



Lux Mundi

40:2-3 September 2021

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



In this Issue
Overviews of various broadest assemblies

Magazine published by the
International Conference of
Reformed Churches



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Assemblies

Many bonds of churches have seen their activities impacted by COVID-19 and government regulations. Last Lux Mundi attention was paid to the impact on the activities of the local church, especially where worship is concerned. Regarding the situation in British Columbia, Canada, I can report that the churches are now being treated far more fairly.

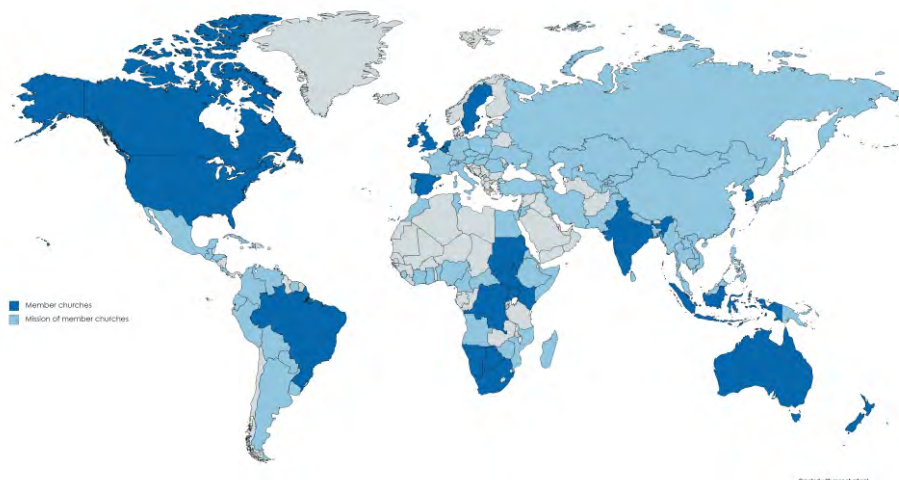
Another area that has been impacted is that of broadest assemblies. It has not been just the ICRC that was postponed. Most ICRC member churches saw their broadest assemblies postponed in 2020.

Many however, did manage to meet in a general assembly or synod this past year. And so you have before you a Lux Mundi that consists primarily of overviews of these broadest assemblies. "Handy to have it all in one place," so we've been told as editors.

We'll begin in the east where the New Zealanders had to make do with a brief synod via video conference that dealt with urgent business. This synod was adjourned to reconvene, the Lord willing, in February of 2022. We then head west to the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia,

and further west to the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa. Their meeting formats were a hybrid of in-person and video conference, also with a view to foreign delegates. We then cross the equator to The Netherlands where the general synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) met. As readers may be aware, this bond of churches has seen its membership in the ICRC suspended. Lux Mundi is republishing a letter many sister churches and contact churches received from the RCN(I), and providing links to official documents outlining recent decisions of the General Synod Goes 2020.

Finally we head further west again for reviews of the General Assemblies or Synods of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, and the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church. All this is preceded by a summary of a sermon by Rev. George Ball on a church assembly reported on in Scripture, the Council of Jerusalem as described in Acts 15. Enjoy the read and be blessed during what remain very difficult times.



Nations where ICRC member churches and their mission projects are located



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).

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When Conflict Enters the Church

Paul and Barnabas had just returned to Antioch after completing their first missionary journey. They reported everything the Lord had done through them, how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). They saw many converts, including many Gentiles.

But they also experienced opposition. For example, Paul was stoned in Lystra, dragged out of town, and left for dead. Soon after they returned to Antioch, they were tested, in Calvin's words, by 'a domestic war.' (15:1) Conflict and tension entered the church.

Which is worse: being attacked in the world by unbelievers, or facing conflict and strife in the church? Neither is desirable. But I think it can be proven that internal strife can do more damage to the church than persecution.

When there's conflict in the church it discourages members, it drains energy, it diverts from the real work of the church, and it gives the world opportunity to criticise.

As we gather for Synod, there is the potential for a 'domestic war.' We need the Lord's help and wisdom. We need humility, tolerance, patience, grace and love. We need the mind of Christ.

To direct us in our thoughts and behaviour, I want to look at Acts 15, to see how the early church tackled 'a domestic war.'

The Dispute that Arose (vs. 1-2)

Verse 1: Men came down from Judea, probably from the 'mother' church in Jerusalem, to the church in Antioch and disturbed its peace and unity by insisting, 'unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' They also insisted that Gentile Christians should submit to the whole jing bang of Jewish rituals and regulations (v. 5).

What was it that motivated them? Perhaps it was hearing about the success of Paul and Barnabas' first missionary journey (cf. 14:27). They were alarmed that floods of uncircumcised Gentile converts were filling the church. All they had cherished as sacred for hundreds of years (such as circumcision, kosher food, festivals, purity rituals, culture, etc.) were now threatened. The constituency and complexion of the church was fast changing, and they didn't like it one bit!

Verse 2a: Luke writes, 'Paul and Barnabas had no small

dissension and debate with them.' In other words, there was a fierce disagreement. They were outraged.

Paul and Barnabas recognised that the heart of the gospel, the purity of the faith, was at stake. The dispute struck at the root of how men and women, whether Jews or Gentiles, are saved and accepted by God. They also recognised that the unity of the church was jeopardised.

Calvin says of these Jewish believers, 'They snatched away the glory of salvation from Christ and were transferring it to works... They poured out darkness on the light of the Gospel... In short it would have been all over for Christianity in a short time if Paul had yielded.'

If they had succeeded, the gospel of grace would have been 'stuffed.' Kaput. 'Dead, buried and cremated.' A false gospel was being promoted. It was a Christ 'plus' gospel.

Verses 2b-5: The church at Antioch realised the magnitude of the problem and sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to settle the issue. The result is what we now call the Council of Jerusalem. The Council marked an important step in the organisation, development and government of the church.

Acts 15 has become a primary text for Presbyterianism. We see a basic Presbyterianism in practice.

Admittedly, no Synod or Council today can claim the presence and authority of apostles. Nonetheless, the Council is an expression that a problem in one part of the church is a concern for the whole church, and that 'two are better than one.'

John Owen observed that the churches, 'did of old, and ought still, to meet... for advice, consultation and consent.'

The Westminster Confession of Faith in 31:1 states the purpose of a Synod: 'For the better government and further edification of the church there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called synods or councils.' We should keep this in mind. Synods should be a time of rich fellowship, encouragement and edification. This hasn't always been our experience!

The Debate that Ensued (vs. 6-18)

Verses 6-7a: There was much lively debate. What's new when church leaders gather! No doubt a variety of views were expressed.

When all was said and done the 'leadership' stood up to speak.

Verses 7b-11: Peter was first. He reminded the Council that 10 years earlier, God had sent him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in Cornelius' house. They were marvellously converted, and God gave them the Holy Spirit. (v. 8) This was a clear indication that God 'made no distinction between us and them.' (v. 9) Therefore, if God didn't insist on circumcision, neither should we, nor should we 'put God to the test.' (v. 10) He concluded by stating, 'We believe that we are all saved the same way by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus.' (v. 11) That's wonderfully just as true today. We are saved by faith alone, in Christ alone, and this is the basis of Christian fellowship. We should see ourselves, and our brothers in this light, as sinners saved by grace.

Verse 12a: There was silence! Surely evidence that 'the Spirit of God reigned in that assembly.'

Verse 12b: Barnabas and Paul spoke briefly. They endorsed Peter's statement. 'They aim at showing that their ministry among the Gentiles was approved by God.' (Calvin)

By the way, I think Peter's speech must have thrilled Paul. Remember, they had a dispute earlier in Antioch (recorded in Galatians 2:11-14). Peter took a backward step when he withdrew fellowship from Gentile believers when the 'James gang' arrived from Jerusalem.

Paul had to rebuke Peter publicly because he was clearly in the wrong. How did Peter respond? It's never easy to receive a rebuke, even when it's deserved. We can be seething with anger and resentment and tempted to hold a grudge.

Clearly, Peter had recovered from his lapse. He had the humility and the grace to admit he was wrong. We need to pray for the kind of humility that will readily acknowledge our faults and sins when they're exposed.

Verses 13-18: James appears to be the Moderator.

He was considered to be on the conservative wing of the church. For that reason, his speech may have surprised some. He agreed with Peter and Barnabas and Paul. He appealed to Scripture by referring to Amos 9:11-12 and the prophets. Amos looked forward to the time when God would rebuild and restore the tent of David, which would involve the ingathering of the Gentiles. That time, according to James, had now arrived. (v. 16-17)

The Decision Taken (vs. 19-21)

Verse 19: All agreed there should be no artificial barriers put in the way of Gentile believers. God requires faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation. All who believe in Christ are part of the household of faith, the family of God. All God's children who have been reconciled through the sacrifice of the

Saviour, have equal freedom into the Father's presence.

If we are brothers, we must live like brothers. We're not competitors or rivals. We all stand on the same level at the foot of the Cross. How then can we pray, 'Lord, I want my will to be done'?

Verse 20: Now that agreement was reached on the major issue, James, an essentially practical man, turned his attention to the nuts and bolts of fellowship. He knew this decision was a difficult pill for Jewish believers to swallow. He therefore appealed to the Gentile Christians to show sensitivity and understanding and avoid anything that would cause unnecessary offence to their Jewish brothers. His proposals were designed to ease tensions and enable fellowship around the Lord's Table.

'He extracts nothing from them, which they do not owe to brotherly concord.' (Calvin)

'We may say then that the Jerusalem Council secured a double victory - a victory of truth in confirming the gospel of grace; and a victory of love in preserving the fellowship by sensitive concessions to Jewish scruples.' (John Stott)

The Deputation Sent (vs. 22-35)

A formal letter was drafted and sent with Judas (a Jew) and Silas (a Gentile) to inform the church at Antioch of their decision. (v. 22) It was brief, clear and courteous.

Verses 30-31: The church at Antioch could have taken umbrage at the recommendations. They could have said, 'We're not giving up our freedom just for them. We're not changing. They need to change. They just need to read their Bible and grow up!'

Instead, 'they rejoiced over its encouragement.' (v. 31) We can hear them say, 'We know how difficult it is for you Jews to have fellowship with us uncircumcised Gentiles. We will do everything to avoid causing offence. Though we have the right to eat whatever we like, we will gladly give it up for the sake of Christian fellowship.'

I want to conclude by proposing two resolutions:

'This Synod resolves that we are confirmed in, and committed to, the doctrines of grace.' I am grateful to belong to a church where the virtues of Christ and the doctrines of grace are preached every week in every church.

'This Synod resolves by God's grace to achieve the victory of love and thus preserve precious Christian fellowship, while recognising and respecting conscientious differences among brethren.'

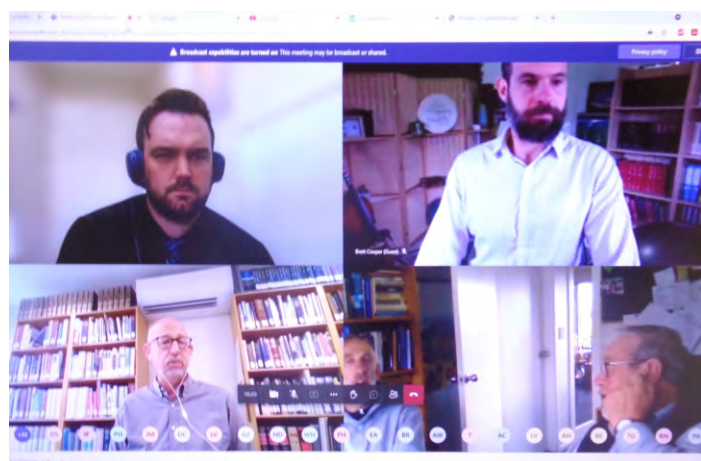
Griffith Thomas advises that when differences arise in the church: 'They should be faced frankly. They should be

discussed fully. They should be decided amicably. Decisions should be accepted heartily.'
And God's people say, 'Amen.'

Source Acknowledgement: This is a summary of the Synod 2021 Incoming Moderator's Sermon, based on Acts 15:1-21. Republished with permission from *The Presbyterian Banner* June 2021.

When Online Is In Line; Synod 2021 of the RCNZ

Much as it was the last thing I would have personally looked towards, September 13th 2021 found myself and forty-one other delegates thrust into the maelstrom of the storm of ever turbulent change – otherwise known as an online Synod, or videoconferencing. Yes, I know, Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, Microsoft Teams and all the other digital ways of meeting up are old hat to us now with the ever present spectre of Covid-19. But managing it all in the way of a Synod with a wide range of age groups and IT abilities made this an extra challenge. You see, there is something about a face-to-face Synod. In that way it is not so much different than an actual worship service, and how much haven't we missed them of late? To not have it is to miss something – something very precious.



Getting meeting ready

Author: Rev. Sjirk Bajema

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This was not meant to replace a face-to-face meeting, however, but to deal with business that is simple and regular. Anything that started to involve more discussion was held over to the physical meeting we hope to have in late February 2022, Lord willing. After two evenings the week before in which we first practiced using the Microsoft Teams software and then choosing the Moderamen, so they could lay down the framework for our online business, we then had two full days on Monday and Tuesday – the 13th & 14th September - going through that schedule. While being one of those who did not vote for going online, I have to say that it worked in well with how a Synod ought to be conducted. It also took one day less than originally envisaged.

Opening of Synod

The moderator pro tem, Rev Leo de Vos of Hukanui, welcomed the delegates. He noted parallels with this synod and the 1954 synod. Both had or have mid-meeting adjournments and high-tech aspects, with the former synod employing an electronic audio feed over which English translations were made available to the non-Dutch-speaking delegates. Despite these unusual circumstances he noted that God blessed that meeting and that we can be confident he will do so for us in 2021.

The Rev John Haverland opened our meeting with prayer. This was followed by the Rev Leo de Vos reading from 1 John 1:1-4 & 2:28-3:3. He then preached upon these verses, bringing out three aspects from them – What We Are, What We Shall Be, and What We Must Become. Following this the

Rev James Hyslop prayed, and then Elder Andy van Ameyde prayed specifically for this Synod meeting.

Business proper began with the credentials. Then there was the confirmation of the selected moderamen – Moderator: Rev Peter Kloosterman; vice-moderator: Rev Reinier Noppers; First Clerk: Elder John van Dyk; Second Clerk: Rev Albert Coperus. This was followed by agreement to the Confessional Standards.

The following appointments were made: Reporter for Daily Reports & Faith in Focus: Rev Sjirk Bajema; Message to the Queen: Rev James Hyslop; Appointments Committee: Rev's John Haverland, Paul Archbald, & Erik Stolte; Finance Budget Committee: Elders Raymond Posthuma & Davy Kerkhoven

Reflections

The Moderator reflected on some of the key events that have happened inbetween Synods. There has been the institution of Rangiora. There have been six new ministers ordained – Joshua Flinn (New Plymouth church plant); Graeme Zuidema (Pukekohe); David Stares (Masterton); Braam Jansen van Rensburg (Nelson); Nathaniel Rademaker (Whanganui); and James Hyslop (Buckland's Beach). There have been two ministers come from overseas – Sjirk Bajema (Oamaru) and Reinier Noppers (Bishopdale). The Rev Hans Vaatstra has become an emeritus minister but that doesn't mean he isn't still busy as he has become a short-term missionary to PNG. The Rev Ryan Sparks has returned to the United States. Two ministers were released from the ministry – Robert van Wichen and Michael Willemse. Presently we have one vicar in our denomination – Joshua Meinsma (Dovedale). In the past inter-synodical period a number have passed on to be with the Lord – Dr John Koolard, who has served our churches on a number of committees, and former ministers – Carl Reitsma, Bert Reurich, Jack Sawyer, Gary Milne, and Willem Pieters.

Reports & Overtures

In chronological order the following reports were dealt with online – Report 10: Synodical Archivist; Report 2: National Publications (this primarily dealt with Faith in Focus and the Website. Thanks were expressed to the Editor and sub-editor of the magazine, Br Walter Walraven and Sr Joanna Voschezang, and the webmaster, Br Seth Zorn. In addition the previous sub-editor, Sr Sally Davey, was warmly thanked for her many years of service to our magazine); Report 12: Ministers & Wives Conference; Report 3: Hymnal Committee (where we officially approved the Sing To The

Lord hymnbook); Report 6: Cadets & Gems (our boys and girls clubs); Report 7: Synodical Treasurer; Report 16: Reformed Theological College Treasurer;; Report 8: Church Order Committee (where we received the discussion paper “Some Considerations Relating To Receiving A Church into the RCNZ”); Report 11: Church Extension Committee; Report 9: Synodical Interim Committee; and Report 17: Stated Clerk (where we were encouraged by the work of our Br van Dyk in the digitalising of the 1953-1986 Acts of Synod).

Then there were also various Overtures – Overture 7, regarding the use of song recordings of the music in the STTL, was approved; Overture 3: Conversion Therapy, which resulted in a study committee to help inform our churches and advocate for us about this matter; Overture 6: Liturgical Raising of Hands (by Ministers), which didn't get enough hands up to see it sustained; and Overture 1: Church Visitation, which resulted in a study committee to look at our present church visitation questionnaire and process.

Leadership

The Rev. Peter Kloosterman is a very good Moderator and he chaired proceedings in a clear and helpful way, supported by his vice-moderator who took over at times, such as when one of Rev. Kloosterman's congregation passed away. The two Clerks were very efficient and helpful to us all.

In addition to the simple and regular business before us the



A synod seat with a difference

other big part of our time was taken up with what was ideal to our present situation – the consideration of our sister-church relationships and other types of ecumenical relationships. You might well wonder how this could be since there is currently very little international travel possible. But we could have delegates from the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia, and the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, address us online! In the present circumstances this was a good alternative and one that we should be able to use in future if it is appropriate.

It was good to hear from these delegates of the cooperative work being done with us, whether church training in Vanuatu by the van der Wel's (PRCA); theological instruction and support in Papua New Guinea (CanRC & FRCA), the RTC and diaconal work in India (CRCA), and building up the saints in Uganda (OPC).

Covid-19 has affected our sister-churches, and, in some cases, quite drastically. Not necessarily physically, although in some of them that is so, but especially spiritually as it has greatly affected the unity of a number of the churches within their respective federations. It was very sad to hear of how one congregation fell apart because of differences over this so that only a few families were left – and it all happened in a lockdown.

Support Crew

We were thankful for the Hukanui Sound Team who ensured a smooth and accessible communication and were always ready to help and train the fossils amongst us. Their work also meant many others could follow proceedings directly online. This augers well for the future – a future which we are increasingly finding could be a little different to what we anticipated. But to the Lord it is nothing unknown. He is the One who has planned it all and we can live with assurance that nothing is ever out of his hands. In fact, isn't it in the hands of his Son that we vividly see how far he went for his chosen and precious?

Conclusion

Our Moderator concluded by reading Mark 4:26-34 using these two parables to show how we are not to be involved in popularity seeking but in faithfully looking to the Lord in all we do. Who was it who had thousands fall away from him and be left with only 120? Like him – the Lord Jesus – we need to simply plant the seed and pray and work that it will sprout and grow. We become anxious because we fail to

trust. But the seed sprouts and grows even though the farmer knows not how.

And like mustard seeds we must be small but looking to God. God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise.

He then led us in closing prayer.

Following this the Moderator declared that the 31st Synod of the RCNZ was adjourned until late February 2022, D.V.

It was interesting seeing what else was happening behind and besides the delegates sitting in their chairs being involved in Synod online. While most chose to block their cameras a number opened up their homes to us, with wives and children making fleeting appearances in and out. A number of times the wives of delegates were seen picking up the bits and pieces in and around the desk and chair and also ensuring their other halves having the energy and substance to keep on the go. I wouldn't always recommend the snacks I saw as part of a balanced diet but there is certainly enough energy in them to keep them up with the play! And then there were those of the better halves that suggested what their spouse should say! It was all on camera! But how much wouldn't you quickly miss it if you weren't looking?

Source Acknowledgement: Republished with permission from *Faith in Focus*



The Reformed Church in Oamaru, New Zealand

PCEA Synod 2021

LM Editor's Note: The "PB Editor's notes" are notes from the editor of the Presbyterian Banner.

Synod 2021 Highlights

PB Editor's Note: The following are just a few of the highlights of Synod 2021. Quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the minutes, with the bracketed numbers beginning with '21' indicating where the matters appear in the minutes.

"Within the Raymond Terrace Church building of the Hunter Congregation, on Tuesday 4th May 2021, at 4.30pm, the Synod of Eastern Australia met. The Moderator Rev Robin Tso took the chair, and extended a welcome. Those gathered joined in praise, singing from Psalm 124 and the Moderator constituted the meeting leading in prayer." (21.1)

"The Clerk reported that the Rev George Ball had been appointed Moderator-elect. It was moved and seconded that this appointment be confirmed. The motion was carried and Mr Ball took the chair." (21.8)

"Synod thanks Rev Trevor Leggott for his services as Synod Clerk from the 1st September 2005 for the last 16 years, and acknowledges his retirement from that role to be effective on 1st September 2021." (21.10.7)

"Synod now appoints Rev David Kerridge to the position of Synod Clerk... from the 1st September 2021." (21.10.8)

Synod adopted a number of amendments to the existing Safe Church Policy and Code of Conduct. (21.18) These amendments can be found in Appendices 1 and 2 of the Law and Advisory Alternative Majority Report 2021 in the Standing Committee Reports.

Synod met by video with Mr. Zach Dotson, an American student for the ministry who visited with the Ulverstone congregation in March 2020. Southern Presbytery has approved continuing discussions for bringing Zach and his family to Australia, possibly to serve as residential supply with a religious worker visa. Synod "resolved to acknowledge the action taken by Southern Presbytery." (21.24)

It was noted in the Youth and Fellowship Committee report: "due to the pandemic the 2020/2021 Family

Camp scheduled to be held at YWAM Tahlee, NSW... was postponed and is now proposed to be held 28-31 December 2021 or in early January. It is hoped that the decision to move to Tahlee and reduced costs will encourage more people to attend. Tahlee is approximately 30-40 minutes from Newcastle airport, with direct flights from Melbourne, Brisbane and Sydney. Vehicle transport from the Hunter-Barrington congregation will be available."

"The Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) recognises in the Free Church of Scotland Continuing (FCC) a church whose doctrines and contendings are largely similar to its own." (21.34) Synod now has Mutual Eligibility with the FCC.

Regarding the PCEA website, it was resolved, "That the Synod commend the PCEA website to delegates and congregations and they be encouraged to participate in the life of the church online by active registration, collaboration and comment." (21.46.1)

"Synod gives thanks for the high level of enthusiasm for exclusive psalmody among many in our churches." (21.49.1)

"Synod instructs the psalmody committee to discuss whether a single common psalter is needed in our denomination, and to make recommendations on this matter to Synod 2022." (21.49.4)

"Tut Yoa shared the difficulty in providing Psalms for singing in the Nuer language. It was resolved that this matter be taken up by Southern Presbytery to provide constructive help." (21.49)



PCEA Synod 2021

It was resolved that a rather substantial bequest “received from the Estate of the late Margaret Isabel Hockett be applied to Synod General Funds.” (21.62.1) “A donation of \$10,000 be made from the Synod General to Annie Soper Christian School, Moyobamba, Peru.” (21.62.2)

“The Moderator called on the retiring Treasurer to come forward and expressed the thanks of Synod to Alex for his long service as Synod Treasurer.” (21.68)

“The Clerk reported that the Hunter congregation had offered to host the meeting of Synod again for 2022. It was resolved that Synod meet for the next ordinary meeting from 4.30pm on Tuesday 3rd May 2022 to 12.30pm on Friday 6th May 2022.” (21.67)

Synod 2021 Missions Evening

PB Editor's note: The following is an edited version of the minutes for the Synod 2021 Missions Evening, held on 5 May.

Samit of the Presbyterian Free Church of Central India joined in from India by video. He provided commentary on a series of slides which showed the desperate situation with Covid in India.

Nevertheless, the church is continuing to provide ministry through online ministry and service to the local community and the provision of groceries.

The PFCCL is engaged in discipleship programs, mission outreach, together with a focus on ministry to women, and church planting in new regions.

There are mission schools in two places, and they are running online classes during the Covid crisis. They have received government support for developing an English language school. They are providing facilities for a vaccination centre.

Samit asked for prayer support for the church, church planters, finances, community service, and for the poor children losing their schooling because of the pandemic.

Mariam, Shekinah, and their younger brother Zack also joined in by video conferencing from India. A video was shown about the circumstances in India and the work Mariam is engaged in at the Taleem Centre. She introduced her brother who shared about the critically desperate situation with the Covid virus.

Mariam then shared and thanked the PCEA for their ongoing support. She spoke of the challenges and opportunities of her ministry and the time taken in travel to and from the Taleem Centre. The centre had been closed until March because of the virus restrictions. Infection rates were low in

the local villages because of the isolation. A good farm is being rented for the provision of fresh food. She asked especially for prayer for India.

Shekinah shared short videos relating to her planned video ministry, and then spoke about her delayed plans to go to Thailand. At the moment, she is looking to work online from home and learn Thai. She shared about Project Video as a means of Bible teaching and ethnic outreach.

Bob Quinn spoke at the meeting in person, and shared about his work as a Pioneers Missionary seconded to work with AIM. Bob shared about Bimbadeen, a property at Cootamundra, once a government girl's school for Aboriginal children.

Children were taken from their families, schooled and trained as domestics from 1912 to 1972. From 1979 the Aboriginal Christian Fellowship began to train church leaders there. A group of Coota girls wanted to use the property for healing and smoking ceremonies. Bimbadeen offered it to this group, so they were left without a property. They developed a funding model to provide money for the college to empower, educate, equip and exhort Aboriginal leadership, and to fund ministry. This was to help Aboriginal people reach their own people with the Gospel.

Bob shared some of his personal family story relating to how Aboriginal people were treated years ago and why many had forsaken their heritage.

Mark and Rahel Landrum spoke in person about the ministry of International Mission to Jewish People (formerly Christian Witness to Israel). They showed a short personal video presentation about Gospel ministry to the Jews. Mark and Rahel spoke of their personal ministry and the Jewish view of Jesus.



Outgoing Moderator Rev. Robin Tso

Visitors from Other Churches at Synod 2021

PB Editor's note: Representatives from other churches brought greetings at various points throughout the synod meeting. The following is an edited version of the minutes outlining their talks.

Rev Bruce Bakensto of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America joined in by video. He asked for prayer for the meeting of their upcoming church Synod. He spoke of their seminary, and asked for prayer for those in leadership there. There are eleven vacancies in the church, together with a need for teaching and ruling elders in mission work.

The ministry works in China are progressing well, with a plan for a locally founded church. A mission work is opening up in Pakistan, and there is a work in India. A new work is being founded in Chile.

Bruce asked for prayer for the church in dealing with the difficulties of the pandemic. He spoke of the increasing pressure that immoral government regulations are having on the church.

Bruce hopes to visit Australia with his wife next year.

David Waldron of the Reformed Churches of New Zealand also spoke over video.

They are members of the ICRC and recognise this organisation as a means to meet and share with like-minded churches.

They have 23 congregations, with 19 ministers, three presbyteries and 3,300 members. Their Synod is to meet from 11th -17th September 2021.

Six men have been ordained in the last year. There are six students for the ministry with another three men looking to begin studies.

They are looking to develop their mission focus in Papua New Guinea and with an interest in work in Myanmar.

Rev Andy McCracken from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia attended synod in person. He spoke of a desire to revitalise and evaluate their work in Victoria.

There is a real need for strong and skilled labourers who can develop relationships with unbelievers, a desire to reach the lost, a willingness to bring people in, and a desire to bring in young people, and a need for prayer. They were wrestling with the issues of the function of officers as managers as opposed to deacons. They recognised the need for work on their Book of Church Discipline. They currently have two students for the ministry.

Rev David Lachman of the Southern Presbyterian Church also attended synod in person. David shared about the



Incoming Moderator Rev. George Ball and Clerk Rev. Trevor Leggott

difficulties of the pandemic. He noted the reference to the churches in Revelation and that the Lord will enable his people to overcome these things.

There is a strong desire to revitalise the work in Launceston, coupled with a desire to see men raised up to take on the ministry of the Word.

David shared that he had been blessed by the time of fellowship in our midst.

Synod watched a video greeting from Rev Iver Martin of the Free Church of Scotland and the Edinburgh Theological Seminary. He spoke on the trials of recent times, but also noted that there are new opportunities opening up.

They hope to plant 30 churches by 2030. They are encouraged by the quality of their students, believing that God is calling people into ministry and mission work.

Rev William Macleod joined synod by video, and brought greetings from the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). He noted some long term connections with folk in Australia.

They have 41 ministers, 14 of whom are retired, and 25 congregations. There is one congregation in Northern Ireland and five in North America. There are mission works in Spain and Southern France.

A college started in Zambia has been handed over to local trustees. There is support for an indigenous work in Sri Lanka.

They produce the magazine the Free Church Witness and a young people's magazine. There has been some decline in the church with the increase in secularism in Scotland, but the church presses on optimistically and faithfully looking for the Lord's blessing.

Source Acknowledgement: Republished with permission from *The Presbyterian Banner*, June 2021. For editions of *The Presbyterian Banner*, visit www.pcea.org.au (> downloads).

Press Release Synod Belhar of the FRCSA

Editor's note: the following Press Release has been edited with a view to Lux Mundi readership.

Opening and Constitution

Rev. G. Mnisi opened synod during the worship service in the church of the Free Reformed Church (FRC) of Bellville, which he led on Sunday April 11. Preaching on Colossians 4:14, he focused on prayer, and its significance during Synod.

On behalf of the convening church, the FRC of Belhar, Rev. P. Abrahams called the meeting to order on April 12. He then read 1 Thessalonians 1-10, followed by a meditation on these verses. The credentials were examined to ensure that all delegates had been legitimately delegated by their Classis.

Attendance

The following delegates were present from Classis North: Rev. P.G. Boon, Rev. H.H. van Alten; Rev. G.F. Mnisi, Br. G. Hagg, Br. F. Hagg and Br. G. R. Bouwmeester. Classis South had delegated: Rev. J. Brintjes, Rev. P. Abrahams, Br. J. Klaaste, Br. M. de Wit, Br. W. Bijker and Br. R. Snijder.

As officers were chosen: Chairman: Rev. J. Brintjes; Vice-chairman: Br. G. Hagg; Clerk: Br. R. Snijder.

Despite the travel restrictions due to Covid-19 we were grateful that delegates from our sister churches could attend several synod-sessions online and could also serve as advisors. Br. B. Veenendaal represented the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). Br. O. Bouwman and br. H. Schouten represented the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), while prof. J. van Vliet was representing the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). Rev. H. Venema and br. A. Pedro were delegated on behalf of the Reformed Churches Liberated in The Netherlands (RCN(I)). Rev. F.J. Bijzet was special advisor regarding the sister church relationship with the RCN(I). On behalf of the Reformed Churches in South Africa (RCSA) Rev. Coen Very did attend parts of synod.

Synod Regulations

In the past the FRCSA had adopted a process of ratification of synod decisions after synod to increase the involvement of the churches. Synod decided that in the future the Deputies shall send their reports, via the federational administrator (Ed.: similar to a stated clerk), to the churches for their comments six months before synod. The comments must be sent to the Deputies three months before synod.

Deputies can then submit their final reports, if necessary with supplements. Objections from the churches will still be discussed at synod. Synod rejected an overture from Classis North that all the churches should be represented at synod.

Other regulations have been adjusted to better streamline the functioning of synod. These regulations shall be published to give the churches better insight in how synods function.

Contact with Churches in South-Africa (DKKSA)

Until now the Deputies have maintained contact with four South-African churches. As far as the Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk in Afrika (NGKAfr) is concerned, the recent efforts for continued contact have failed. With regard to the Free Church of Southern Africa (FCSA), deputies have attended the General Assembly of the FCSA in King Williamstown, and have encouraged these churches to remain an active member of the ICRC. The FCSA has acknowledged that the lack of participation was the result of financial pressure. This shall be reported to the ICRC with the goal to receive support. Contact has also been made with the Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church of South-Africa (REACH). REACH is confronted with similar challenges as we are, like hermeneutics, women in office and new ideas about gender. Synod decided to continue the contacts with FCSA and REACH since they have committed themselves to sound Biblical obedience.

DKKSA has expressed its concern that the development towards unity with the RCSA on the national level is slowing down. In 2019 the RCSA and the FRCSA organized a conference on the topic of church federation, during which there was general agreement on most of the theological, confessional and church political principles. However, in practice it is sometimes hard to implement these principles in the RCSA.

Synod has adopted a proposal from the Deputies to encourage local churches to strengthen and expand their contacts with local RCSA congregations. Deputies should shift their focus to providing more support to local consistories, especially of the churches in not-Afrikaans-speaking communities. Although Deputies have already provided some guidelines, local circumstances can differ considerably and will require more leadership, for instance by means of draft agreements.

Contacts with Churches Abroad (DKBK) and membership of the ICRC

The FRCSA has a sister church relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) and the Reformed Churches Liberated in The Netherlands (RCN(I)), the last one with restrictions concerning rule #5 and #6 of the Rules for Contact with Sister Churches Abroad.

Synod expressed its thankfulness for the faithfulness of the CanRC, as well as their support of the FRCSA, in particular through prayer, communication in the sister church relationship, and their financial support for our students and the Reformational Study Centre. Mission Deputies SA (SDSA) have approached the CanRC for possible funding of mission work in South Africa. However, the Canadian government regulations make it next to impossible to fund activities in other countries, unless the Canadian donor remains fully in control of the expenses. A proposal was made to explore the possibility that the CanRC would fund the FRCSA Deputies for Theological Training and that the FRCA would designate their funding for the SDSA. Synod decided that a three-party discussion should be organized between the deputies of all three church federations. Synod also decided to continue the sister church relationship, to send a delegate to the CanRC general synod in Guelph in 2022, and to keep the FRCSA churches informed about developments within the CanRC.

Concerning the FRCA synod expressed its thankfulness for their commitment to sound doctrine, as well as their support in prayer and funding for the Theological Training in the FRCSA. FRCA delegates were questioned about the ICRC, to which the positive answer was given that this matter will be discussed at the FRCA synod of June 2021 in Albany. Synod decided to continue this sister church relationship and to send a recording of greetings to Synod Albany. Synod also decided that the DKBK should continue to be informed about ecclesiastical developments in the RCNZ and the Asian area of the Pacific Ocean, mainly via the FRCA and the ICRC.

Synod Shoshanguve-North 2017 of the FRCSA decided to maintain a limited [or: restricted] sister church relationship with the RCN(I), and to make a final decision in this matter at a later stage. Such a final decision would be based on either an affirmation or a withdrawal by Synod Goes 2020 of the decisions of Synod Meppel to admit women to all ecclesiastical offices and the proposed merger with the

Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK). Our synod discussed the affirmation of those two decisions by Synod Goes. In their original report the DKBK has presented two alternative proposals, one to end the sister church relationship and the other one to continue the relationship with the goal to assist those congregations and church members who are concerned about the synod decisions. After considering a report from Rev. F. Bijzet the Deputies, in a supplement to their report, have withdrawn the second alternative.

Synod confirmed that the decisions of Synod Goes have made the sister church relationship indefensible. However, some argued that no date has been set as to when the relationship would be discontinued and that we could go an extra mile. It was mentioned that those churches within the RCN(I) that had appealed the decisions of Synod Meppel may get the impression that the FRCSA abandons them when we break the sister church relationship at this time. The following decision was voted on and adopted by synod:

1. That with the decisions of Synod Goes 2020 about women in office and merger with the Netherlands Reformed Churches, the RCN(I) has deviated from the Word of God and has undermined its authority. These decisions of the RCN(I) synods give sufficient grounds to discontinue the sister church relationship (in line with Synod Shoshanguve-North 2017, art.44).
2. To continue the restricted sister church relationship in accordance with Synod Shoshanguve-North 2017, art.44.17, for the sake of the local churches and church members who have objections against the decisions of the Synods of Meppel and Goes.
3. That at Synod 2024 of the FRCSA a final decision shall be made, or – alternatively – the sister church relationship shall come to an end when the RCN(I) unites with the NGK, whichever comes first.
4. Although the rules for sister church relationships do not give room for this, to instruct the Deputies to take up contact with concerned congregations and church members who have objections against the decisions of RCN(I) synods, with the purpose to discuss the way forward.
5. To communicate with Deputies BBK of the RCN(I) about the mandate of the Deputies KBK of the FRCSA to take up contact with concerned congregations and church members.
6. To write a letter to all consistories of the FRCSA and

to inform the congregations about the nature and the grounds for this decision.

7. To instruct the DKBK to convey these synod decisions to our Canadian and Australian sister churches, as well as the ICRC.

With regard to De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), with thankfulness to the Lord Synod took note of the fact that these two church federations are now in an advanced stage of becoming one. (Ed.: the DGK and GKN both have their origins in the RCN(I)). Synod instructed Deputies to continue their contacts with these churches, and observed that after they have become one a sister church relationship can be considered. In case members of these church federations come to South Africa, consistories should only receive them as members or as guests at the Lord's Supper – if they would request this – after a satisfactory interview.

With regard to the RCNZ Synod gave Deputies the mandate to stay informed about developments in those churches by means of our sister churches (FRCA) and decided not to enter into direct ecclesiastical communion, because of our limited manpower.

The FRCSA is actively involved in the ICRC and Synod expressed appreciation for the manner in which this Conference guards the Reformed doctrine. The ICRC has asked the FRCSA to assist them in strengthening the churches in Africa and to encourage Reformed churches to join the ICRC. In this the Reformational Study Centre can play an important role. Synod decided that two FRCSA delegates shall focus on involvement with the ICRC, and to promote the ICRC among FRCSA congregations, for instance through the ICRC magazine *Lux Mundi*. Synod decided to send at least two delegates to the next ICRC conference in Windhoek, Namibia.

Bible translation, liturgical music, forms and prayers

The Deputies for Bible Translation had submitted two reports with opposite views of the African Bible Direct Translation ('Bybel Direkte Vertaling' or BDV) of 2020. One report proposed that Synod should decide first whether the Critical Text is acceptable as source text edition for translating the New Testament, since this was the one used for the BDV. If it is acceptable, then the BDV 2020 can be evaluated with regard to the reliability and purity of the Afrikaans translation. If not, there is no reason to evaluate the BDV. The second report proposed that only the Textus

Receptus or the Majority Text can be used as original text edition and that consequently the BDV must be rejected.

Synod discussed the differences between the various source text editions and was informed that the various source text editions agree for more than 98%. Our sister churches abroad, as well as CRTS, have accepted the Critical Text as source text and as basis for theological training. Synod also considered the fact that the BDV 2020 explains differences in translations in footnotes. Synod decided not to express a preference for any of the source text editions. With regard to the English Bible Translations Synod has accepted as permitted translations the English Standard Version (ESV) for official use in our churches, and the New International Version (NIV) especially in our mission churches. Synod gave the Deputies the mandate to continue with the evaluation of BDV 2020 and also to evaluate the need for translations in Sotho or other African languages, especially for use in the mission churches.

Regarding the liturgical forms and prayers Synod adopted the report of the Deputies, but new Deputies will receive the task to solicit more input from the congregations about the alternative Lord's Supper Form ('Viering van die Heilige Nagmaal 2') and report to the next synod. Deputies shall also review which forms have not yet been translated in Sotho, and consider reprinting the forms that are used in the RCSA, together with a translation of the forms that have not yet been published in the book with forms of the RCSA, which is in use in the mission churches.

Needy Churches (art.11)

Following a number of years in which there have been very few requests from needy churches, the number of requests for support is expected to grow. This is the result of newly-instituted churches, as well as an increase in the needs of existing churches. For that reason the Deputies have asked for an increase of the contributions from the churches. Deputies have warned for the danger that the church federation might develop into a federation of needy churches, that would continue to depend on foreign funding, and would not be sustainable. Mission churches that want to be instituted need to realize that it is expected of them to cover their own basic expenses.

Mission

With thankfulness Synod has taken note of the mission work the churches are involved in, the coordinating and supervising role of the Mission Deputies of SA, as well as the availability of funds for the coming years from the

RCN(I) (via ZAM/DVN). Under God's blessing several mission congregations in Tshwane and Cape Town are striving to be instituted within the next three years. Synod has discussed its concern about the Missio Dei approach, which apparently underlies the new ZAM/DVN vision of mission work. The classical Reformed vision of mission work is to proclaim the Gospel, lead unbelievers to conversion and plant churches. Funding projects of a more diaconal nature and providing actual help is the secondary goal. The ZAM/DVN mission is focused on proclaiming God's love in word and deed, and helping establish God's kingdom on earth, so that people of the world acknowledge God and will follow him. In short: to share the faith worldwide.

Synod took note also of the step-by-step reduction in the funding from ZAM/DVN. The Deputies have been instructed to continue their cooperation with ZAM/DVN according to the Agreement for Cooperation. The reduction in funding from ZAM/DVN makes it necessary to increase the funds coming from the FRCSA and to request support from the foreign sister churches. Delegates from the CanRC have indicated that opportunities for funding mission work outside of Canada are limited.

Theological Training

With thanks to the Lord, Deputies Theological Training reported that currently seven students are registered for theological training. Two of those are enrolled at CRTS (Hamilton, Canada) for the MDiv degree. Five students are busy at different levels for a BA degree in languages at South-African institutions. Deputies have recommended one single training trajectory, consisting of a BA degree in languages and MDiv degree at CRTS. The annual program of studies shall as a rule consist of eight months academic courses in Hamilton and three months Practical Pastoral Training in South Africa. Deputies have also proposed additional supporting courses where necessary to help students reach the required academic level for admission to theological studies. The interests of the churches should carry more weight than those of the students. For that reason the theological training must be firmly based on solid theological studies, which is then applied contextually.

Training at South-African institutions should preferably take place close to the student's home church, to make sure that students do not estrange from their congregation. Prof. J. van Vliet, as advisor from CRTS, indicated that the



An aerial view of the Reformatioal Study Centre

MDiv training should preferably take place by attending classes in Hamilton, but that CRTS is in the process of developing an alternative compound (hybrid) training model, that will consist of a combination of in-class, online and practical training. Students will then be supervised in South Africa by their own minister and, if necessary, by an arranged mentor, and at CRTS by mentors that have been appointed by the seminary. Synod expressed the wish not to consider CRTS as the exclusive possibility for training, but to research also alternative options, like the newly-planned independent 'Gereformeerde Teologiese Akademie' [Reformed Theological Academy].

Liturgical Music

Deputies Liturgical Music had asked the churches to come with proposals for new hymns that are in line with the criteria and the framework that was adopted at Synod 2011. Some churches have also suggested additional themes to Deputies. The Deputies have stressed the reality that in several congregations the resistance against hymns is being expressed so strongly that the consistories have become reluctant when it comes to singing hymns. During the synod discussions it was emphasized that in the past already the theological underpinnings for singing hymns have been made very clear. Synod decided that the new themes, as proposed by the FRC Pretoria (Christian living and the fruit of the Spirit; Perseverance of the Saints and the Armor of God; Jesus' return; Prayer; and Comfort for believers who are dying) and by the FRC Bellville (Creation and Re-Creation; the Last Judgment; Eschatology) should be added to the list of themes that was used for choosing hymns and rhymed versions of Scripture passages. A sub-committee should be appointed that includes members of the Sotho speaking churches and missionaries. They will have to work at evaluating the Difela tsa Sione songs and psalms, with the goal to standardize those songs. Deputies shall also offer support to the RCSA/Calvin Anniversary Fund, in the form of IT expertise, to further develop and improve the RCSA app of Psalms/Rhymings of Bible passages, as this is used more and more in our church federation.

Synod decided to approve the 14 rhymed version of Scripture passages to be used with the purpose of testing. Synod requests the consistories to forward feedback with regard to those songs to Deputies.

Synod Treasurer

The treasurer reported on the financial condition of the

church federation, which has become critical during the last two years. Not all the churches contribute, and those that do don't always pay in a timely fashion. This leads to cashflow problems. A proposal was adopted to send a letter to all consistories to urge them to bring their synodical contributions up to date and to hold each other accountable at classis. The budget for 2021 – 2024 was extensively discussed, since a maximum had been set for synodical expenses and the requests from the Deputies exceeded this amount.

Government, Federational Administrator and Internet

Synod decided to send synodical messages to the President of SA, as well as the Mayor of the city where Synod was held, wishing them God's blessing.

Synod expresses its thankfulness to the Federational Administrator for his continuous excellent work over the years. Together with the Archivist of the Archive Church, the Federational Administrator shall investigate and begin to employ an updated and digital system for archiving. The Federational Administrator was furthermore mandated to publish as a new Church Book the newly adopted Synodical Regulations, together with other documents of FRCSA Synods 2008 – 2021 that are relevant for the church federation.

Synod instructed the Deputies Internet Communication to redesign the website, to give it a more modern and attractive look; to update the website and keep it up to date with all the publications, and to encourage the congregations to revise their information regularly; and to make sure that all the pages appear in Afrikaans as well as in English.

Next Synod

The FRC Mamelodi was appointed as convening church for the next synod, which is scheduled for September 2024, Lord willing. The FRC Pretoria was appointed as alternate. The chairman expressed gratitude to the convening church and the brothers and sisters of Belhar and Bellville for the excellent manner in which they have received and taken care of synod.

After a meditation on Romans 16: 1 – 17 and 25 – 27 and prayer the chairman Rev. Johan Bruintjes closed synod.

Source Acknowledgement: This press release has been translated and is being published with permission from the FRCSA committee for relations with churches abroad.

Letter from the RCN(I) to foreign churches

The following letter was sent by General Synod Goes 2020 of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) (RCN(I)) to various churches. It is being republished with synod's permission.

The RCN(I) saw its membership in the ICRC suspended in 2017 and the ICRC has committed to reviewing its membership at the next ICRC, now scheduled for October 2022. Thus the following letter is of interest to the member churches, as well as further documents referred to below under "Decision" which the reader can access online here: <https://lv-gs2020.nl/gkv/english-materials-gs-2020/>. They are the first two documents on this webpage. The editor.

To all sister churches abroad who sent letters to the 2020 Synod of Goes regarding men/women in office

Dear brothers,

Decisions regarding men/women in office

In a letter to the 2020 general synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated), you expressed your concern about the decision made in 2017 by the general synod of Meppel, permitting women to serve in church offices. You requested the synod to revoke this decision. The synod gave all objections, submitted by Dutch and foreign churches, serious consideration.

Different views

The synod decided to continue to give room for both the opinion and the practice of women serving in church offices. She observed a meticulous handling of Scripture in the substantiating of this opinion. Meanwhile, the synod expressed that the opinion and practice of excluding women of serving in church offices remain similarly justified. This opinion can also be argued by respectful Bible reading.

Unanimous decisions

The synod delegates still disagree on the topic of allowing women to serve in church offices. Nevertheless, they supported the synod decisions unanimously. Amongst each other, the delegates saw careful and principled handling of the Bible, which may be expected of Reformed believers. It is this way of handling Scripture that unites, despite remaining disagreement in opinions. That is why the decisions were taken in unison in an atmosphere of warm-hearted harmony.

Dealing with differences

There has been room for opposite views on a serious issue before within reformed churches both nationally and internationally. On this topic – men/women serving in church offices – the synod didn't want to bind consciences



either. Both opinions are justified within the reformed confession. Both opinions are also substantiated by a reformed way of reading Scripture. Church boards in the Netherlands have the freedom to decide whether they will call women to serve in offices locally. We may expect to find both practices in the future. Each church member and each church board may seek guidance in God's words about dealing with different opinions within the church. We build on the same foundation, even if we do so in different ways.

Room

Reformed churches have never been single minded on each and every topic. Hence, church unity is not based on having the same views. It's foundation is her Lord, Jesus Christ. From there, we seek to find our way forward together. Some may walk on one side of the road, some may walk on the other side. But it is the Spirit who unites us and we walk together in faith, hope and love. We call reformed churches nationally and internationally to accept one another on the basis of that foundation and to continue to give one another room, also in church meetings. Thus, we let the Christ's love carry us. He is Lord over the church of all times and places.

Decision

Please find enclosed the decisions that have been taken, together with the committee report Serve each other sincerely from the heart that was written to substantiate the decisions.

- Regarding objection 2: Structure of church offices: the general synod decisions lack consideration of the structure of church offices: refer to decision 5, ground 2.
- Regarding objection 3: the synod too easily dismisses the so called 'remain silent' texts: refer to decision 3.
- Regarding objection 9: Questions about handling Scripture/hermeneutics: refer to decision 7.
- Various Scripture verses about the participation of women in the Old and New Testament in the grounds supporting decision 3 to 6 have been removed and replaced.

We sincerely thank you for your brotherly letter and commend you to God's blessing.

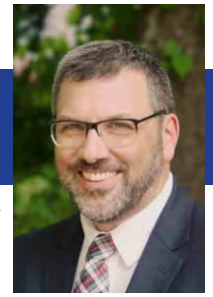
Kind regards, In Christ,

ds. A. Koster,

scriba 2 (second clerk)



A foreign delegate addresses General Synod Goes of the Gkv during the Foreigner Delegates' Week, January 2020



Author: Rev. Danny E. Olinger

Danny Olinger is a minister with the OPC and editor of New Horizons.

God's Faithfulness in Affliction

The theme that permeated the Eighty-Seventh General Assembly—the faithfulness of God in affliction—was put forth at the opening worship service with the sermon of Claude Taylor, pastor at New Hope Presbyterian in Bridgeton, New Jersey. In his first words, Mr. Taylor told those gathered how he came to have this great privilege. He was standing in the place of his longtime friend and New Hope Church ruling elder David Haney, moderator of the Eighty-Sixth General Assembly, who had died and gone to be with the Lord. Mr. Taylor preached on 2 Corinthians 4:7: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” In the week that followed, testimony abounded from pastors, ruling elders, and committee representatives of God's goodness during the pandemic. When the commissioners gathered for worship on the Lord's Day, David VanDrunen preached from Psalm 119:65–80 on God's goodness and faithfulness in affliction. Then, in the evening worship service that same Lord's Day, Bruce Hollister told those gathered that, in the providence of God, he had prepared a sermon on 2 Corinthians 4, the same text as Mr. Taylor. Mr. Hollister rejoiced that the message of life out of death once more would be proclaimed.

Remembering David Haney

Before the election of the new moderator, Danny Olinger and David Nakhla presented a pictorial remembrance to the praise of God for Mr. Haney's thirty years of service in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Mr. Olinger remarked that sixty-four years earlier, a young Orthodox Presbyterian from Bridgeton, Mr. Haney's father, George, had traveled to Iowa to serve as pastor of First OPC of Waterloo, Iowa. There George Haney met and married Grace Vanden Bosch, the younger sister of the local Christian Reformed pastor. What a blessing it was for George and Grace to see the covenant faithfulness of God as David grew into a young man who wanted to serve Christ and his church. When the opportunity arose for Mr. Haney to leave a successful career to work for the Committee on Coordination, he gladly accepted it. Mr. Nakhla spoke about Mr. Haney's pivotal role in mercy ministries, including OPC disaster relief. When Hurricane Katrina struck in 2005, Mr. Haney not only organized the OPC's response but also participated in some way with eleven different teams in Mississippi and Louisiana. He also witnessed to Mr. Haney's

love for his wife, Becky, his children, Lauren, Shelly, and Scott, and his grandchildren.

After the presentation finished, acting moderator John Van Meerbeke addressed Becky and her family via Zoom on behalf of the assembly and assured her of the prayers of the commissioners.

A Representative Body and the Moderator

Since 1975, the OPC has operated with a representative assembly that is capped at one hundred and fifty ministers and ruling elders. Each of the sixteen presbyteries can send a certain percentage of its presbyters to the assembly. The range this year varied from the Presbytery of the Midwest sending eleven ministers and seven ruling elders to the Presbytery of Connecticut and Southern New York sending two minister and one ruling elder.

Around two-thirds of the commissioners this year did not attend the previous assembly. Sometimes new commissioners can get up to speed on why an assembly is at a particular point in its consideration of a matter. Other times it is a struggle.

That is why it is always important to elect a moderator who can help the assembly move steadily through its business without sacrificing needed deliberation for the sake of efficiency. The assembly elected such a man for moderator in Zachary Keele, pastor of Escondido OPC in Escondido, California.

Mr. Keele's calm demeanor and godly wisdom helped to guide the assembly through forty-three hours of business that included a record number of complaints on appeal (nine) and appeals in judicial cases (four) in the pursuit of the peace, purity, and unity of the church.

OPC Membership

Statistician Luke Brown reported that membership in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church grew during 2020 by 291 persons to 31,809. This total membership consists of 570 ministers, 23,304 communicant members, and 7,935 baptized children (non-communicant). There are 1,092 ruling elders and 930 deacons.

At year end, there were 290 local churches and 38 mission works. Eight congregations were organized as new and separate churches from mission works: The Haven OPC, Deer Park, NY; Christ Covenant, Crystal Lake, IL; Pleasant Mountain, Bridgton, ME; Providence, West Lebanon, NH; Emmanuel, Colville, WA; Firelands Grace OPC, Sandusky, OH; Wolf River,

Collierville, TN; and, Providence, Cumming, GA.

Largely due to COVID-19 restrictions, both morning worship attendance (-21.6 percent) and Sunday school attendance (-61.6) dropped dramatically. At the same time, however, total offerings increased 3.31 percent as members gave \$67.6 million. Seventy-eight percent of the giving, \$52.6 million, was spent on local church expenses. Thirteen percent of the giving, \$8.9 million, was designated for benevolence offerings to missions, outreach, and diaconal ministry. Nine percent of the giving, \$6.1 million, was used for capital improvements.

Christian Education

The first program committee to report was that of Christian Education. General Secretary Danny Olinger thanked the assembly for the prayers that have poured out on his behalf during his recovery from COVID-19. Mr. Olinger announced that in 2020—despite the pandemic—the CCE was able to co-sponsor thirty-one ministerial internships in which the committee provided a record-high \$344,436 to local OP congregations.

Special note was also made of the service of Mark Lowrey, interim executive director of Great Commission Publications, in helping to keep GCP afloat during a time when most churches did not hold Sunday school classes.

Home Missions

Home Missions General Secretary John Shaw praised God for his faithfulness during the recent pandemic. Mr. Shaw reported that the Lord—faithful, sovereign, and good to his

church—provided abundantly during this period. Five new mission works began receiving aid and four new regional home missionaries were added (Bradley Peppo, Presbytery of Ohio; Bruce Hollister, Presbytery of the Midwest; David Chilton, Presbytery of the South; and Christopher Hartshorn, Presbytery of Southern California). The committee also announced the publication of its newest evangelistic tract, *What Is Truth?* by Eric Watkins.

Foreign Missions

Quoting J. Gresham Machen, “The truly penitent man glories in the supernatural, for he knows that nothing natural would meet his need,” General Secretary Mark Bube stated that it is the goal of the Committee of Foreign Missions to advance the cause of Christ's kingdom by taking the Word of God to the nations. Currently, there are seven active fields: Asia, East Africa, Haiti, Uganda, Quebec, Uruguay, and the Ukraine. Mr. Bube stated the highest priorities for the upcoming year are finding evangelists for Mbale and Karamoja, Uganda; Haiti; and Uruguay. He urged the commissioners to consider whether Christ's Spirit might be inclining their hearts to consider foreign missionary service.

At the end of the report, it was announced that Richard Gaffin Jr. would not be seeking reelection to the committee. Mr. Bube praised the Lord for Mr. Gaffin's calm, godly, and Christ-centered service to his Savior during his unprecedented fifty-two years of continuous service on the committee. Lord willing, the committee is seeking to honor Mr. Gaffin at the



Eighty-Eighth (2022) General Assembly scheduled to be held on the campus of Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania.

Diaconal Ministries

David Nakhla, administrator of the Committee on Diaconal Ministries, proclaimed that the ministry of mercy at the local, regional, and national level is a tangible expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ. During the worldwide pandemic, deacons helped sessions to implement measures of safety, to visit shut-ins, and to extend funds to needy families. In 2020, donations totaling seventy-five thousand dollars were given to the COVID-19 Pandemic Response Fund. The majority of the fund has been used to help sister churches and ministries around the world, including twenty thousand dollars for Kenya and ten thousand dollars for Haiti.

A video was presented showing the response to the Midland, Michigan, flood in spring 2020, which ruined the homes of two OPC families. The video showed the efforts of over one hundred OPC volunteers in rebuilding the homes, and the joyful appreciation of the families.

Ministerial Care

Director of Ministerial Care John Fikkert shared that through phone, email, and Zoom, he had been able during the pandemic to field inquiries regarding the OPC 403(b) retirement plan, financial planning, counseling resources, and more. All ministers and full-time employees of the OPC or its congregations are eligible for participation in the plan. Approximately 46 percent of participants in the 403(b) plan are under the age of fifty-two.

Gregory De Jong presented the challenges of finding a firm that could provide financial planning assistance for ministers. Thankfully, a firm has been found, but the committee is first running a pilot program with a few ministers. If the pilot program goes well, the committee plans to announce the firm and make its services available at the end of the year.

Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations

The assembly passed the recommendation of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations to propose to the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) should be suspended from the ICRC. The RCN recently acted to permit the ordination of persons to the offices of minister and ruling elder contrary to Scripture. The committee noted that the constitutional process that a proposal to suspend or terminate a member church of the ICRC requires the initiation of another major assembly of a member church. The assembly also

sought to encourage the RCN to restore the doctrine and practice of its church to be in agreement with the Holy Scriptures.

Chaplains and Military Personnel

Chairman Richard Dickinson reported that many chaplains were disappointed that they were prohibited from holding worship services and interacting with others during the pandemic. There are seven OPC chaplains serving on active duty: John Carter, David DeRienzo, Daniel Halley, Joshua Jackson, Cornelius Johnson, Stephen Roberts, and Jeffrey Shames. There are also eight men serving in active reserves or National Guard and nine men serving as civilian chaplains.

Historian

After twenty-two years of distinguished service as Acting Historian and Historian, John Muether, ruling elder at Reformation OPC, Oviedo, Florida, retired. Under Mr. Muether's leadership, such books as *Confident of Better Things: Essays Commemorating Seventy-Five Years of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (2011), *Between the Times: The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Transition, 1945–1990* (2011), *Choosing the Good Portion: Women of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (2016), and *For Me to Live Is Christ: The Life of Edward J. Young* (2017) were produced. Mr. Muether also authored *Cornelius Van Til: Reformed Apologist and Churchman* (2008) and helped to oversee the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary celebration of the OPC in 2011.

The assembly then followed the recommendation of the Committee for the Historian and elected Camden Bucey, minister from the Presbytery of the Midwest, as Historian.

The Committee for the Historian also recognized the extraordinary service of commissioners Stephen Phillips, George Cottenden, and John Mahaffy. The assembly marked the fiftieth time that Mr. Phillips served as a commissioner, the forty-ninth time for Mr. Cottenden, and the thirty-sixth time for Mr. Mahaffy.

Updating the Language of the Doctrinal Standards

The Eighty-Fifth (2018) General Assembly erected a Special Committee on Updating the Language of the Doctrinal Standards. Chairman David Noe reported that the committee had been at work the last three years with the understanding that the Eighty-Fifth General Assembly had authorized the committee to “propose specific linguistic changes” to the Westminster Standards. He stated that the committee's understanding is that, when it submits its final report at a future assembly with recommendations, its purpose will be fulfilled. That is, if a future assembly

believes in light of the committee's final report that there are changes that are worthy of consideration, then that assembly will establish a new committee.

The committee shared a draft work of its suggested morphological (120), archaic (27), and other changes (23) to the Confession of Faith. The assembly approved the committee's request that it be continued with the same mandate for another two years with the goal of bringing its final report to the Eighty-Ninth General Assembly.

Judicial Appeals

The two-year gap between assemblies because of the pandemic helped to create an unprecedented number of matters, thirteen, to be adjudicated. Two advisory committees on Appeals and Complaints were created and an extra day was added to the docket of this assembly so that all the appeals could be heard.

During the question-and-answer period of one appeal, a collie entered the doors and approached a speaker. As individuals sought to herd the dog out, the moderator commented that their efforts were appropriate because "it didn't have the privilege of the floor."

Of particular presbyterian polity interest, the assembly heard a complaint on appeal from some members of the Presbytery of the Northwest that concerned whether a complaint may be brought by one session against another session in another presbytery. The assembly sustained the complaint, meaning a session could bring such a complaint. However, the assembly denied the complaint on appeal by the same members of the Presbytery of the Northwest regarding the ability of ministerial advisors to vote in matters pertaining to an appeal of complaints against the session they are advising.

The assembly also sustained a complaint against the Presbytery of the Southeast where a minister was permitted to defend himself in a judicial trial by using language that the presbytery had previously determined to be an offense. The assembly passed amends that the presbytery acknowledge its error in allowing the minister to use reviling language and to communicate this to OPC members Aimee Byrd and Rachel Miller so as to preserve their good names.

A New Presbytery

The assembly adopted the overture of the Presbytery of the Midwest to divide the presbytery into two separate regional churches. The new Presbytery of Wisconsin and Minnesota will include the geographical region within those two states and the upper peninsula of the state of Michigan. The Presbytery of the Midwest will include the states of Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska.

Day of Prayer and Fasting

As the assembly was nearing its close, it called for a day of prayer and fasting on Saturday, August 21, 2021, "that the whole church may pray as one people, and call upon the Lord with one voice, that we might lament our distress and unworthiness before the Lord, confess our sin, and commit ourselves anew to the faithful service of the Lord our God; that we humbly implore God to send seasons of refreshment, pour His Spirit of wisdom upon us, and draw multitudes to the hope of the gospel by granting faith and repentance unto life."

Source Acknowledgement: Republished with permission from *New Horizons*, August-September 2021.





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What happened at the RPCNA Synod 2021?

The Reformed Presbyterian Church Synod (RPCNA) met on the campus of Indiana Wesleyan University in Marion, Ind., June 14-17, 2021.

Many happy things were announced and decided upon as well. Professor Keith Evans's position as biblical counseling professor at RPTS was renewed for seven more years. Students in various presbyteries were examined and made eligible to receive calls to Gospel ministry, including Mark Brown and Jerry Foltz. Denominational finances are very good and giving was up from years' past. Churches are growing as attendance in other denominations have dropped significantly since Covid-19.

Heads and beards were visibly more gray, and pages, who ordinarily serve the court with passing out papers, were stationed behind screens to monitor delegates over Zoom; unable to attend due to international travel restrictions. For some, tensions were high and for many, hearts were very heavy. The court was called to order and our former moderator led devotions from his home, over 10,000 miles away, in Australia. The world has changed dramatically between the 188th and 189/190th Synod meeting of the RPCNA.

Admonishments

Preaching on the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, and patience from the hearts of Revs. Andy McCracken, Noah Bailey, John Edgar, and Daniel Howe were needed admonishments each morning as we did our work. Papers and complaints came in from various parts of the church. Synods, according to the Westminster Confession 31.3, are "to receive complaints in cases of maladministration, and authoritatively to determine the same." This year brought several complaints which the court divided into three judicial committees to review and bring back recommendations. The first set of complaints concerned Dr. Michael Lefebvre's departure from the RPCNA following his teaching against the standards of the church regarding human origins. The second set of complaints involved pastoral and procedural steps in an active judicial case concerning sexual abuse in the church. This case is seeking to bring charges against a session which allegedly failed in shepherding and protecting minors in the church. A third judicial committee was set up to counsel the Pacific Coast

Presbytery that requested help with a trial of a minister, who has since left the RPCNA.

Church Life

This year many of the highlights and highpoint of church work were not emphasized due to two years work put into one. The church has seen churches planted, students raised up, and men and women disciplined, but sadly we did not focus on those things this year.

The Global Mission Board made recommendations for changes in their bylaws, and through a discussion with the Japan Presbytery (a mission presbytery of the RPCNA), those changes were sent back to the Global Mission Board for further study. The seminary board then reported, with President, Dr. Barry York taking the floor to speak on on the need for preachers in the church: "the fields are ripe for harvest" he reminded us in the words of the Lord Jesus. The court also rose in applause and thanksgiving for retired president Jerry O'Neill who is suffering with Primary Progressive Aphasia, seriously effecting his ability to communicate. The court also rose to pray for Dr. O'Neill.

Prison Inmate Church Membership

A synod discussion that goes back a few years concerning prison inmate church membership was taken up with a majority report and a minority report. Elder Bob Bibby represented the majority and Rev. Tim McCracken represented the minority. Eventually the court came to an agreement that allows for inmates to have membership in local churches, which will require great oversight of sessions.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada

Dr. Andrew Quigley from Ottawa, brought a petition to form the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada. The Canadian churches who desire to join would form their own denomination, distinct from the RPCNA, complete with their own constitution. This request passed and a committee to assist the Canadian RP churches was formed to aid them in becoming their own indigenous RP denomination, joining the RP Global community as a distinct church from the USA's synod. This may take a few years to birth this idea. Give thanks with our Canadian brethren and pray for their distinct labors north of the border.

Grounds for Divorce

A considerable amount of time was spent on the Atlantic Presbytery's paper on biblical divorce because of desertion. A 75 page paper seeking to define the word desertion as used in I Corinthians 7 and Westminster Confession of Faith 24.6 was heard. The paper sought to be biblical, exegetical, historical, and pastoral. Eventually the Synod declared that we understood desertion as a "willful, irremediable, physical departure by one spouse from the other or irremediably caused by one spouse or the other." This hearty discussion and debate ought to inform our counseling and shepherding of those struggling through or seeking divorce.

Convictions on Origins

Related to Dr. Lefebvre's departure from the RPCNA and the struggles of his presbytery concerning a trial and judicial process, a two-part "special resolution" passed after some debate: "This court hereby declares that belief in the literal parentage of Adam and Eve as our first parents is an essential point of the Christian system of doctrine." And, that "Reformed Presbyterian Testimony 4.3 & 4.4 are essential to the Christian system of doctrine and that Synod declare that Testimony 4.3's definition of the theory of evolution includes theistic evolution." The two paragraphs referenced in the Testimony say, "The theory of evolution which assumes that chance happenings are an explanation of the origin and development of matter and living things is unscriptural. God created various kinds of living forms with tremendous potential for variation. The increase of varieties which has occurred is within genetic limitations provided at creation (4.3)." And, "We deny that man evolved from any lower form of life (4.4)." Some argued that this was a tightening of our church's position, others argued that it was a timely and necessary reaffirming of our church's teaching on human origins.

Complaints related to Dr. Lefebvre's departure were heard through a judicial committee. Members of the Great Lakes Gulf Presbytery (GLG) were not allowed to vote on these complaints because they are categorically "matters of injustice." Two complaints concerning witnesses in the trial and the actions of the GLG Ad Interim Commission were not sustained and returned to the complainant. Another complaint, written by several members of the GLG, argued that the church was in error for giving to Dr. Lefebvre his credentials in the midst of a trial. This complaint was sustained.

Procedures in Complaints

The synod then moved to the three complaints concerning the active case concerning sexual abuse. These complaints were not acted on by Synod, but the jurisdiction of the case was removed from the jurisdiction of the presbytery and a seven-man judicial commission of the synod was appointed that would hear the case and serve as the jury in the case. The sense of the synod was that the judicial process must continue.

The synod is setting up a committee to study the appropriateness of trials conducted over Zoom (or other e-platforms). It was reported by the Pacific Coast Presbytery, with tears, that they had deposed Mr. Bob Hackett, no longer a minister of the gospel. The presbytery has communicated that to him.

Clearly some very heavy matters were discussed this week, and between heaviness of hearts was robust singing of psalms, fervent prayers, and men seeking the will of God for his church.

Further Matters

Many happy things were announced and decided upon as well. Professor Keith Evans's position as biblical counseling professor at RPTS was renewed for seven more years. Students in various presbyteries were examined and made eligible to receive calls to Gospel ministry, including Mark Brown and Jerry Foltz. Denominational finances are very good and giving was up from years' past. Churches are growing as attendance in other denominations have dropped significantly since Covid-19. As a denomination, we have had a year of troubles and there are difficult matters that lie ahead, but we reminded of the words of our Lord, who said, "In this world you will have tribulation, but I give you my peace (John 16:33)." We rest in that peace as we, together, seek to build the kingdom of God on earth.

"Though sowing seeds is weary toil, And he who scatters weeps, He'll come again and shout for joy With sheaves of grain he reaps." -Psalm 126:6

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Associate Reformed Presbyterian Synod 2021

Opening Worship

Reverend Philip Bunch, Fayetteville ARP Church, opened the 217th General Synod meeting with a prayer saying, "He who is in us is greater than he who is in this world."

Moderator Rob Roy McGregor, III, called the meeting to order, followed by a welcome from Dr. Derek Thomas, Senior Pastor of First Presbyterian Church Columbia.

A list of the deceased ministers and elders from the past year was read by Moderator McGregor followed by a time of prayer.

Rev. Rob Patrick of Boyce Memorial ARP Church led the time of worship from Philippians 2:1-11. Patrick referred to the Moderator's Challenge which was to "Prepare the church for the return of Jesus Christ." "There is nothing more sure than this promise," Patrick said. "How foolish if we didn't prepare for this. What preparation goes into weddings, vacations, and retirement. How foolish are we if we didn't prepare for our greatest longing."

Patrick went on to tell us how we are to prepare by, "urging us to unity, humility, and service to have the mind of Christ."

"Be renewed in knowledge and confirmed to the image of Christ," Patrick reminded his hearers. Christians are called to believe and hear the gospel. They are called to proclaim the good news. They must be faithful to the Gospel and give themselves to worship.

Jesus is the only King and Head over the church. Christians should serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. This is not a drill. This is a certainty!

Patrick asked, "Is your appetite dull by circumstance? We have a blessing before us by the sacrament of the Lord's supper. We are strengthening our union with Him. Come, come quickly Lord Jesus."

Communion was served by the elders of the First Presbyterian Church in Columbia. Rev. Matt Carr, Back Creek ARP Church, said, "There is no better place to prepare for the coming of Christ than in this supper that we proclaim and receive. In this meal, we see the bitterness of sin, the sweetness of Christ, and the foretaste of seeing Him."

Rev. Andrew Shoger, Coddle Creek ARP Church, closed the time with a prayer, saying, "We are reminded of a sure promise. We come to you weak and prone to doubt. You meet us in our doubt and sin."

Select Approved Motions

- That SCONAR be instructed to prepare a capital funds

campaign to meet the current financial crisis while continuing the mission to preach the gospel to the nations.

- That a commission be appointed by the General Synod which shall be composed of the current stated clerk of each presbytery along with the Principal Clerk of the General Synod, and that this commission be tasked to examine both the content and the processes of annual statistical information so as to improve the process. The commission shall put a revised process in place in time for the gathering of information in January of 2022.
- That Synod grant the Theological and Social Concerns committee permission to publish drafts of papers for feedback and comments in preparation for its report to the 2022 General Synod.
- That the Committee on Interchurch Relations study the ARPC's membership in the World Reformed Fellowship and the current trajectory of the WRF and report back to the 2022 ARP Synod.
- That Synod direct the Special Committee on Restructuring to study the feasibility of returning the agencies of synod, excluding Bonclarken and Erskine, to a historic Presbyterian committee structure. The committee shall bring its proposals to the 2022 meeting of Synod.
- That Synod direct its agency boards to perform a biennial (i.e., every other year) competitive compensation analysis for their executive staff and/or directors, with the results to be included in their reports to General Synod.
- That the General Synod direct the Moderator to modify the original task of the Special Committee On Restructuring to include a study on the vision, values, and ministry of the ARP church; and if deemed necessary, to hire an outside consultant to assist them in this process and to report back to the 2022 General Synod.
- Based on a recommendation from the recently completed financial audit, World Witness requests approval from the General Synod to hire a financial assistant prior to the hiring freeze being lifted.
- That the State of Minnesota be added to the bounds of Florida Presbytery.

Tuesday Afternoon Business

The 217th General Synod meeting was held at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC again. Due to Bonclarken Conference Center's mask restrictions and the unfinished culvert a decision had to be made early enough to give delegates time to make arrangements. Knowing the weight of the decisions during the Synod meeting, getting a quorum was not an issue. Virtual participation was set up through zoom for those in the Canadian Presbytery, Northeast Presbytery and Missionaries. Livestream was available for others as well.

Business began on Tuesday afternoon following the Opening Worship with the Retiring Moderator's Address and with the Moderator's Challenge. Those ministers retiring in 2020 were recognized and thanked for their years of service. A report was heard from Fraternal delegates of the RPCNA and OPC.

The Special Committee to Produce a Directory of Private and Family Worship had their draft approved and it was overtured to Presbytery. The Special Moderator's Committee to Produce Catechetical Instruction on Human Sexuality encouraged churches to utilize the 2019 ARP Statement on Human Sexuality for educational purposes. There was discussion on recommendation 2 that encourages churches to utilize existing publications explaining the ARPC should have their own materials. The recommendation passed as is. Reverend Ben Dowling prayed for this committee.

(The summary of the sermons at the beginning of each business section do not give the feel and power of them as presented during Synod. For a recording of sermons go to ARPchurch.org.)

Tuesday Evening Business

Tuesday evening began with Reverend Clint Davis, pastor of Chester ARP Church, reading from Matthew 9. "There are long days and we are tired. We don't take time to minister to our souls, soul care," Davis said. This is a passage about evangelism. Matthew 9:36, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." They were harassed, chased, always on the run. They are never at peace to take a deep breath. They are helpless.

"When we feel helpless we can turn to the one that helps us," Davis said. They are like a sheep without a shepherd: lost, lonely, without direction, and constantly running around. Matthew 11:28 "Come to me, all you who are weary

and burdened, and I will give you rest." Davis closed saying, "I don't know another group as tired as pastors and elders. The devil wants you to fail. Come to Jesus constantly."

The Special Committee on Net Assets Reallocation was next. Moderator Malphrus was on the committee along with the Vice Moderator, so Past Moderator McGregor had to moderate this portion of the meeting. The special committee was created and charged by a motion from the 2020 October Synod meeting stating that a reallocation of at least \$3,000,000 from the net assets of Synod boards and agencies to the ARP Retirement Plan Trust Fund be approved. The report included their strategy, considerations and a list of available funds. These funds were updated since the printing of the Synod Packet as reported at the Synod meeting.

The committee plans to reach out to other Presbyteries, individuals, and churches. Legal reviews have begun as well. A motion was approved to begin a Capital Campaign.

The Special Committee on Restructuring was tasked with reorganizing the denomination's ministry structure. The committee stated the ARP Church does not like change. The discussion began with delegates wanting to know what led to the recommendations. For example, Recommendation 1: That Synod dissolve its Committee on Campus Ministry Oversight by July 1, 2022. This recommendation was at the request of the Committee on Campus Ministry oversight. A delegate asked about the vision as a whole and what the committee is working towards. They reached the order of the day.

Wednesday Morning Business

Reverend Ben Glaser, pastor of Bethany ARP Church in Clover, SC, led the morning worship by reading from Deuteronomy 20. "Why do we spend our time galivanting when there is a war. It isn't about us, it is about the high priest Jesus. We are to preach and teach the word and to do the work we have been called to do. We need to trust in Him forever. He is our King and God."

Following the morning worship, Women's Ministries President Brandy Glaser addressed the court.

Reverend Brian Howard had a prayer for the Women of the Church praying, "That we can be men of encouragement to the women." A motion was made for a time of prayer. All of Synod stopped and gathered in groups to pray. Business continued by picking up the Index from the day before on The Special Committee on Restructuring. After much debate, comments, and questions, the recommendations below were approved.

- That the Committee on Revisions be comprised of Presbytery members from each presbytery of the General Synod.
- That Synod dissolve its Committee on Worship by December 31, 2021, and that the Committee's Music Conference be moved under the jurisdiction of the Board of Bonclarken.
- That Synod dissolve Christian Education Ministries as a Board and Agency of the ARPC by July 31, 2022 and that Horizon, Quest, and Family Bible Conference be moved under the authority of a new committee on camps and conferences, and that Appalachia be moved under the authority of the Board of World Witness, and that Camp Joy be incorporated as a separate agency of the ARPC, and that the Adult Quarterly be moved under the authority of the Executive Board's Administrative Committee, and that the committee bring any further necessary recommendations to complete this action to the 2022 stated meeting of the General Synod.
- That Synod amend the "At Large" portion of the board composition section for the Board of Bonclarken in the Manual of Authorities and Duties to include the following sentence: "At least two of the board members shall be ordained ministers in the ARP Church."
- That Synod direct its Principal Clerk to make all necessary changes in the Manual of Authorities and Duties to reflect the actions taken in the above recommendations.
- That Synod affirm the Restructuring Committee's conviction that the Synod needs a fresh start and a renewed vision towards global ministry, evangelism, and church planting as it confronts the ever-changing challenges of the twenty-first century. As a part of this affirmation, Synod will empower the committee to develop a unifying organizational approach and possible organizational structures that will not only address the present work of Outreach North America and World Witness, but also give direction towards the presentation of the free offer of the gospel and the proclamation of the Lordship of Christ (Vision Committee Report, 2007). Any new organizational structure will be developed with the twin purposes of returning principal authority to Synod's presbyteries (Form of Government 10.1) and optimizing Synod's

historical and biblical commitment to the ministry of the Word & Sacrament (FOG 1.7). The committee will bring its detailed recommendations to the 2022 stated meeting of the General Synod for approval.

Women's Ministries Address

Paul tells us that the body has many parts and cannot function properly if all the parts do not work together (1 Corinthians 12:14-27).

Our denomination, like the body Paul speaks of, is made up of several parts. As a whole, we must work together in order to glorify God in the way the Bible tells us to.

Women's Ministries is not a glorified gossip circle or a glorified women in the kitchen, but a way for the sisters in Christ to gather and get to know Jesus intimately, love Jesus faithfully, serve Jesus fruitfully through bible studies, annual meetings, fellowship gatherings, supporting our Jubilee Birthday Ladies / other missionaries, denominational causes (Appalachia, Camp Joy), etc.

Being able to gather with ARP sisters for Fellowship, sharing of concerns/ struggles, praising the Lord shouldn't be frowned upon by church leadership, but encouraged with a joyful heart.

I was asked once, what can we do to help Women's Ministries? My response: Encourage the ladies to attend any local/ Presbyterial/ Synodical level event, especially those who don't seem to think they have time. Men are welcome to attend the local Jubilee Birthday parties, the Silver Tea during Fami-Bible Conference, etc.

Without women's ministries, being a pastor's wife, an ARP woman, would be a much bigger struggle.

2022 ARPWM Calendars are on sale for \$15. Proceeds go to Synodical Hall for her "spa" day. The calendars feature churches throughout the denomination as well as Bonclarken. Calendars will be on sale throughout the rest of the year at various ARP events and through the ARP Center. Checks should be made payable to ARP Women's Ministries (on the memo line: Calendars).

Wednesday Afternoon Business

Reverend Stephen Jordan, pastor of Rowan ARP Church in Lugoff, SC led the afternoon worship from Ephesians 4:11-16 saying these verses are "Everything we need to know about being elders." Jordan went on to say, "Where is the church going? Our best days are ahead of us. We need to train our elders. We need to know the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Form of Government. We need to pastor the flock and work so that we can share the gospel"

Business picked up with the Special Committee on Retirement Fund Crisis Study saying they need an extension of time to continue to work. Reports were heard from the Committee on Minister and His Work, The Committee on Revisions, and the Committee on Worship. The Committee on Theological and Social Concerns didn't have a report. During the Report from the Committee on Inter-Church Relations, it was brought up to not forget the Synod of Mexico and Pakistan. The committee is tasked with studying World Reformed Fellowship to make sure it is still going in the right direction. The Executive Board report gave updates on future printing of Synod materials including the Minutes, the Synod reports, and the MAD. The Board of Stewardship report asked churches to continue to donate to the Denominational Ministries Fund. Their report brought on many conversations which ended with 5 out of 13 recommendations not passing.

Wednesday Evening Business

Reverend Brian Taylor, pastor of Heritage ARP Church in Springfield, Missouri opened the evening session by reading 2 Timothy. He encouraged other pastors, "What we preach needs to be in line with what the apostles preached. We must fight the good fight like the good farmer. We need to be broken to trust less in ourselves and more in the Father. Maybe as a denomination we go through this so we will be broken and trust God more."

The Committee on Campus Ministry shared a thanks to Rev. Paul Patrick for his faithful years of serving Erskine College. Jonathan Cook will be joining the campus to lead the RUF program. The Board of the ARP Foundation was to be dissolved but that recommendation did not pass.

The Board of Benefits report started with a presentation from Rev. Leo Markwat. "There were 3 principles to guide the board: a clear solution, a simple message as possible, and a strong witness," Markwat said. Adam Bloom explained the remainder of the recommendations which are listed below and were all approved. The slides and webinar from the original presentation are available on ARPchurch.org.

That Synod adopt the Board of Benefits recommended action plan for the ARPC Retirement Plan including the following:

- That the Plan implement a Hard Freeze effective July 31, 2021.
- That there will be no change to retiree benefits (those currently collecting pension benefits).

- That all Active and Vested Terminated employees will be involuntarily terminated from the plan and paid 100% of their Present Value of Accrued Benefits as of July 31, 2021.
- That Active employees eligible to retire under the plan will either be allowed to stay in the ARPC Retirement Plan or receive a one-time option to take a lump sum.
- That the Board of Benefits and its officers be authorized to take actions necessary to implement these changes.
- That effective August 1, 2021, church contributions for minister's retirement will remain at 12% and be directed to the ARPC Defined Contribution Plan(403(b)). The Board of Benefits recommends all churches participate in the ARPC Defined Contribution Plan. However, if a church decides to secure their own retirement plan for a minister they need to sign and return the form from Central Services acknowledging the risks and responsibilities associated with an individual church plan.
- That the General Synod provide approximately \$8,500,000 to fund the recommendations of the Board of Benefits as the proposed changes are contingent upon the receipt or commitment of these funds.

(Take note that the Net Allocations Committee has pledged \$6,305,235. Also, one of the motions was to begin a Capital Campaign for the \$2,000,000 if needed.)

Thursday Morning Business

Reverend David Walkup, pastor of Chapel By The Sea in Melbourne Beach, Florida began the worship time from John 6:35-71. Walkup said, "The encouragement here is to rejoice in the security that God has said, 'I've called you by name and you are mine.'" Nothing can take us away from God. "When we lack wisdom, maybe we can be smart enough to ask You," Walkup said.

Northeast Presbytery Licentiate, Gun Shik Yang, sang "The Lord's Prayer" for a special time of reflection and music.

The business section began with the nominations for Moderator Elect and Vice Moderator Elect. The next item on the agenda was the allocation report from the Board of Stewardship. The original budget presented cut agencies from receiving Denominational Ministry Funds (DMF). There were many opposed discussions saying, "What message does this send congregations?" And others, "People lose confidence in what this does to the real mission

of the denomination." An amendment was presented to return to the approved 2021 budget which only cut the DMF by 20% to agencies.

There were several motions brought to the floor. There is an overlying theme in those motions to not just be good stewards but for boards and committees to study their visions and values.

The only Moderator's Committee this year was Memorials. The first Memorial from First Presbytery was very clear and well written. The concern from the Northeast Presbytery committee was the speed of transitioning women out as deacons. There was lots of debate for both sides therefore the decision was to study it and study it well.

Thursday Afternoon Business

Reverend David Lauten, associate pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, SC, led the worship from 1 Kings 19:19-21. Lauten introduced their Sexton and how faithful he has been to his call for 35 years at the church. "The scripture is about the call of Elisha. Elisha was willing and responded promptly. We live in light of that great day. Let's put the plow before us and be willing to go as God has called us. In this day of trouble and darkness, we are to be faithful to follow with joy," Lauten said.

The afternoon business finished the decisions on the Memorials and then moved on to Nominations. We are thankful for those who were nominated and are willing to serve. The Bonclarken report was presented reminding the court of the 100 year celebration next year. The World Witness report was presented by Alex Pettett. An additional recommendation was brought forth to lift the hiring freeze so that an additional financial assistant could be hired.

The Christian Education Ministries report was received followed by the Outreach North America report. The hiring freeze for ONA was lifted due to the need to have someone train and coach new church planters.

The Dunlap report was received as information followed by the final report from Erskine College and Seminary. Dr. Tom Hellams, Interim President, said that enrollment continues to grow. Erskine has been recognized as #7 best regional and #1 in the state of SC. 140 students celebrated graduation this year in person. The Presidential search is on going.

Reverend Rob Roy McGregor, Jr., had the honor to make the motion to adjourn at 4:30pm.

Source Acknowledgement: Republished with permission from *The Associate Reformed Presbyterian*, vol 46 no. 4. This material has been edited for length and relevance.

The Lord willing
the next
General Meeting
of
the International Conference of Reformed Churches
hosted by
the Reformed Churches in Namibia and South Africa
will take place in
Windhoek, Namibia
in
October 2022
(note change of year)

Newsletter of the ICRC Theological Education Committee

June 15, 2021

Greetings, all. This is our first edition of the promised newsletter of the ICRC's Theological Education Committee. Our goal is to keep seminaries that are used by the church federations affiliated with ICRC connected to each other, so that they can help and encourage each other in the service of our glorious King, the Head of the Church.

How often the newsletter will appear depends entirely on the interest you show in it and the amount of material you send to us. You can do this by sending material to us (at icrctecnews@gmail.com).

We ask all our seminary representatives to forward a copy of this edition to staff and faculty at their respective institutions. Do remember: our focus is not on all seminaries in the world, not even all Reformed seminaries (as interesting as all that would be), but especially on seminaries supported and endorsed by the member federations of the International Council of Reformed Churches.

Covid-19 in India

Over recent months, we have heard often of the dire Covid situation in India. We asked Professor Matthew Ebenezer, member of the TEC committee in India, to comment on the present situation. Here are his words:

"The situation in India as of now (June 16, 2021) is improving every day. The number of daily new cases has gone down to about a little over 70,000 and deaths range from 3-4000. The vaccination drive is finally catching on in the cities with people rushing to get themselves at least one shot. Some have had both shots. The villages still need awareness of the seriousness of the pandemic. The immediate concern is the deadly symptoms of what's called "black fungus" and the expected 3rd wave (in about 4 months) that is supposed to affect children. Please pray."

Hebrew and Greek Offered Online at PRTS, Grand Rapids, USA

In a recent meeting with our seminary representatives, we heard that there is a real need for more accessibility to online Greek and Hebrew. Here's what Chris Engelsma of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary had to say:

For those who are interested in learning (or teaching) the original languages of Scripture, we would like to direct your attention to the free language courses from Chris Engelsma.

These courses are setup on the Moodle learning management system and are freely available to anyone with an internet connection. They are highly developed courses and leverage Moodle's powerful learning tools to facilitate the learning of these languages. Each course has 25 lessons, each with its own assignment, vocabulary and grammar quiz. The courses can be completed on a mobile device. Furthermore, schools who are already using the Moodle LMS can submit a request, and we will import these courses directly to your own school's Moodle site. From there, your school can use/modify these courses any way they see fit. I am happy to provide support for these courses along the way. If you are not using Moodle, you are welcome to enrol your students directly in our course. You can see these courses for yourself here (online.prts.edu). You can view them without logging into the site or registering for an account; simply click **Login as a guest** when you are asked to login. Both the Hebrew and Greek courses use a more immersive teaching style which helps make the learning more long-term. The Greek course also teaches sentence diagramming. The textbooks in the Greek course are available digitally; unfortunately, the main text in the Hebrew course is not.

If you have more questions about these courses, please do direct them to Chris Engelsma, christopher.engelsma@gmail.com.

Do you teach NT?

The TEC has often talked about getting some online groups together via email or Zoom for the purpose of discussing concerns that arise with respect to the respective disciplines. The first such group will meet soon via Zoom – namely, those who are specialists in NT studies. If this is your specialty and your interest, you are welcome to join by dropping an email to Jerry at gerhard.visscher@gmail.com.

Or if you are interested in joining or organizing such a group in another area, please email Jerry as well at the same address. We can set your group up for collective emails through google groups.

Topics for ICRC Namibia 2022

ICRC Namibia 2022 on Theological Education is coming! Aside from the main sessions where this will be the subject of much discussion through the direction of the Executive Committee, the TEC is going to attempt to add additional

meetings regarding the specific needs of seminaries. In the future months, the TEC will be discussing such topics, so if you have specific matters that you would like to hear about, feel free to drop us a note through our secretary (gerhard.visscher@gmail.com).

Expansion in Mukhanyo, South Africa

Mukhanyo Theological College is seeking to appoint a Programme Manager and Senior Lecturer whose responsibilities will include:

To lead and manage the Honours in Theology degree (BTh Hons) programme of Mukhanyo.

- To coordinate and facilitate the Master of Theology degree (ThM) programme of PRTS.
- To teach at the postgraduate and degree levels in either Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Historical Theology, or other areas, to be determined by previous experience and present need.
- To provide godly holistic academic assistance and spiritual mentoring for postgraduate students.
- To serve on Mukhanyo's academic management based at the Pretoria Learning Centre.
- To effectively teach biblical content to adult learners and cultivate a learning environment.

- To produce quality biblical teaching material at the tertiary level for distance education.
- To serve in other areas of the Mukhanyo ministry. Additional areas of responsibility will be determined by the experience, skills, and desire of the appointed candidate.

Interested or know anyone who should be? Please submit a resume to brian.devries@mtc.ac.za

ICRC-TEC Newsletter

"Any interesting news updates? Any needs for an online course? Interested in a visiting professor to teach a short course on-site? New online courses you have developed that may be of interest to others? Other questions or items of interest? Please email them to us for our next newsletter. Thanks so much."

How often the newsletter will appear and how much material it contains, depends entirely on the interest you show in it and the amount of material you send to us. You can do this by sending material to us (at icrctecnews@gmail.com).

For ICRC TEC,
James (Jim) Beeke
Gerhard (Jerry) Visscher



The Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary

Covid-19 Diaconal Ministry to ICRC Churches

Press Release of the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC

July 5, 2021

As the Covid-19 Pandemic continues to impact each of our churches in different ways, extents, and times, this has been an occasion for the ICRC denominations/federations to minister the mercy and compassion of Christ to one another, as God gives opportunity.

It has been observed that, by virtue of relationship, expertise and/or experience, some denomination/federations have been positioned to take the lead ministering mercy to another ICRC denomination/federation. In an effort to coordinate rather than duplicate efforts, the Diaconal Committee seeks to put forth those relationships already formed, through whom other churches might be able to also participate in said ministry.

If your denomination/federation becomes aware of the needs of a sister ICRC church and would like to participate in ministry to her, you might consider partnering in the ministry of the following churches/organizations in what they are already doing.

Region in Need	Church/Organization Leading in Meeting Needs
PFCCI (Central India)	Word & Deed, Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund
RPCNEI (Northeast India)	Word & Deed
AEPC (Kenya)	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
SRC (Sudan)	Word & Deed

The above list is not exhaustive, but merely reflects those relationships that have come to the attention of the Diaconal Committee members. Should your church/organization have an established relationship of mercy ministry toward another ICRC member church in which your church/organization would welcome the participation of others, please email that information to DC [Secretary Pieter Boon](#), that it might be added to this list.

On behalf of the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC

Africa: Pieter Boon
 Asia: Aaron Bae
 Australasia: Dirk van Garderen
 Europe: Gé Drayer and Ko Serier
 North America: David Nakhla and Rick Postma
 South America: Chris Boersema



Rev. Dr. P. Boon at ICRC 2017