, Kevin Carroll, Kyle Sorensen, Michael McGee, and Tim Marinelli; as well as elders Ken Hanko, Loren Huber, Matt Fickbohm, and Gary Maasen.

Rev. Kyle Sorensen explains that the Committee spent a few years researching and formulating a "detailed report, outlining the historical, biblical, theological, and pastoral implications of cremation." He believes that because no other Reformed or Presbyterian—or even Protestant—church has presented a position on this issue in the last century, and because other federations have expressed an interest in the Committee's final report, the RCUS wants more time to digest the committee's research before taking a denominational stance.

He says, “The Reformed church world needs a clear voice on this new practice in our culture, [and] the RCUS wants to be clear and certain that our trailblazing efforts are thorough and correct and useful to the body of Christ outside our denomination.”

Women voting

The issue of whether or not women should be permitted to vote in congregational meetings had long plagued the RCUS. Rather than being a case of congregations capitulating to modern cultural pressure, allowing women to vote has been the practice of some churches for many years. Position papers approved in more recent years, however, affirm only male heads of households may vote. While most churches seem to allow only men the vote, efforts to incorporate the male-only position into the RCUS Constitution have failed so far. The denomination remains divided over this issue.

An overture last year asked: “Is voting by a woman in a congregational meeting a violation of 1 Timothy 2:11-12?” In response, Synod 2017 established a committee to study a slightly different question: “Is voting in the church an exercise of authority according to the Scriptures?” This year’s Synod recommitted the study paper to the Committee and changed the question to: “Does a Christian woman (single or married) exercise authority over a man when she votes?”

Getting to the final form of the question this year took some time. The debate included multiple substitutes and motions, some of which were defeated, and a challenge to a ruling by the chair, which was upheld.

Synod almost entirely reconstituted the committee. Current members are: Kevin Carroll, James Grossman, Jerry DeYoung, Jay Fluck, Randy Klynsma, Eric Bristley, and Joe Gross.

Home Missions

Synod 2017 had appointed a special committee to Clarify the Authority of the Home Missions Committee. Synod 2018 adopted that committee’s recommendation to add a paragraph to the Home Missions Manual, which designates limits of the role of the Home Missions Committee. The paragraph reads:

“The authority of the Synodical Home Missions Committee is for the purpose of providing to the Synod recommendations regarding the viability of a mission work and the appropriate levels of funding. The committee may also provide programs which will seek to assist and

encourage missionaries in the prosecution of missions. Such programs are to be recommended to the Synod for approval.”

The RCUS provides funding for mission works in Golden Valley, MN; Dickinson, ND; Los Angeles, Shafter, and Stockton, CA; Casper, WY; and Omaha, NE; as well as the new works beginning in Denver, CO, and Oskaloosa, IA.

Ecumenical


Synod 2018 voted to terminate the fraternal relationship of the RCUS with the Reformed Church in the Netherlands (Liberated) due to their permitting the ordination of women to the offices of the church.

Complaint

Delegates deliberated on a complaint against a decision of Western Classis. The individual bringing the complaint was not present at Synod, but special care was taken that he be represented fairly and adequately and that the matter was handled in accordance with the RCUS Constitution. Synod upheld the action of Classis.

Leadership

Because Rev. Kyle Sorensen is retiring from serving as editor of the Reformed Herald, Synod appointed Rev. George Horner to that position. Treasurer Randy Schroeder was re-elected. Synod officers were: Rev. Frank Walker (President), Rev. Travis Grassmid (Vice President), and Rev. David Fagrey (Clerk).

In his presidential report, Rev. Walker noted that RCUS ministry reflects Martin Luther’s statement: “We study; we pray; we suffer.” 

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OPC GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018

After the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA) was formed on October 1, 1996, members of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, especially senior saints, sympathized with the new federation's courageous stand for the straight teaching of the Bible.

The Christian Reformed Church of North America (CRCNA) had determined to ordain women to the offices of minister and ruling elder and could not be persuaded to repent. Because this change affected the biblical marks of the church, some CRCNA members believed that they had no choice but to depart, forming the URCNA. The senior saints of the OPC knew from their own experience in joining the OPC that this action meant leaving behind family members, and almost always church buildings and church saving accounts, too.

But, these older OPC members also knew firsthand the relationship that had existed between the OPC and the CRCNA. When the OPC was formed on June 11, 1936, the CRCNA was the first church to recognize it two days later. For decades, the OPC and CRCNA shared Christian education resources, ran summer camps together, and gladly recommended their members to seek out the other church when travelling or undergoing a job transfer. The two churches even engaged in ecumenical discussions on how they might become one. The basis of this fellowship was a shared commitment to a Bible-based, confessional Calvinism that did not shy away from acknowledging the sinfulness of humanity and the good news of Christ's death and resurrection.

It was with sadness, then, that the OPC witnessed the CRCNA's turn, but hearing of the URCNA's formation brought joy. Through its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations, the OPC at its Sixty-fourth (1997) General Assembly officially recognized the creation of the URCNA. The declaration expressed the OPC's thankfulness to God for the URCNA's love for the truth of God and the purity of the church of Jesus Christ, welcomed them to the family of Reformed churches, and promised to pray for the blessing of God on their ministry.

A Joint Meeting

Now, twenty-one years later, URCNA Synod Wheaton 2018 and the Eighty-fifth General Assembly of the OPC met on the

campus of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. Together, the URCNA delegates and OPC commissioners celebrated their joint labors on the newly produced Trinity Psalter Hymnal. The two ecclesiastical bodies furthered the bonds of unity with shared meal times, devotional periods, presentations on home and foreign missions and ecumenicity, and a closing worship service.

URCNA pastor Derrick Vander Meulen, co-editor of the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, welcomed everyone to the opening prayer service on Monday, June 11. He had the privilege of introducing the first psalm, Psalm 148A, "From Heaven O Praise the Lord," and the first hymn, "I Sing the Almighty Power of God," sung publicly from the new psalter hymnal. During the week, David and Susan Winslow helped distribute over six thousand volumes for those who had taken advantage of the pre-publication offer and saved shipping costs by picking up their orders at the assembly.



OPC Moderators

Later that night, the Eighty-fifth General Assembly convened. Out of the one hundred and thirty-nine commissioners that were enrolled, thirty were attending an assembly for the first time. Over half of the commissioners had been ordained for fewer than fifteen years. Three commissioners, ministers Thomas Tyson and George Cottenden and ruling elder Donald Jamieson (San Jose, California), were ordained in the decade of the 1960s.

John Van Meerbeke, pastor of Living Hope OPC in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was elected as moderator. He faced the challenge of allowing full deliberation on issues

without falling behind in the docket to the point where the work of the Assembly could not be completed.

At the end of the week, the commissioners gave Mr. Van Meerbeke a well-deserved standing ovation for his gracious but decisive voice in guiding the Assembly through its business.

Tuesday, June 12

The next morning, Michael Dengerink, pastor of Delta Oaks Presbyterian in Pittsburg, California, led the devotional service, which set the tone of shared thankfulness to the Lord that marked the meetings for the days to follow. Mr. Dengerink recalled growing up in the CRCNA. He said, “This was the church of my family and friends. This is the church of which I can still hear my grandma say, ‘If you get a job promotion in another town that does not have a CRC church and CRC school, it doesn’t matter how good the promotion is. You don’t take it.’ ” But, what sin destroys and divides, Christ heals and unites. He thanked the Lord for the “taste of heaven” that those present would experience during the week, “as we your people, by your grace, join in praise of your name and serve you in your church.”

The OPC commissioners then turned to the work of the advisory committees before hearing from Statistician Luke Brown. Mr. Brown reported that at the end of 2017 there were 281 local churches, 40 mission works, and 31,377 members in the OPC. The “average” size of an established congregation is 105 members, he stated, but approximately

65 percent of congregations are smaller in size than the average.

The Assembly and Synod gathered on Tuesday evening for a song service led by URCNA pastor Christopher Folkerts. Alan Strange, co-editor with Mr. Vander Meulen, officially presented the Trinity Psalter Hymnal, and the evening finished with URCNA members John Bouwers and Todd De Rooy and OPC members Jack Sawyer, Tony Curto, and Danny Olinger participating in a colloquium on the pursuit of unity in OPC and URCNA relations.

Wednesday, June 13

On Wednesday, the Assembly engaged in a daylong debate concerning the recommendation of the Committee on Christian Education that the Assembly elect a committee to propose specific linguistic changes to the doctrinal standards (Confession of Faith and Catechisms) without changing the doctrine or meaning of the standards.

The kind of changes that the committee would be authorized to consider would be morphological (e.g., “hath” to “has”), the replacing of archaic pronouns (e.g., “thou” to “you”) and words (e.g., “stews”), and substituting a modern translation of the Scriptures for the text of the Ten Commandments and the Lord’s Prayer. The recommendation ended with the admonition that the committee should aim with every change to preserve the cadence, memorability, and dignified style of the standards.

The Assembly passed the recommendation and elected to



Church Planters of the OPC

the committee ruling elders David Noe, James Gidley, John Muether, and Mark Bube, and ministers Alan Strange, Glen Clary, and John Fesko. The Assembly also moved to notify the member churches of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council and other appropriate church bodies that it has erected a special committee to propose linguistic updating of the doctrinal standards of the OPC and that it welcomes any input that such churches might desire to give.

During the report of the Committee on Home Missions and Church Extension (CHMCE), General Secretary John Shaw paid tribute to John Hilbelink, who was retiring from work on the committee but not from the ministry. Shaw said that Mr. Hilbelink would be deeply missed after having served on the CHMCE for thirty-three years, the past twenty-seven years as president. He assured Mr. Hilbelink that he and the members of CHMCE would “pray for the Lord’s continued blessings on you, your dear wife—Lois, your church in Rockford, and your continued service of Christ and his church.” The Assembly responded with a standing ovation in appreciation for Mr. Hilbelink.

The evening joint service continued the theme of home missions in the OPC and URCNA. Mika Edmondson, OP church planter at New Life City Fellowship in Grand Rapids, Michigan, stressed that his goal was to present “accessible orthodoxy” to a diverse group. He explained that at New Life City Fellowship, “our God in Christ has been able to bring together people of every tribe and nation, something government and politics could not do.” Every week after morning worship at New Life City Fellowship, everyone breaks bread together at a shared meal as coequals in Christ.

Bradney Lopez (Arroyo, Puerto Rico) told of a young father after Hurricane Maria coming to Iglesia Presbiteriana Sola Escritura (“Scripture Alone Presbyterian Church”) and asking, “How can I know about infant baptism?” After going through membership classes, the man and his wife professed faith in Christ and their daughter was baptized.

Jim Cassidy (South Austin, Texas) testified that robust, historic Reformed worship had led to Providence OPC being classified as “weird.” Christopher Cashen (Clarkston, Georgia) spoke about ministry to refugees in what is labeled “the Ellis Island of the South.”

Daniel Doleys (Springfield, Ohio) emphasized that church planting involves the entire congregation, not just the pastor. David Graves (Coeur d’Alene, Idaho) praised the Lord for the opportunities for an “odd duck” such as himself to

meet individuals in everyday life who were interested in learning more about Jesus. URCNA Missions director Richard Bout then prayed for these OP church planters and the gospel endeavors of OPC home missions.

URCNA church planters then shared their work in taking the gospel to diverse groups of people. Thabet Megaly spoke of Muslim outreach in St. Catharines, Ontario. Tony Zekveld reported on the joys of ministry to Sikhs and Hindus in Toronto, and Mitchell Persaud talked about bringing the gospel to Muslims and Hindus in Scarborough, Ontario. Sam Perez reported on inner city ministry in Jersey City, New Jersey. Nathan Brummel spoke about prison ministry through the Divine Hope Bible Seminary in Michigan City, Indiana, whose faculty includes OP minister Brett Mahlen. CHMCE Associate General Secretary Al Tricarico then prayed for the Lord’s blessing on Mr. Bout and URCNA domestic missions labors.

Thursday, June 14

Committee on Foreign Missions General Secretary Mark Bube had attended the start of the Assembly on Monday but had then flown to California for the burial of his father and former OP ruling elder Richard H. Bube, who had died on Saturday. The general secretary returned in time for the Thursday evening joint presentation on foreign missions. He expressed an enthusiasm for potential opportunities for the OPC and URCNA to work together in bringing the gospel to the nations.

In one of the most poignant moments of the joint meetings, Eric Tuininga, OP missionary to Mbale, Uganda, addressed the two churches, both of which he has known intimately. Prior to being appointed as an OP missionary in 2012, Mr. Tuininga had been ordained to the gospel ministry in the URCNA and served as pastor of Immanuel Reformed Church in Salem, Oregon. Mr. Tuininga reflected on the fact that his father, URCNA minister Calvin Tuininga, was present to hear his presentation while his sister and brother-in-law, Carla and Mark Van Essendelft, members of the URCNA, were serving as OP missionary associates at the Karamoja station in Uganda.

Thursday, however, also marked the bittersweet dissolution of the Presbytery of the Central United States. Representing the presbytery, James Stevenson, pastor of Providence OPC in Tulsa, Oklahoma, reported that the presbytery enjoyed wonderful fellowship, but by 2017 the number of congregations in the presbytery had dropped below the minimum of four required in the OPC Book of Church Order.

The Assembly transferred Faith OPC in Lincoln, Nebraska, to the Presbytery of the Midwest, and Westminster OPC in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and Providence OPC to the Presbytery of the Southwest. Mr. Stevenson urged the brethren to pray regularly that the Lord would raise up OP congregations in the central portion of the United States so that, in time, a new presbytery could be established.

In the report on the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, Administrator David Nakhla focused on the disaster response efforts in 2017 in Houston, Texas, and Puerto Rico. Mr. Nakhla expressed thanksgiving for the \$620,000 that had been donated to hurricane relief in Houston and Puerto Rico. "The Lord always proves faithful in supplying sufficiently for all needs through the generous giving of his people," he said. Earlier on Tuesday, Steve Larson, the regional disaster response coordinator after Hurricane Harvey, and Bradney Lopez on behalf of members living in Puerto Rico who were affected by Hurricane Maria, had thanked the Assembly for showing compassion and helping many who had suffered greatly.

Lendall Smith, chairman of the less-than-one-year-old Committee on Ministerial Care (CMC) and its vice-president, Gregory De Jong, ruling elder at Bethel OPC in Wheaton, Illinois, introduced David Haney as the new director of CMC.

In appointing Mr. Haney as director, the committee saw a unique opportunity to combine professional counsel with a personal touch. Mr. Haney, in his role as Director of Finance and Planned Giving, has worked in one way or another with nearly every pastor and/or congregation for over a quarter of a century. Mr. Haney explained the committee's three-pronged goal: managing the OPC retirement fund (306 participants), providing counsel and assistance in financial planning, and informing sessions and presbyteries of tools available for care of their ministers. In assuming his new responsibilities, Mr. Haney is hopeful of visiting every presbytery in the next eighteen months in order to share CMC's vision of expanding care of pastors throughout their ministry, not just as they near retirement.

The Synod and Assembly gathered for a group photo on the steps of the Edman Memorial Chapel. The sheer number of 350 delegates, commissioners, and fraternal representatives challenged the photographers, but there was also evident joy in how the Lord had worked in bringing the members of these two sister churches to such close fellowship.

Friday, June 15

On Friday at 4:00 p.m., the Assembly and Synod combined one last time for a closing joint worship service led by Larry Westerveld, moderator of the Eighty-fourth (2017) General Assembly. Mr. Westerveld proclaimed God's Word from Amos 9 and John 4, encouraging those gathered from the OPC and URCNA that, through Jesus Christ, there will be an abundant harvest.

It was an appropriate message for two churches who have taken stands for biblical orthodoxy and suffered earthly consequences. Cornelius Van Til was a son of the CRCNA who joined the OPC at its beginning. Responding to a man who had asked Van Til what he should do now that his church had embraced the tenets of theological liberalism, Van Til wrote, "I hope that you and a group of faithful people will seek admission to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a separate congregation. I do not know of any other Presbyterian body in which you would have such loyalty to the Reformed Faith." Van Til then added, "I need not boast to say this. The O.P. church has plenty of faults. We are all petty human beings with plenty of sins to fight against daily. But I do think that you would find the fellowship you want and need for your work."

Van Til was writing as an Orthodox Presbyterian to a Presbyterian who had asked for his opinion, but, in this writer's judgment, his sentiments today could be applied to the United Reformed Churches of North America. For those Reformed believers who find themselves in denominations that are straying openly from the Bible, the URCNA, like the OPC, is a church that should be sought out. It knows its faults and sins but is self-consciously seeking to be loyal to the Reformed faith. In it, Christians can find the fellowship they want and need for their work.

May we in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church continue to pray for and work with these dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, even as we look forward to that great day in heaven when we will join together to sing God's praise eternally. ✱

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URCNA SYNOD 2018

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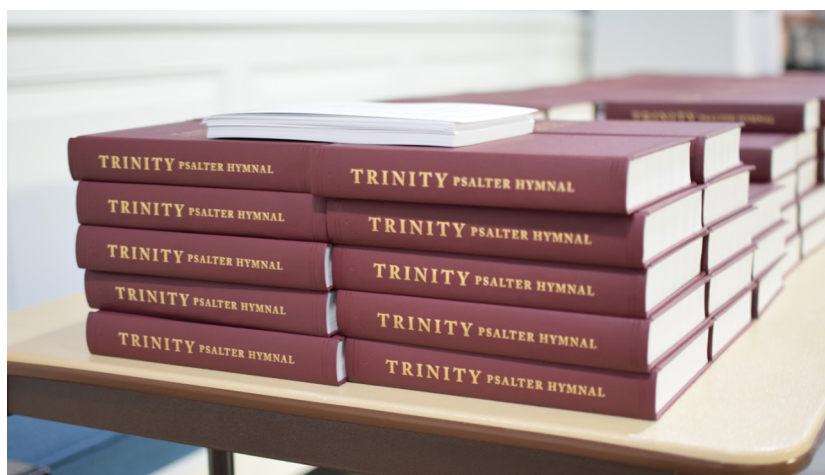
Opening

The opening prayer service for the concurrent meetings of the URCNA Synod and OPC General Assembly set the tone for the week. Rev. John Vermeer spoke about the privilege of being living stones, called to win people to the Christ, praise God for His Grace, and live honorably before each other and the world. It was, indeed, a privilege to participate in the historic meetings, which surpassed ecclesiastical unity to encompass corporate praise and Christian fellowship.

The concurrent meetings took place from June 11-15, 2018, at Wheaton College near Chicago, IL. The initial prayer service was held at 4:00 pm on Monday. When it became apparent that the URCNA Synod would finish ahead of schedule, closing worship was moved from 7:00 pm to 4:00 pm on Friday. Synod concluded shortly before that, at 3:00 pm, while the GA returned to work after dinner break and finished at 8:30 pm.

The highlight of combined worship was singing from the newly-released Trinity Psalter Hymnal. The blended, predominately-male, voices at ecclesiastical assemblies are always stirring, but the excellent acoustics of Edman Chapel and the beautiful songs made this year's singing especially moving. Joint evening sessions focused on the new songbook, ecclesiastical relationship between the two federations, home missions, and foreign missions.

Women from both the OPC and URCNA enjoyed fellowship at a tea time on Tuesday afternoon. Author Glenda Faye Mathes opened with devotions. Organizers Diane Smith and Becky Beezhold provided introductions and led games.



Missions

While a deep love for missions was evident, delegates spent the most time debating issues related to this subject. After a great deal of debate and very close votes, Synod decided to set aside an extra hour on Friday afternoon for open discussion. The most energetically-debated matter was a proposal from the Missions Committee regarding the relationships between URCNA consistories and international students.

Some delegates found the document negative, even offensive, and wondered if the Committee had exceeded their mandate. A few mentioned the lack of communication between the Committee and interested parties such as consistories, seminaries, and missionaries. Members of the Committee spoke about how problems on the mission field could be handled better by local consistories. Mission Coordinator Richard Bout pointed out repeatedly that if one man can "sell" his idea to a consistory in the US, his church on the foreign field becomes a mission work of the URCNA. Synod sent the proposal back to the Committee to better clarify the proper way to encourage foreign nationals studying in North America.

Synod approved augmenting the membership of the Missions Committee by classical appointment of additional representatives, with preference for one elder and one minister from each classis. The expanded Committee is tasked with investigating the current OPC and the older CRC missionary endeavor models, including financial aspects, and making specific recommendations to Synod.

An overture to hire a Domestic Missions Coordinator was not adopted, although the vote was close. Synod re-appointed Rev. Bout as the Missions Coordinator and thanked him for his work.

Marriage

Several overtures called for the adoption of a statement affirming marriage and the gospel testimony, and Synod complied by adopting without dissent sixteen "Affirmations Regarding Marriage" as a doctrinal affirmation.

Membership

Synod approved changes to the Church Order that reflect the previous Synod's pastoral advice

regarding members who leave a congregation. Church Order changes require ratification by a majority of consistories, who have until the end of the year to do that.

Statistician

Synod appointed Mrs. Jody Luth as the federation's new statistician. She will collect, compile, and publish information for the annual directory.

Appeals

Synod approved procedures for handling appeals and established a standing Synodical Appeals Committee, which will include one representative from each classis. Synod added Guidelines for Appeals to the Church Order. Delegates also heard and adjudicated an appeal.

Ecumenical

The URCNA entered into Ecumenical Contact (Phase 1) with the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church and Ecumenical Fellowship (Phase 2) with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW). Consistories must vote on ratifying the Phase 2 decision before the end of the year.

The URC joined other federations such as the OPC and RCUS in discontinuing its relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) due to its opening church offices to women.

The Committee for Ecumenical Contact with Churches Abroad (CECCA) is to report to Synod next year regarding

how the URCNA might provide necessary support to foreign churches within federal relationships.

Synod directed CECCA to study how the URCNA might support needy churches abroad with whom we have ecumenical contact (Phase 1) or fellowship (Phase 2) and to report. CECCA was encouraged to consult the Missions Committee, sister denominations, and other appropriate organizations.

Other

The Psalter Hymnal Committee established 21 years ago was dismissed with hearty thanks for its excellent work. The Trinity Psalter Hymnal Joint Venture Board will work with the OPC on digital and mobile app versions. Synod designated \$20,000 for this work and another \$10,000 for electronic versions of liturgical documents. A few members will remain on the Liturgical Committee to complete this work.

Suggested "askings" per family were approved at \$46.93 (CAN) & \$34.14 (USA) for 2019 and \$48.25 (CAN) & \$35.11 (USA) for 2020. Rev. Ralph Pontier was re-appointed as Stated Clerk, with Rev. Greg Lubbers appointed as alternate.

Rev. Bradd Nymeyer chaired Synod, Rev. John Bouwers served as Vice-Chair, Rev. Doug Barnes as First Clerk, and Rev. Talman Wagenmaker as Second Clerk. A suggested rotation for hosting Synod was adopted, and Wellandport URC in Ontario was appointed to convene Synod 2020. 