



Lux Mundi

October 2026

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



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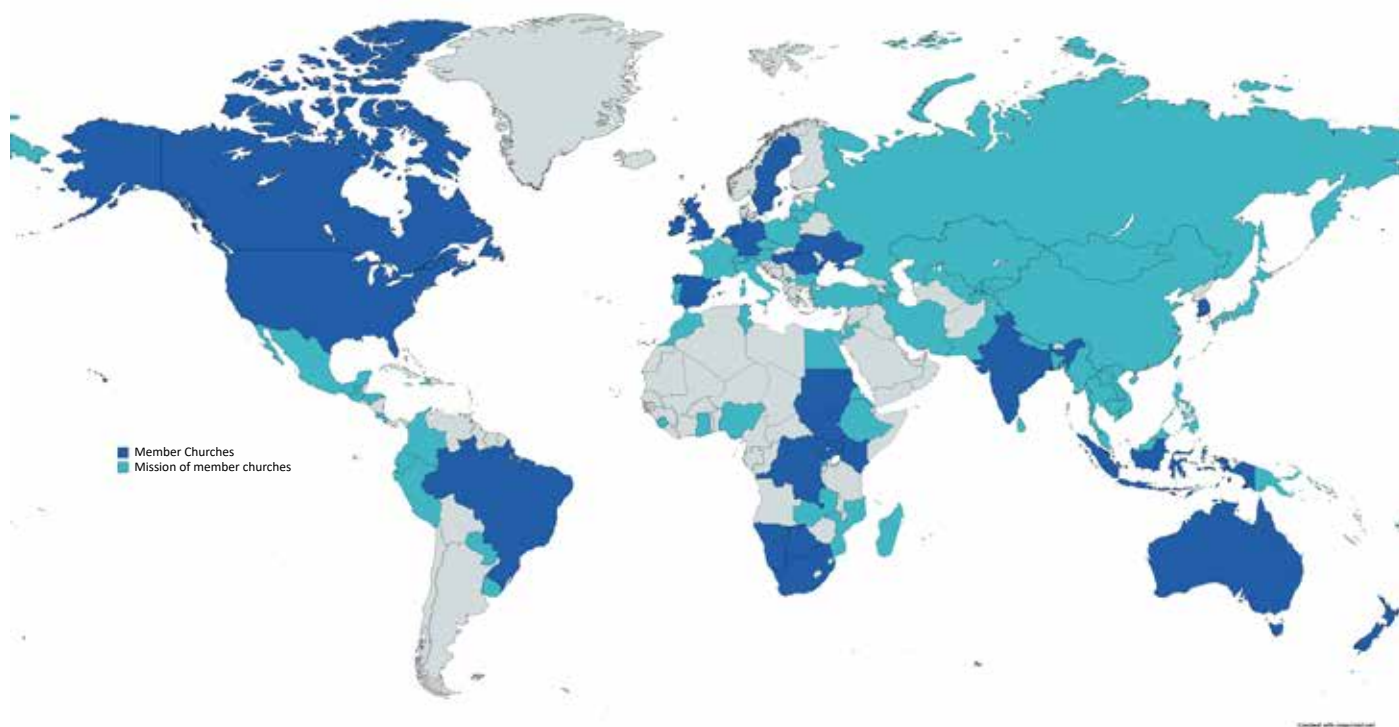
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ICRC 2026

This edition of Lux Mundi is a special one prepared with a view to the 11th Conference held on October 14 through 21 in Incheon, Korea. We open with the first devotional message spoken by Rev. Dr. S.G. Hur at ICRC 1997, the last time an ICRC was held in Korea. It's followed by an excerpt from Dr. Hur's memoirs regarding the origins of the ICRC. (Full disclosure by the editor: Dr. Hur was my minister in my youth, he's one of the first men who put on the path to ministry.)

Next you will encounter information regarding the ICRC: its Constitution, Regulations, and the current membership list. This is followed by a well-researched paper presenting an historical overview as well as an evaluation of the ICRC from a Korean perspective.



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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The late Soon Gil Hur served as a minister with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea. He was chairman of ICRC 1997.

Praise the LORD!

Editor: the following devotional was spoken during ICRC 1997 in Seoul, Korea.

Dear brothers:

God's people are a praising people. They have the joy of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ and they praise the Lord. They are not simply satisfied with their praise, they want all creatures to join them in praising the Lord. This joy and desire is made very clear in Ps. 148.

The Psalmist begins this song with "Hallelujah", that is, "Praise the Lord", and he closes it with the same "Hallelujah". His heart is full of the desire to sing to the Lord. He exhorts all creatures in the heavens to praise the Lord. He summons all the angels, all the beasts, even the sun, the moon and all the stars to praise the Lord. He then turns his attention to the earth, urging all creatures of the earth to praise the Lord. He summons the mountains, all the hills, all the beasts, and the flying birds. He summons kings, princes, and all people.

Finally the Psalmist exhorts God's chosen people, the children of Israel: "praise the Lord!" They are a people near to God. God had shown them a very special mercy, and they had many reasons to praise God.

In this Psalm we hear a mighty chorus of all creation praising the Lord. There is a unity of all creation in this praise. A wonderful harmony of voices is heard. In that mighty choir there is a special group of people. That is God's chosen one, the children of Israel. They are in the centre of the chorus, and they praise the Lord with a most wonderful unity. The Church is the people close to the Lord. They are partakers of the covenant of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. The people of the Lord know how lovely God the Lord is. And the Church must raise its voice in unity: "Praise the name of the Lord!"

We are gathered together here as representatives of the Church of the Lord in the world. May the name of the Lord be praised in unity not only by our singing, but also by what we do. For we work here for the sake of His Church.

Amen.

From Hur's Memoirs: The ICRC

In 1970s there was not yet the word, global village or global age. Australia was a very isolated continent far from European and American continents. At that time many migrants never visited their home country since they left it in 1950s. It was also not easy for the churches to have contact with sister churches abroad. The present situation is totally different from the situation of that day. Today people can easily communicate with each other globally by means of advanced communication. People can easily go and come from continent to continent.

We ministers, Bruning and I, sought a way to solve the problem of the isolation and to have a close relationship with sister churches in the other continents. As a result we thought out an idea to establish an international council of sister churches. We soon had consulted with Rev. G van Rongen who could well understand the isolation of the Australian Churches, because in the past he had served the church in Launceston of Tasmania. When we contacted him he was serving a church in The Netherlands. He completely agreed with us and he

worked out the matter within the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. The preparation committee in The Netherlands broadened the scope of invitation to include some faithful presbyterian churches like the Free Church of Scotland and The Evangelical Presbyterian Church and so on. Consequently, the first preliminary meeting for the International Conference of Reformed Churches was held in the GKV Columna Church of Groningen, The Netherlands in 1982. Rev. K Bruning and I were delegated on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. Seven federations of Churches gathered together there. This International Conference is not for an institutional unity of churches, but for the unity in the reformed faith. Presently there are 29 member churches in ICRC. The Conference which is held every four years had its 9th Conference in Wales in 2013.

Republished with permission from The Pilgrimage By Grace Alone: Memoirs of Dr Soon Gil Hur, published in the Reformed Guardian New Series, number 37, published in 2015.

ICRC: Constitution

(As amended by the 8th [2013] Meeting of the ICRC)

I. NAME

The name of the Conference shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches ("ICRC").

II. BASIS

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

III. PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the Member Churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the Member Churches;
3. to facilitate and promote cooperation among the Member Churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the Member Churches;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

IV. MEMBERSHIP

1. The Conference was duly constituted on October 26, 1982, by delegates from the eight founding churches, having been previously authorized to do so by their major assemblies. A list of past and present members of the Conference shall be maintained among the Conference's documents.
2. Churches eligible for membership are those which:
 - a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
 - b. have complied with the applicable Regulations regarding applications for membership;
 - c. are not members of any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis.
3. Admission to membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote.
4. Suspension or termination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote



ICRC 2017

of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes that the Member Church, in its doctrine and/or practice (which includes the ordination of persons to the offices of minister or ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture, cf., *Belgic Confession*, Article 30), is no longer in agreement with the Basis; removal of suspension shall also be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote. A proposal to suspend, terminate, or remove the suspension of the membership of a Member Church may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church. A suspended Member Church may send Delegates to meetings of the Conference but shall not vote.

5. When a Member Church fails to send at least one Delegate to three consecutive meetings of the Conference, its membership shall be automatically terminated as of close of the third such meeting, unless during that meeting the Conference determines by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, that there are good and sufficient grounds for such failure.

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF AUTHORITY

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

VI. AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

This Constitution may be amended by two-thirds majority vote of the major assemblies of the Member Churches eligible to vote, such amendment having been proposed to the Member Churches by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches present and eligible to vote, each Member Church having one vote. An amendment, as proposed to the Member Churches, is not amendable.

A proposal to amend the Constitution may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church eligible to vote, or by a Committee of the Conference, and shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary not later than two years before the meeting of the Conference.

ICRC Regulations

I. MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

1. The Conference shall ordinarily meet every four years.
2. Each meeting of the Conference shall determine the time, place, and convening Member Church for the next Conference.

II. DELEGATES, OFFICIAL OBSERVERS, OTHER GUESTS, PRIVILEGES OF THE FLOOR, AND VOTING

1. Delegates. Each Member Church shall appoint no more than four Delegates to each meeting of the Conference and, except as provided in *Regulations IX.2.a*, shall ordinarily bear the cost of its Delegates' travel, housing, and meal expenses in attending the meeting. It shall furnish to the Corresponding Secretary an appropriate letter of credentials for its Delegates, each of whom must be an ordained minister or ruling elder (presently or previously) in that Member Church.
 - a. Voting Delegates. Each Member Church shall designate not more than two of its Delegates as "Voting Delegates."

- b. Advisors. The other members of a Member Church's delegation shall be designated as "Advisors." They may participate in the deliberations of the Conference, but they may not vote.
2. Official Observers. Official Observers are duly credentialed representatives of non-Member Churches that faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis (*Constitution*, II) and are invited to attend the meeting (at their own expense) by the Coordinating Committee. Up to two Official Observers per sending church may be given the privilege of the floor, which may be revoked at any time by a majority vote of the Delegates present.
3. Other Guests. All persons present for the meeting who are neither Delegates nor Official Observers shall be considered as "Other Guests." A two-thirds majority vote of the Delegates present shall be required to grant the privilege of the floor to Other Guests, which may be subsequently revoked at any

time by a majority vote of the Delegates present.

4. Except as provided in the *Regulations*, no other persons shall be granted the privilege of the floor. The Conference may provide a designated area for Official Observers and for Other Guests (who have been granted the privilege of the floor), to distinguish them from others who may be present to observe the meeting.
5. Except as otherwise provided in either the *Constitution* or the *Regulations*, a (simple) majority vote in the affirmative adopts any motion. Only Voting Delegates may vote on matters being considered by the Conference. Insofar as is possible, significant decisions in respect of the purpose of the Conference (*Constitution*, III) should: i) be taken by consensus, and ii) give witness on the basis of the Scriptures and the Reformed standards.

III. CONVOCAATION OF THE CONFERENCE

1. The convening Member Church shall organize a prayer service prior to the opening session of the Conference.
2. The Moderator (of the previous meeting) shall convene the meeting of the Conference and preside through the election of Officers.
3. The Moderator (of the previous meeting) shall appoint three Delegates who will serve as a Credentials Committee to examine and report on the credentials (previously furnished to the Corresponding Secretary) of each delegation.

IV. OFFICERS OF THE CONFERENCE

1. Each meeting of the Conference shall elect the following Officers: Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Coordinator, and Treasurer. The Vice-Moderator of the previous (quadrennial) meeting shall normally succeed to the office of Moderator and shall be declared elected by acclamation, unless the Conference determines to conduct an election.
2. The responsibilities of the Officers will be as follows:
 - a. The Moderator shall
 - 1) preside at the meetings of the Conference;
 - 2) make required appointments;
 - 3) call the meeting to order at the appointed time and see to it that each session is properly opened and closed;
 - 4) ensure that the matters on the agenda are dealt with as expeditiously as possible;

- 5) place before the meeting every motion that is made and duly seconded, and call for the vote;
 - 6) rule on all points of order, subject always to an appeal from two Voting Delegates;
 - 7) preside at the next quadrennial meeting of the Conference, appoint a Credentials Committee of three Delegates to examine and report on the credentials of each delegation; and continue to preside until a new slate of Officers has been elected;
 - 8) serve ex officio (with vote) as a member of the Coordinating Committee and its Executive Committee.
- b. The Vice-Moderator shall
 - 1) take the chair when the Moderator desires to express himself on any question before the meeting;
 - 2) assume the duties and privileges of the Moderator in his absence;
 - 3) assist the Moderator when needed;
 - 4) serve ex officio (with vote) as a member of the Coordinating Committee and its Executive Committee.
 - c. The Recording Secretary shall
 - 1) call the roll of Delegates at the commencement of the meeting and note the arrival and departure times of any who did not attend the whole meeting;
 - 2) keep an accurate record of all the Proceedings of the meeting, including a list of all Official Observers and Other Guests (who are granted the privilege of the floor);
 - 3) ensure that all documents are properly cared for during the meeting and are turned over to the Corresponding Secretary following the publication of the Proceedings of the meeting;
 - 4) arrange for the preparation of an electronic version of the Proceedings of the meeting and distribute it electronically to each of the Member Churches and to each member of the Coordinating Committee;
 - 5) forward an electronic edition of the Proceedings (edited to remove sensitive material) to the Website Committee (through the Corresponding Secretary) for posting on the ICRC Website;

- 6) serve ex officio (with vote) as a member of the Coordinating Committee.
- d. The Corresponding Secretary shall
 - 1) during the meetings of the Conference, assist the Recording Secretary when needed;
 - 2) in between the meetings of the Conference:
 - i. carry on correspondence on behalf of the Conference with regard to inquiries from the public, to the work of the Conference (and its Committees and Special Conferences), and to the next meeting of the Conference;
 - ii. prepare and present to the Conference a written report regarding his labors on behalf of the Conference;
 - iii. prepare and present to the Coordinating Committee an annual written report regarding his labors on behalf of the Conference;
 - iv. assist the convening Member Church in preparing for the next meeting of the Conference;
 - v. when necessary, assist Delegates from Member Churches and Invited Observers in applying for visas to attend meetings of the Conference;
 - vi. receive materials for the Agenda for the next meeting of the Conference, and distribute them, with the proposed Agenda, to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than three months before that meeting;
 - vii. receive proposals for amendments to either the Constitution or the Regulations that have been properly proposed by a Member Church and distribute them promptly to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches;
 - viii. receive reports of Study Committees and Special Conferences and distribute them promptly to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches;
 - ix. receive applications for membership in the Conference, advise Churches applying for membership of the procedure and requirements for such, and advise sponsoring Member Churches regarding their responsibilities with respect to such;
 - x. communicate the actions of the Conference (or its Coordinating Committee) to appropriate parties, including the extension of invitations to Official Observers and Other Guests;
 - xi. arrange for the preparation of a Press Release of the meeting of the Conference (for approval by the Conference) suitable for posting on the Conference's Website and for inclusion in the Proceedings;
 - xii. execute documents as required or authorized by the Conference (or the Coordinating Committee or its Executive Committee);
 - xiii. serve as an ex officio member of all Operating Committees and provide counsel to them as appropriate;
 - xiv. maintain updated copies of the Conference's *Constitution, Regulations, and Informational Documents*, as they may be amended from time to time;
 - xv. maintain the archives of the Conference's documents, including the Proceedings and papers from its prior meetings, and arrange for their safe storage;
 - xvi. where he is unsure regarding the discharge of any of the above responsibilities, he may seek the advice of the Executive Committee, under whose oversight he serves;
 - xvii. serve ex officio (with vote) as a member of the Coordinating Committee and its Executive Committee.
- e. The Coordinator shall
 - 1) preside at the meetings of the Coordinating Committee and the Executive Committee;
 - 2) maintain regular communication, as appropriate, with the chairman/convenors of all ICRC Committees, Conferences, and Consultations to encourage them in the faithful discharge of their responsibilities;
 - 3) make the necessary arrangements for, prepare an agenda for, convene, and preside at the annual meetings of the Coordinating Committee;

- 4) call, make the necessary arrangements for, prepare an agenda for, convene, and preside at the meetings of the Executive Committee;
- 5) serve ex officio (with vote) as a member of the Coordinating Committee and its Executive Committee.
- f. The Treasurer shall
 - 1) keep full and accurate accounts of receipts into and disbursements from the Treasury in books belonging to the Conference;
 - 2) receive and disburse the funds of the Treasury in accordance with the policies and directions of the Conference (*Regulations, IX*);
 - 3) deposit all funds of the Treasury in the name and to the credit of the Conference in insured or other accounts as may be designated by the Conference;
 - 4) execute documents as required or authorized by the Conference (or the Coordinating Committee);
 - 5) monitor the funds of the Treasury and alert the Coordinating Committee to significant deteriorations in the Conference's financial condition that might undermine the Conference's ability to meet its financial obligations;
 - 6) submit periodic reports to the Coordinating Committee, as he deems appropriate or is requested by the Executive Committee;
 - 7) submit an annual financial report to the Coordinating Committee summarizing: all receipts and disbursements, deposits and withdrawals from the Treasury, and the Conference's assets (including bank accounts and investments, and interest/dividends earned thereupon);
 - 8) where he is unsure regarding the discharge of any of the above responsibilities, he may seek the advice of the Executive Committee, under whose oversight he serves;
 - 9) serve ex officio (with vote) as a member of the Coordinating Committee.

V. COORDINATING COMMITTEE

There shall be a Coordinating Committee to arrange for the orderly carrying on of the work of the Conference

between the quadrennial meetings of Conference.

1. Membership. The members of the Coordinating Committee shall be:
 - a. the Coordinator;
 - b. and the following members (serving ex officio, with vote):
 - 1) the Moderator
 - 2) the Vice-Moderator;
 - 3) the Corresponding Secretary;
 - 4) the Recording Secretary;
 - 5) the Treasurer
 - 6) the Chairmen/Convenors of the following committees:
 - i. the Regional Conferences Committee;
 - ii. the Website Committee;
 - iii. the Missions Committee;
 - iv. the Theological Education Committee;
 - v. the Diaconal Committee.
2. Functions. The Coordinating Committee is to:
 - a. advise the Conference with respect to applications from churches seeking admission to membership;
 - b. propose to the Conference a nomination for the convening Member Church for the next quadrennial meeting of the Conference;
 - c. propose to the Conference a theme for the next quadrennial meeting of the Conference, and nominate two or three speakers;
 - d. propose to the Conference nominations for the Officers of the meeting: Moderator (usually the Vice-Moderator of the previous quadrennial meeting), Vice-Moderator (usually selected with a view to his serving as the Moderator of the next quadrennial meeting), Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, Coordinator, and Treasurer;
 - e. propose to the Conference nominations for the members (including the Chairman/Convenor when required) of Committees;
 - f. propose to the Conference a budget for the next four years, including such honoraria as it deems appropriate;
 - g. propose to the Conference an assessment

schedule for the next four years, based upon the budget it is also proposing to the Conference;

- h. extend invitations to non-Member Churches that appear to meet the requirements of Constitution, IV.2 to send (at their own expense) Official Observers to the next meeting of the Conference;
 - i. extend invitations to other non-Member Churches to send (at their own expense) observers (to be received as Other Guests);
 - j. deal responsibly with all matters pertaining to the implementation of a previously adopted action of the Conference, which had been inadvertently overlooked during the meeting of the Conference, and which requires action before the next meeting of the Conference;
 - k. in the event an Officer of the Conference (or a Chairman/Convenor of a Committee) becomes incapacitated or is otherwise unable or unwilling to continue to serve, appoint a minister or elder of a Member Church to perform the functions of that office on an interim basis;
 - l. advise the Conference in situations where, following a split or disruption in a Member Church, one of the churches resulting therefrom (but having a name different from that on the list of ICRC Member Churches) desires to be recognized as the (continuing) Member Church in the ICRC. However,
 - 1) such advice shall be given only after the Coordinating Committee has consulted with and sought the advice of appropriate representatives of those Member Churches that have first-hand knowledge of the situation; and
 - 2) the Coordinating Committee may, provided its advice is consistent with the advice it received from such consultation, authorize the Corresponding Secretary to implement its advice pending the decision by the next meeting of the Conference.
 - m. advise the Conference in situations involving a merger of a Member Church with a non-Member Church
3. Executive Committee. The Executive Committee of the Coordinating Committee ("the Executive Committee") shall consist of the Coordinator,

the Moderator, the Vice-Moderator, and the Corresponding Secretary.

- a. During the meetings of the Conference, the Executive Committee shall
 - 1) manage the proceedings of the meetings, and arrange and propose the business to be transacted in each session;
 - 2) liaise with the convening Member Church.
- b. Between meetings of the Conference, the Executive Committee shall
 - 1) oversee the work of the Corresponding Secretary and advise him in the execution of his duties (in such matters, he may participate in the deliberations, but not vote);
 - 2) oversee the work of the Recording Secretary and advise him in the execution of his duties;
 - 3) oversee the work of the Treasurer and advise him in the execution of his duties;
 - 4) arrange for periodic audits of the Treasury's accounts, as it deems appropriate, and submit an audit report to the Corresponding Secretary for distribution to the Member Churches with the Agenda materials;
 - 5) consult with the convening Member Church regarding the planning and arrangements for the next quadrennial meeting of the Conference, including the selection of a suitable venue for the meeting and the arrangements for the accommodation of the Delegates;
 - 6) propose an Agenda for the next meeting of the Conference, including reviewing materials received after the deadline for submission and making a recommendation(s) with respect to their inclusion in the Agenda;
 - 7) propose to the next meeting of the Conference: the erection of several Advisory Committees to assist the Conference in reviewing the matters before it, the assignment of specific matters to particular Advisory Committees, and nominations for the membership of such Advisory Committees;
 - 8) act as the legal representative of the Conference when necessary;
 - 9) meet in person not more than once (if such

meeting requires a significant expenditure of funds for travel)—and at other times, by telephonic or video conferencing media, at the call of the Coordinator and/or the Corresponding Secretary whenever such may be necessary to the accomplishment of its business.

4. Meetings. The Coordinating Committee shall meet annually by voice- or video-conference. The Coordinator and/or the Corresponding Secretary are authorized to call additional meetings. Administrative matters may be dealt with by email.
5. Reports. The Coordinating Committee shall report on its work to the next meeting of the Conference.

VI. COMMITTEES, SPECIAL CONFERENCES, AND CONSULTATIONS

The Conference may establish Operating, Facilitating, and Study Committees (*Constitution*, III). Any such Committees shall report to the Coordinating Committee every year and to the meeting of the Conference until they have completed their task.

The Conference may also call Special Conferences on subjects of mutual concern and arrange for Consultations among the agencies of the Member Churches. The mandates of the respective Committees and Special Conferences shall be included in the Conference's Informational Documents. In the discharge of their

respective mandates, Committees, Special Conferences, and Consultations shall take care not to infringe or intrude upon the prerogatives of the Member Churches for the conduct of their own ministries.

1. ICRC Operating Committees

Operating Committees are established, normally with three to five members (together with an alternate), to oversee a particular part of the Conference's operations (e.g., Regional Conferences, the Website). Members of an Operating Committee shall be elected at each meeting of the Conference and may be re-elected to serve at the pleasure of the Conference. The Conference will designate a chairman for an Operating Committee from among those elected, and the Operating Committee shall elect from among its members a secretary, who will keep minutes of the meetings and send copies to both the Corresponding Secretary and the Coordinator. All reports (other than interim reports) of Operating Committees should be submitted to the Corresponding Secretary for distribution to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than six months before the next meeting of the Conference. Ordinarily, Operating Committees shall meet by voice- or video-conferencing media, and shall meet at least semi-annually. The expenses of an Operating Committee shall be borne by the Treasury.

2. ICRC Facilitating Committees

Facilitating Committees are established, normally with



Chairman Douw Breed and the Diaconal Committee at ICRC 2022

five to seven members (together with two alternates), to assist the Conference in facilitating and promoting cooperation among the Member Churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy. Members of a Facilitating Committee shall be elected at each meeting of the Conference and may be re-elected to serve at the pleasure of the Conference. The Conference will designate a chairman for a Facilitating Committee from among the appointees, and the Facilitating Committee shall elect from among its members a secretary, who will keep minutes of the meetings and send copies to both the Corresponding Secretary and the Coordinator. All reports (other than interim reports) of Facilitating Committees should be submitted to the Corresponding Secretary for distribution to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than six months before the next meeting of the Conference.

Ordinarily, Facilitating Committees may meet once in person between meetings of the Conference (perhaps in conjunction with the appropriate Consultation), and at other times by voice- or video-conferencing media. The expenses of a Facilitating Committee shall be borne by the Treasury.

3. ICRC Study Committees

Study Committees are established, normally with five to seven members (together with two alternates), to study matters of mutual concern to the Member Churches and, when appropriate, to make recommendations to the Conference with respect to such matters (bearing in mind the nature and extent of the Conference's authority, Constitution, V). The members of a Study Committee shall be elected by the Conference with a view to their particular competency and experience in the subject matter, and with a view to the diversity of perspectives among the Member Churches. The Conference shall designate a Convenor from among those elected. The Study Committee shall elect from among its members a chairman and a secretary, who will keep minutes of the meetings and send copies to both the Corresponding Secretary and the Coordinator. All reports (other than interim reports) of Study Committees are to be submitted to the Corresponding Secretary for distribution to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than one year before the next meeting of the Conference. In discharging its mandate, a Study Committee shall solicit the input of the Member Churches (through their appropriate agencies). The expenses of a Study Committee shall ordinarily be borne by the Treasury.

4. ICRC Special Conferences

The Conference may call Special Conferences on subjects of mutual concern to which all Member Churches are urged to send representatives. The Conference shall designate one of the Member Churches to convene the Special Conference and to appoint a chairman and a secretary (who will keep minutes of the Special Conference and send copies to both the Corresponding Secretary and the Coordinator). All reports (other than interim reports) of Special Conferences are to be submitted to the Corresponding Secretary for distribution to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than one year before the next meeting of the Conference. Unless the Conference determines otherwise (and authorizes a special appropriation), the expenses of conducting the Special Conference (e.g., meeting hall rental, speakers' honoraria, promotional materials, etc.) shall be borne by the Treasury, but the travel, housing, and meal expenses of the Member Churches' representatives in attending the Special Conference shall be borne by their sending church.

5. ICRC Consultations

Representatives of the appropriate corresponding agencies of the Member Churches (e.g., world/home missions, Christian/theological education, diaconal/relief/development ministries of mercy) are encouraged to gather together periodically with their counterparts in the other Member Churches to consult with each other regarding the ministries that have been entrusted to them and to explore ways in which they might cooperate with one another to advance the cause of Christ. Unless such Consultations are already being arranged by a Facilitating Committee, each Consultation, before it adjourns, shall select a host agency, a chairman, and a secretary, and set the date and place, for the next Consultation, and communicate such to both the Corresponding Secretary and the Coordinator. If several years have elapsed since a Consultation has last met, the Coordinating Committee may encourage the Consultation to meet and, towards that end, may appoint a host and a convenor for such meeting. Ordinarily the minutes of a Consultation's proceedings shall not be circulated beyond the participants in the Consultation. The travel, housing, and meal expenses of the Member Churches' representatives in attending the Consultation shall be borne by their sending church.

VII. AGENDA

1. The following shall be placed on the Agenda for the meetings of the Conference:

- a. report of the Credential Committee (when available);
 - b. correspondence from Member Churches;
 - c. discussion of reports from Member Churches;
 - d. applications for membership from other Churches;
 - e. reports from its Committees and any Special Conferences;
 - f. reports from the Corresponding Secretary;
 - g. reports from the Coordinating Committee;
 - h. recommendations from any two Member Churches to extend an invitation to another church to send observers to the Conference.
 - i. opportunities to pray for Member Churches particularly those experiencing difficulty.
2. The Agenda shall also include several blocks of time, so as to allow for bilateral meetings of various delegations.
 3. Each Member Church is encouraged to submit a written report highlighting significant actions of its major assembly and developments in its life since the last meeting of the Conference. Ordinarily, such reports will not be read aloud to the Conference, rather the Conference will allocate time in the Agenda for a discussion of the reports, during which Delegates from the Member Churches may ask questions and/or discuss portions of a Member Church's report. In preparing their reports, Member Churches are encouraged to make use of the Suggested Form for Member Church Reports.
 4. Materials for the Agenda are to be submitted to the Corresponding Secretary not later than six months in advance of the next meeting of the Conference. Recommendations (from other than Operating Committees or Facilitating Committees) are to be in the hands of the Corresponding Secretary for distribution to the interchurch relations committees of the Member Churches not later than one year in advance of the next meeting of the Conference. Proposed amendments to Committee proposals can be received by the Corresponding Secretary up to the opening session of the next meeting of the Conference. Agenda materials received less than six months before the opening of the next meeting of the Conference shall only be considered if the Conference so decides.
 5. The Agenda must be finalized three months in advance and a copy be sent to all Member Churches.
 6. All matters placed on the Agenda for the meeting of the Conference, except those for which review is unnecessary or inappropriate, shall be referred to Advisory Committees to be elected by the Conference, which shall review the matters referred to them, so as to assist the Conference in understanding them and to advise the Conference concerning them, especially with respect to recommendations contained therein. The report of an Advisory Committee shall be considered by the Conference when the matters assigned to that Advisory Committee are taken up by the Conference.
 7. Additional subjects for the Agenda introduced by a Delegate of a Member Church shall be restricted to those matters which are important and urgent and which could not have been placed on the Agenda in a regular way. In such cases, the meeting of the Conference shall decide by a two-thirds majority whether to place these matters on the Agenda.

VIII. RULES OF ORDER

While binding the Conference to the observance of detailed parliamentary rules is not suitable for a conference consisting of delegates from many diverse backgrounds, the following general rules may serve to maintain good order in the meetings of the Conference.

1. Main Motion. A main motion presents a specific subject for consideration or action by the Conference.
 - a. A main motion is acceptable if the mover has been recognized by the Moderator and another motion is not pending before the Conference; if requested by the Moderator, the mover will present the motion in writing.
 - b. A main motion is not acceptable if:
 - 1) it conflicts with the *Constitution* or the Regulations of the Conference;
 - 2) if another motion is before the Conference;
 - 3) it is in conflict with a decision already made by this meeting of the Conference.
2. Motion to Amend. A motion to amend is a proposal to alter the main motion in language or meaning before voting on the main motion. A motion to amend: i) must be germane to the main motion, and ii) must not nullify the main motion.
3. Motions to Defer or to Take No Action.

- a. If deemed advisable, the Conference may decide to defer a motion temporarily. Deferring a motion implies that the Conference will resume consideration of the motion at a later time in the meeting.
 - b. If the Conference prefers not to take any action regarding a matter, it may adopt a motion to take no action.
4. Motions to Reconsider or to Rescind. If for weighty reasons a Voting Delegate who has voted with the majority opinion desires either a reconsideration or a rescission of a matter once decided, he may:
 - a. move to reconsider the action—the purpose of which is to propose a new discussion, the possible proposal of additional amendments, and/or a new vote on the matter;
 - b. move to rescind a previous decision—the purpose of which is to annul that decision as if the original motion had been defeated.
 5. Call for a Division of the Question. At the request of any Voting Delegate, a motion consisting of more than one part may be divided appropriately and each part voted upon separately.
 6. Appeal against the Ruling of the Moderator. If any two Voting Delegates are not satisfied with a ruling of the Moderator, they may appeal the ruling and ask the Conference to vote on whether to sustain the ruling.
 7. Discussion. The Moderator should allow flexibility while still maintaining good order. He should ensure that all Delegates are able to follow the discussion and to understand the motions. When the discussion leads to alternative views on a matter, he should ask the appropriate Advisory Committee to review the matter and recommend a way forward, and he should encourage the Delegates to work toward consensus.
 - a. Anyone with the privilege of the floor wishing to speak must be recognized by the Moderator before addressing the Conference.
 - b. The Moderator should obtain the support of a second before putting a motion to the Conference for discussion.
 - c. If a speaker does not keep to the point under discussion or becomes unnecessarily lengthy in his remarks, the Moderator should call the Delegate to speak to the point and avoid unnecessary remarks.
 - d. If a speaker has spoken twice on an issue, others who have not yet spoken twice should ordinarily be given priority by the Moderator.
 - e. When the Moderator believes that a motion under consideration has been discussed sufficiently, he should propose that the vote be taken. If there are no objections, the vote may then be taken. If there are objections, the Moderator should allow continued discussion or call for a (two-thirds majority) vote on whether to end discussion.
 - f. Any Voting Delegate, when he deems a matter has been discussed sufficiently, may move to close the discussion. If a two-thirds majority votes to close discussion, the motion under consideration shall be voted on after those who have already requested to speak have been given opportunity to do so.
8. Voting.
 - a. Ordinarily votes will be determined by a voice vote, and the Moderator will call for both the “Yes” and the “No” votes. Where the Moderator is unsure, or if a Voting Delegate disagrees with the Moderator’s judgment on a voice vote, the Moderator shall retake the vote by a show of hands.
 - b. In matters of a personal nature or of great importance, it is advisable that the Conference vote by ballot.
 - c. A Voting Delegate may ask to have his negative vote recorded.
 9. Right of Protest. It is the right of any Voting Delegate to protest against any decision of the Conference. Protests should be in writing and registered promptly.
 10. Closed Session. A closed session is one in which only the Delegates of Member Churches are present. The Conference may allow the Observers to be present. The Conference should not go into closed session except in unusual or delicate situations. Discussions in Closed Session are confidential.

IX. FINANCES

The Conference shall establish a Treasury, into which all assessments and other receipts shall be deposited, and out of which, all expenses of the Conference shall be paid or reimbursed in accordance with the actions and policies of the Conference.

1. Assessments

- a. Each meeting of the Conference shall approve a budget for the Conference for the next four years.
 - b. Before each meeting of the Conference, each Member Church is requested to inform the Corresponding Secretary of the number of its baptized members, as of the close of the calendar year immediately preceding such meeting.
 - c. The total assessment to each Member Church shall be determined by apportioning the total budget for the Conference for the next four years to each Member Church on the basis upon which the number of its baptized members—weighted by the per capita income of the nation in which such Member Church is located (to be ascertained from a standard recognized published index)—bears to the total number of baptized members of all Member Churches, subject to the following limitations: (1) the assessment to any Member Church shall not be less than an amount equal to fifty US dollars (\$50); (2) the assessment to any Member Church shall not exceed twenty-five percent of the total budget for the Conference.
 - d. A Member Church's total assessment for the four-year budget should be paid in four equal annual installments.
2. Conference Meeting Expenses
- a. The Treasury shall bear the following expenses:
 - 1) all food consumed by Delegates, Official Observers, Other Guests, and their spouses at the meetings of the Conference;
 - 2) accommodations for up to two Delegates per Member Church;
 - 3) upon the advice of the Executive Committee, travel costs for up to one delegate for those Member Churches that are unable to bear that cost;
 - 4) costs of travel and accommodations, plus a nominal honorarium, for the speakers.
 - b. Unless the Conference determines otherwise with respect to a particular request for payment or reimbursement, the Treasury shall not bear any of the following expenses:
 - 1) travel costs to attend the meeting of the Conference;
 - 2) except for food consumed at the meetings of the Conference, any of the expenses of Official Observers or Other Guests (or their spouses), or of spouses of Delegates.
3. Other Expenses. The Treasury shall also bear the expenses for:
- 1) all honoraria approved by the Conference;
 - 2) meetings of the Coordinating Committee and its Executive Committee;
 - 3) meetings of Operating Committees, Facilitating Committees, and Study Committees;
 - 4) conducting Special Conferences (e.g., meeting hall rental; speakers' travel, meals, accommodation, and honoraria; promotional materials, etc.), but not for the travel, meals, or accommodation of the participants;
 - 5) if upon the advice of the Coordinating Committee, conducting Regional Conferences (e.g., meeting hall rental; speakers' travel, meals, accommodation, and honoraria; promotional materials, etc.)—but not for the travel, meals, or accommodation of the participants;
 - 6) other items included in the budget approved by the Conference.
- X. APPLICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP**
1. Prior to making an application for membership, the major assemblies of Churches that may be eligible for membership in the Conference shall ordinarily demonstrate their desire to be an active participant in the Conference by sending an Official Delegate(s) to at least one meeting of the Conference. They are also encouraged to send an Official Delegate(s) to the appropriate ICRC Regional Conference.
 2. In making an application for membership in the Conference, major assemblies of Churches shall furnish to the Corresponding Secretary copies (either paper or digital) of: their confessional standards, declaratory acts (if applicable), form of government, and form(s) of subscription, together with a brief overview of their history, ecclesiastical relationships, memberships in ecumenical organizations, missions activities, and the theological education of their ministers.
 3. Applications for membership in the Conference shall be sponsored by at least two Member Churches, which, in their own ministries, have ongoing first-hand knowledge of the ministry and life of the applicant Church. Any Member Church in the same country as

the applicant shall also be consulted. In their letters of sponsorship, Member Churches shall include a statement of the reasons or grounds which lead them to conclude the applicant Church faithfully adheres to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis (*Constitution*, II). They should assist the applicant Church in preparing her application, as needed.

4. Churches applying for membership in the Conference should make every effort to send an Official Delegate(s) to the meeting of the Conference at which their application is to be considered, in order to be able to respond to questions and meet with the appropriate Advisory Committee(s) and respond to questions. Ordinarily, no action to receive an applicant Church as a member will be taken by the Conference without such Official Delegate(s) being present, unless the Conference determines by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, to proceed with acting upon the application.
5. The World Council of Churches and the World Communion of Reformed Churches are deemed to be organizations whose aims and practices are in conflict with the Basis (*Constitution* IV.2.c).

XI. INFORMATIONAL DOCUMENTS

The Conference will maintain a collection of its Informational Documents which might be useful to the

Member Churches in pursuing the purposes for which the Conference was established (*Constitution*, III). Either the collection, or a particular document listed therein, may be amended by a majority vote of the Delegates, with the exception of the List of ICRC Member Churches (which may be amended only as provided in *Constitution*, IV). Included in the collection are the following:

1. List of ICRC Member Churches
2. List of ICRC Committees (with their respective mandates)
3. Member Church Assessment Schedule (2009)
4. Suggested Form for Member Church Reports
5. Protocol for Responding to Major Disasters (2009)
6. Protocol for Responding to Opportunities to Assist Persecuted Christians (2009)

XII. AMENDMENTS TO THE REGULATIONS

These *Regulations* may be amended or suspended by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches present and eligible to vote, each Member Church having one vote.

A proposal to amend the *Regulations* may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church, or by a Committee of the Conference, and shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary not later than one year prior to the meeting of the Conference.



Panel discussion following a speech at ICRC 2022



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The History and Significance of the ICRC

The Confessional Solidarity of Reformed Theology: Its History and Theological Legacy

Editor's preface: The following article was researched and written for a Korean audience, hence its emphases and flavour. Nevertheless, it will speak to a much broader audience. We are grateful to Dr. Lim for allowing his article to be used by the ICRC as a record of its history. – Regarding the use of acronyms, the practice in this article will be, for the most part, to name churches by their English name but the acronym in their language of origin.

The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) is an international body of Reformed and Presbyterian churches founded in 1982 in Groningen, the Netherlands. It is a confessional international fellowship, formed on the basis of a common confession by churches that hold to the theological legacy of the Reformation — the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards.¹ Unlike broad ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) or the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the ICRC occupies a distinctive position in that it makes confessional unity the precondition of fellowship.

Of special note, the second ICRC conference to be held in Korea will take place on October 14–21, 2026, hosted by the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea. Yet the Kosin churches themselves know rather little about the ICRC; it has scarcely become a matter of interest for local congregations. International bodies of this kind tend to remain at the level of the general assembly and rarely capture the attention of individual churches. Taking the ICRC's meeting in Korea as the occasion, this article seeks to promote awareness of its history and significance.

This essay traces the background and historical development of the ICRC, examines its theological identity and organizational structure, and surveys the principal theological themes discussed at its conferences. By treating the relationship with the Korean Kosin churches in a separate chapter, it also seeks to illuminate the history and significance of the ICRC from the perspective of Korean Reformed theology.

2. THE BACKGROUND OF THE FOUNDING: THE SEARCH FOR INTERNATIONAL REFORMED SOLIDARITY

2.1 The Ecumenical Movement and the Crisis of Conscience of the Reformed Churches

From the mid-twentieth century onward, the international Christian world came to be dominated by the inclusivist ecumenical movement centered on the World Council of Churches (WCC, founded 1948). From the standpoint of confessional Reformed theology, the WCC's theological inclusivism and its socio-political conception of mission represented a serious deviation. In the same year, 1948, the International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) was organized in opposition to the WCC, but it was limited by its fundamentalist theological basis. Conservative churches of the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions therefore began to seek a fellowship structure of their own.

2.2 The Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) and Its Limitations

In 1946 conservative Reformed churches organized the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES). Established just after the Second World War, chiefly by the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), and the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA), this body aimed at an international union of churches standing on the Reformed confessions, over against the WCC-style ecumenism that was drifting into liberal theology. The Kosin churches too once belonged to this body and through it maintained contact with the international Reformed community. In 1988 the RES changed its name to the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC).

Over time, however, the RES drifted from its founding spirit. Differences deepened among the member churches over the authority and inerrancy of Scripture, women's ordination, and ecumenical relations. Although the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) were moving down the road of theological liberalism, the RES failed to discipline them. An observer at the time judged: "The ICRC is in a sense an alternative to the RES. The RES refused to expel the GKN and failed to uphold its own constitution. Several churches that were once RES members have left that body and have joined, or are considering joining, the ICRC." In the end the RES, later REC, grew increasingly liberal and drew closer to the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC); in 2010 the two bodies merged to form the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC). Churches seeking to maintain a strict confessional identity concluded that the REC could no longer serve as an adequate framework of fellowship.^{2,3}

2.3 The Search for a New International Fellowship

Against this background, discussions about founding a separate international fellowship that would maintain stricter confessional standards took concrete shape, led by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (GKv), the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). The GKv, notably, had never joined the RES in the first place because of its relation to the liberalizing GKN. What these three churches had in common was a thoroughgoing commitment to the Reformed confessions and an uncompromising stance on the authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

3. THE FOUNDING AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE ICRC

3.1 The Groningen Constituent Meeting (1982) and the First Edinburgh Conference (1985)

In 1982 the first meeting toward the founding was held in Groningen, the Netherlands. Officially the ICRC calls this gathering a Preliminary Meeting and counts the 1985 Edinburgh conference as its first regular conference; but since it was at Groningen in 1982 that the constitution and the basis of fellowship were laid down, that year is taken here as the founding year of the ICRC. Among the founding participants were the GKv, the CanRC, the FRCA, the Free Church of Scotland (FCS), the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland (EPCI), and the Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI); the Korean Kosin churches also took part as a founding member.^{4,5}

The constituent meeting defined the essential character of the ICRC as a “conference” of churches, not a “federation.” The name itself — Conference rather than Synod or Council — is significant: not a higher body ruling over the member churches, but a gathering of churches that fellowship and cooperate on the basis of confessional unity. The constitution states five purposes of the ICRC: to express and promote the unity of faith the member churches have in Christ; to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among them; to promote cooperation among the member churches in mission and in the other tasks entrusted to them; to study the common problems and issues facing the member churches and to formulate recommendations; and to present a Reformed testimony to the world. Visible expressions of fellowship include participation in one another’s worship, and may extend to communion at the Lord’s table, and the mutual reception of ministers and members.⁶

3.2 Early Member Churches and Growth

Since its founding the ICRC has grown steadily, expanding to

more than thirty denominations across Europe, Asia, Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. The conference ordinarily meets every four years; delegates sent by each member church discuss common theological tasks and strengthen ecclesiastical fellowship. The growth of the ICRC has been not merely quantitative but a process by which churches committed to confessional Reformed theology around the world have deepened their international solidarity.

4. THE THEOLOGICAL IDENTITY AND CONFESSION OF THE ICRC

4.1 Confessional Commitment

The most striking feature of the ICRC is its thoroughgoing confessional commitment. Its member churches without exception have officially adopted either the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) and/or the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms) as the norm of their faith and life, one member church also holds to the Second Helvetic Confession. This principle — doctrinal unity as the prior condition of fellowship — fundamentally distinguishes the ICRC from most other ecumenical bodies.

The Heidelberg Catechism (1563) plays a central role in the instruction and worship of ICRC member churches. Opening with the question and answer concerning “my only comfort,” it captures the heart of Reformed theology: assurance of salvation in Christ and a life of gratitude.⁷ The Canons of Dort (1618–1619), which articulated and affirmed the doctrines of grace against Arminianism, supply the theological grounds of the Calvinistic soteriology the ICRC maintains. The Belgic Confession (1561), drafted on the basis of the French Confession, became the common confession of the continental Reformed churches. The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) is very similar to the French and Belgic Confessions.

The Westminster Standards, though of later composition, are esteemed as the most systematically ordered of the confessional documents. It is a fact of some interest that in the 1960s, when the GKv entered into a sister-church relationship with the Kosin churches — its first substantial contact with a Presbyterian church — it undertook a painstaking synodical analysis and examination of the Westminster Standards. This confirmation that the continental Reformed and the Presbyterian traditions confess one and the same Reformed faith may be regarded as the theological groundwork that later made it possible for the ICRC, a confessional body embracing both traditions, to come into being at the GKv’s initiative.⁸

4.2 The Authority and Inerrancy of Scripture

ICRC member churches commonly confess the full authority and inerrancy of Scripture. This is not a merely declaratory position but a foundation to be worked out in practice in every area of the church's life — theological education, preaching, catechesis. The New Testament textual scholarship of Jakob van Bruggen is counted among the notable contributions to the scholarly grounding of this position. Since the authority of Scripture bears directly on such contemporary issues as women's ordination and creation, it has continued to function as the normative premise in the papers and discussions of ICRC conferences.⁹

5. THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND OPERATING PRINCIPLES OF THE ICRC

5.1 The Conference

The central gathering of the ICRC is the Conference, held every four years. Delegations from each member church attend, hear and discuss theological papers, decide on membership and on matters of fellowship, and determine the agenda and venue of the next conference. This year, the Conference will set aside time for churches to meet bi-laterally as well as in their regions (Americas, Europe, Africa, and Asia-Pacific). Its decisions are not the rulings of a higher body binding the member churches; they carry an advisory character, arrived at by the deliberation of churches standing on an equal footing. This is the ecclesiological principle of the ICRC.¹⁰

5.2 Committees and Research

Between conferences an Interim Committee handles the day-to-day administration of the Conference and prepares the next meeting, with a Corresponding Secretary and a Treasurer carrying out the practical work. Each conference also establishes committees for particular tasks. Thus the 1989 Langley conference appointed a Committee on Theological Affirmation to study the marks of the true church (see chapter 7), and the 1993 Zwolle conference mandated the Missions Committee to organize regional mission conferences during the interim in four regions — the Americas, Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Europe. This structure of research and cooperation is the institutional device by which the ICRC functions not as a mere fellowship club but as a deliberative body carrying out common theological tasks.¹¹

5.3 Sister-Church Relations

Fellowship within the ICRC ultimately takes concrete form in "sister church" relations. These are not merely formal ties but substantive relations in which churches

confirm one another's confessional integrity and share all the privileges and responsibilities of ecclesiastical fellowship: mutual recognition of attestations when members move, pulpit exchange, mutual support in times of crisis, cooperation in missions, and the like. ICRC membership does not of itself create sister-church relations; establishing them remains the prerogative of each church. The ICRC's theological account of this matter was given in the 1993 report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation (see 7.3).

6. A SURVEY OF THE PRINCIPAL ICRC CONFERENCES

Since its founding the ICRC has met as follows; each conference is known by the name of its host city.¹²

- Preliminary Meeting: Groningen, the Netherlands, 1982.
- 1st: Edinburgh, Scotland, 1985.
- 2nd: Langley, Canada, 1989.
- 3rd: Zwolle, the Netherlands, 1993.
- 4th: Seoul, Korea, 1997.
- 5th: Philadelphia, USA, 2001.
- 6th: Pretoria, South Africa, 2005.
- 7th: Christchurch, New Zealand, 2009.
- 8th: Cardiff, Wales, 2013.
- 9th: Jordan, Canada, 2017.
- 10th: Windhoek, Namibia, 2022.
- 11th (forthcoming): Incheon, Korea, October 14–21, 2026.

6.1 1982 Groningen (the Netherlands) — The Constituent Assembly

Overview: The assembly met from October 26 to November 4, 1982, in the Refajah Church in Groningen, hosted by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (GKv). G. van Rongen (FRCA) served as chairman and M. van Beveren (CanRC) as clerk. Nine churches attended (the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka being absent); from Korea, Kun Sam Lee (K. S. Lee) of the Kosin churches was present.

Main business: At the first session (October 26) the Basis of the Conference was determined to be the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession of Faith.

ARTICLE 7 BASIS OF THE CONSTITUENT CONFERENCE

It is decided that the basis of the Conference is the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession of Faith.¹³

It is worth noting that the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms are not named here. On the following

day a Constitution and Regulations newly drafted by a three-man committee — Macleod (FCS), Thomas (EPCI), and Visscher (CanRC) — were adopted after clause-by-clause deliberation, and after the assembly Interim Rules were also drawn up. Lectures were given by professors of the Kampen seminary, including L. Doeke on “Harmony and Diversity in the Reformed Confessions,” along with addresses by D. Deddens, P. van Gurp, and M.K. Drost.

Character: The meeting was devoted to organization rather than the transaction of substantive business, and the leading role of the Dutch GKV was unmistakable. From the outset the Conference made clear its identity as a confessionally faithful international conference, an alternative to the WCC and the RES (REC). Van Rongen’s opening address — that the continental Reformed (Three Forms of Unity) and the Presbyterians (Westminster Standards) stand on common ground — well summarizes the theological premise of the assembly. An interesting point is the discrepancy that, while the opening address spoke of the “Westminster Standards,” Article 7 stating the Basis named only the Westminster Confession of Faith. The minutes do not explain why the Larger and Shorter Catechisms were omitted. Given, however, that two of the three drafters of the constitution were Presbyterians and that no objection to the wording is on record, the omission may reflect not any slighting of the Presbyterian tradition but the practice of the participating Presbyterian churches themselves — the Free Church of Scotland, for instance, takes only the Westminster Confession as the subordinate standard for office-bearers’ subscription. In any case, by the constitutional revision of 1989 at the latest, the Basis was formally expanded to the full Westminster Standards, catechisms included (see 6.3).¹⁴

6.2 1985 Edinburgh (Scotland) — First Regular Conference

Overview: Held September 3–10, 1985, in St Columba’s Free Church of Scotland (FCS). D. Lamont (FCS) chaired, with G. Van Rongen (FRCA) as vice-chairman, and M. Van Beveren (CanRC) as clerk. Three churches were admitted as new members: the Free Church in Southern Africa (FCSA), the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA), and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI). From the Korean Kosin side Byung Sae Oh attended, Soon Gil Hur was present as delegate from the FRCA.

Main business: The financial structure was established — a General Fund, assessments based on communicant membership and per-capita income, the appointment of a treasurer, and audit rules. A Missions Committee was created, and at the proposal of J. Faber a committee

was formed to study common texts of the ecumenical creeds (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed). Principal addresses included J. Faber on “The Ecclesiology of the Reformed Confessions,” H. M. Ohmann on “The Piety of the Psalms,” D. Macleod on “The Sacraments and New Life in the Spirit,” J. N. Macleod on “The Doctrine of the Covenant,” and J. Visscher on “The Practice of Interchurch Relations.”

Character: A meeting that consolidated the institutional foundations laid at the founding — finances and standing committees. It had strongly the character of a lecture conference, and it left only brief typescript minutes (there is no printed volume). The introduction of Eastern Europe (Daniel Szabo of Hungary) and of churches of the Third World is also noteworthy.

6.3 1989 Langley (Canada) — Second Conference

Overview: Held June 19–28, 1989, at the Canadian Reformed (CanRC) church of Langley; the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) were admitted to membership. From Korea, Ho Jin Jun attended and presented a paper, introduced the Kosin churches and the seminary in Busan (including its plan to relocate to Seoul), and formally announced Kosin’s wish to host the next conference in Seoul.

Main business: A large body of amendments to the Constitution and Regulations came to the table. Here the confessional Basis of the Conference came to include not only the Westminster Confession of Faith but also the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. Also considered were the FCS proposal on the mutual recognition of members, offices, and sacraments among member churches (defeated), the CanRC/FRCA proposal that REC membership constitutes an obstacle to ICRC membership (defeated eight to three), and the question of the scope of delegates’ subscription (defeated). Seven papers in all were delivered, including C. Graham on “Nehemiah,” J. van Bruggen on “Baptism with the Spirit,” D. Macleod on “Christology,” and J. Douma on “Apartheid.” The report of the committee on the ecumenical creeds (Credo) was received, a workshop on rules for interchurch relations was held, and a Committee on Theological Affirmation (convened by Faber) was appointed to study the concept of the true church. Seoul (September 1993) was chosen as the venue of the next conference.¹⁵

Character: The most contentious conference to date. Douma’s paper on apartheid drew a frontal rebuttal from the South African side, and the dispute widened into one of principle — whether an ecclesiastical assembly may

deal with political matters (Article 30 of the Church Order of Dort). Tensions between the continental Reformed and the Presbyterian traditions over admission to the Lord's table and sister-church relations surfaced for the first time. The Korean element in the conference was more notable.

6.4 1993 Zwolle (the Netherlands) — Third Conference

Overview: Held September 1–9, 1993, in the church of Zwolle-Zuid, the Netherlands. It had originally been slated for Seoul, but when circumstances made this impossible for the Kosin churches, the GKv stepped in as host — a fact recorded in the report of the Corresponding Secretary. A. de Jager (GKv) chaired; Soon Gil Hur (KPKK) served as vice-chairman (succeeded by Kun Sam Lee from September 3). Four churches were admitted: the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS), the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA), and the Free Church of Central India (FCCI). The FRCA abstained from all admission votes, on the ground that unity of faith was not leading to mutual recognition as true churches for member churches on the home front.

Main business: Seven papers were delivered, focused largely on preaching: C. J. Haak on "Mission and the Wrath of God," N. H. Gootjes on "Catechism Preaching" (in two parts), H. M. Ohmann on "Redemptive-Historical Preaching," and J. Kamphuis on "The Church and Tolerance," among others. The report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation

(Faber) was referred to the member churches, the Missions Committee was mandated to organize regional mission conferences in four regions (Americas, Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Europe), and Seoul was again fixed as the venue for 1997.

Character: The decisive event was the expansion of membership into North American Presbyterianism, above all the admission of the OPC. The papers converged on homiletical themes — catechism preaching versus textual preaching, redemptive-historical versus exemplary preaching — questions that were also the follow-up to the discussion of the Nehemiah paper in 1989. This was Gootjes's first ICRC after concluding his ministry in Korea and moving to Canada in 1989; the minutes record his paper on catechism preaching (Sessions 9 and 10, Arts. 50, 55).

6.5 1997 Seoul (Seomun Church) — Fourth Conference

Overview: Held October 16–23, 1997, at Seomun Church in Seoul, hosted by the Kosin churches, with Soon Gil Hur in the chair. No fewer than seven churches were newly admitted, including the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (CGK) and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW); the FRCA, on the other hand, submitted a letter of withdrawal. With twenty member churches and thirty-three voting delegates, the ICRC had grown into a genuinely worldwide assembly. From Kosin, in addition, Seomun's minister Sung Bok Park, Eun Jo Park, Keun Doo Chung, and Yu Kwang Hyun attended.



Delegates at ICRC 1997

Main business: Five papers were given, including M. T. Bube on “Reformed Principles of Mission,” Soon Gil Hur on “Women in Office — with Special Reference to Deaconesses,” and R. B. Gaffin Jr on “The Challenge of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition.” The Constitution (membership article) and the Regulations (articles on attendance and agenda) were amended, a budget was set for the support of regional mission conferences, and a six-point reply was adopted to the OPC’s letter on the restructuring of ecclesiastical fellowship. The next venues were fixed: the United States in 2001 and South Africa in 2005, beginning the pattern of hosting conferences equitably around the world.

Character: The conference at which the Korean Kosin churches supplied host, chairman, and keynote papers all at once. It was distinctive that chairman Hur himself led the devotions at every session — meditations on the Psalms, Ephesians, Ezekiel, and Revelation, printed in full in the minutes. The Korean coloring was strong: J. P. Galbraith’s introduction to Korean church history (the refusal of Shinto shrine worship, Bruce Hunt, the beginnings of Kosin), experiences of Korean culture, and a visit to the seminary in Cheonan. S.G. Hur’s paper on deaconesses remains a source of direct relevance to the study of women’s ministry.

6.6 2001 Philadelphia (USA) — Fifth Conference

Overview: Held June 20–27, 2001, at Westminster Theological Seminary and the facilities of Beaver College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, hosted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). J. J. Peterson (OPC) chaired with B. de Graaf (CGK) as vice; M. van Beveren and P. Naylor served as clerks. From Kosin, Chang Ki Hwang and Sung Bok Kim attended as voting delegates, Jong Gil Byun and Nak Heung Yang as advisory delegates.

Main business: The central theme was “The Unity of the Church” in the Reformed tradition. J. De Jong (CanRC) spoke on “Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church,” D. Mackay (RPCI) on “Church Unity in the Westminster Tradition,” G. I. Williamson (OPC) on “The Regulative Principle of Worship,” and C. Pronk (CGK) on “The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Believer.” The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (RPCNEI) was admitted as the twenty-second member church. On the membership petition of the Free Church Continuing (FCS-C, later FCC), arising from the division in the Free Church of Scotland in 2000, the conference made clear that it possessed no jurisdiction, yet seated the petitioners in the plenary as non-voting participants and encouraged their application — a formula of reconciliation.

Character: Meeting at Westminster Seminary, the heartland

of North American Presbyterianism, the conference bore a strongly Presbyterian stamp. While debating vigorously how to heal the wound of the Scottish division that had first surfaced at the 1997 Seoul conference, it also exercised institutional flexibility, referring to the next conference an amendment to Article IV.a of the Constitution on widening the range of confessional documents acceptable for membership.

6.7 2005 Pretoria (South Africa) — Sixth Conference

Overview: Held October 12–19, 2005, at the Rietfontein church and the John Calvin School in Pretoria, South Africa. B. de Graaf (CGK) chaired, with B. Hoyt (RCNZ) as vice; C. VanSpronsen (CanRC) and P.J. Naylor (EPCEW) served as clerks. From Kosin, Koeng Ho Bae and Tae Jun attended as voting delegates.

Main business: The central theme was “The Lordship of Christ,” treated in three concentric circles — the believer, the church, and the world. A.J. de Visser (CanRC) spoke on “The Lordship of Christ in the Life of the Believer,” J.W. Maris on “The Lordship of Christ in the Church,” Y. Dethan on “The Lordship of Christ proclaimed in the World,” and D. Robertson on “Postmodern Apologetics and Evangelism.” The Reformed Churches of Spain (IRE) and the Confessing Reformed Church in Congo (ERCC, now URCC) were admitted as new members. After sharp debate over the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) — concerning the women-in-office controversy and its sister relation with the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) — an alternative motion incorporating the conference’s admonitions was carried, and conditional admission was granted. On petition of the Missions Committee, protocols were adopted for response to large-scale disasters and for the support of persecuted Christians.

Character: A conference that carried membership further beyond its earlier geographical bounds, into Africa and continental Europe. The complex church-political situation within host South Africa was its hottest issue. Soon Gil Hur, chairman of the 1997 Seoul conference, delivered a farewell address at this conference and retired from the scene.

6.8 2009 Christchurch (New Zealand) — Seventh Conference

Overview: Held October 15–22, 2009, at the Holiday Inn and the Bishopdale church in Christchurch, hosted by the Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ). Bruce Hoyt (RCNZ) chaired with R. Holst (EPCEW) as vice; C. VanSpronsen (CanRC) and P.J. Naylor (EPCEW) were clerks. From Kosin, Koeng Ho Bae and Jung Chul Choi attended as voting delegates.

Main business: The central theme was “The Vitality of the Reformed Faith,” addressing the varied challenges of contemporary society. G.W. Knight III spoke on “The Challenge of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement,” N.D. Kloosterman on “The Challenge of Individualism in Church Life,” F. van Dalen on “The Challenge of Islam,” and M. Chacko of India on “The Challenges of the Asia-Pacific Context.” The Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCInd), the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC), and the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (IRCK; Hun Soo Kim) were received into full membership, bringing the membership to thirty.

Character: A conference that laid down clear Reformed theological guidelines on the three great threats to the contemporary church — the charismatic movement, individualism, and Islam. While declaring, over against the charismatic movement, the sufficiency of Scripture and the cessation of the foundational gifts, it also recognized the need for indigenous confessions suited to the Asian context (such as Dr Mohan Chacko’s Asian catechism) — extending theological depth and worldwide reach at once.

6.9 2013 Cardiff (Wales) — Eighth Conference

Overview: Held August 28 – September 4, 2013, at Immanuel Presbyterian Church, Cardiff, Wales, hosted by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (EPCEW). R. Holst (EPCEW) chaired with D. Moes (URCNA) as vice; J. Visscher (CanRC) and P.J. Naylor were clerks. From Kosin, Koeng Ho Bae, Ho Jin Jun (advisory), and Kyung Yang Kim, among others, attended.

Main business: The central theme was “The Priority of Preaching.” Robert Letham spoke on “The Necessity of Preaching,” J. Visscher on “The Nature of Preaching (Explanation and Application),” and Ho Jin Jun on “Preaching in a Non-Literate Society.” The Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Kenya (AEPK) and the Sudanese Reformed Churches (SRC) were admitted as new members. The committee structure was thoroughly reorganized: with a Coordinating Committee, the Missions Committee, a Theological Education Committee, and a newly created Diaconal Committee, a network-centered system was established.

Character: For the first time in its history the conference made a Diaconal Committee permanent, marking a turning point at which the Reformed denominations began to respond jointly not only in missions but to worldwide disaster and poverty. The papers, concentrated on homiletics, defended the public authority of the proclaimed Word in a society dominated by visual media.



PCU delegates being congratulated upon admission into the ICRC (Photo: L. den Butter)

6.10 2017 Jordan (Canada) — Ninth Conference

Overview: Held July 12–19, 2017, at Immanuel United Reformed Church in Jordan, Ontario, hosted by the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA). D. Moes (URCNA) chaired, with M. Ebenezer (RPCInd) as vice; J. Visscher and P.J. Naylor were clerks. From Kosin, Aaron Bae and Koeng Ho Bae attended.

Main business: Marking the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, the conference opened each morning with meditations on the Five Solas. D.W.H. Thomas spoke on “John Calvin’s Sermons on Job” and J. Beeke on “Covenantal, Experiential Reformed Piety.” The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) and the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU) were received into full membership. On the other hand, in view of the decision of the June 2017 synod of the GKv to open the offices of minister and elder to women, the conference judged this a violation of Scripture and of the Belgic Confession (Article 30) and resolved, upon a motion put by the OPC and seconded by the CanRC, the immediate suspension of the GKv’s membership. The conference also formally took over from the GKv the publication of the international Reformed journal *Lux Mundi*, appointing R.C. Janssen as its editor.

Character: A heated conference in the Reformation’s quincentenary year. When the leading founding church, the Dutch GKv, declared its theological shift on women’s ordination, the conference boldly suspended its membership — a historic watershed at which it proclaimed to the world its resolve to guard Reformed identity and the supreme authority of Scripture amid the tide of secularization.

6.11 2022 Windhoek (Namibia) — Tenth Conference

Overview: Postponed a year by the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference met October 13–19, 2022, at the Windhoek Country Club Resort in Namibia, hosted by the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA). Douw Breed (GKSA) chaired, with A. Bae (KPCK) as vice; J. Visscher and R.C. Janssen served as clerks. From Kosin, Hae Shin Yu and Aaron Bae attended.

Main business: The central theme was “Theological Education”. M. Chacko spoke on “Centres for Theological Education, Ministry Training or Spiritual Formation? An Integrated Approach.” D. Breed (GKSA) presented on “Models or Alternate Strategies for Ministry training”. H. van den Belt presented on “The Authority of Scripture in Diverse Ethical Situations.” Admitted as new members were the Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Church, Bangalore, India (ARPCBI), the Evangelical Reformed Church in India (ERCI), the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Africa, Uganda (RPCA), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE), and the Reformed Churches The Netherlands (GKN) — the body formed by those who had left the GKv in protest against its shift. The membership of the GKv, suspended at the previous conference, was terminated by unanimous vote. J. Visscher, Corresponding Secretary since 2013, retired, and R.C. Janssen (CanRC) took office as the new Corresponding Secretary.

Character: Meeting on the African continent, the conference demonstrated that the center of gravity of

the world church is shifting toward the Majority World. Under the pressure of secular accreditation regimes in the West, strategies for preserving the integrity of Reformed seminaries were discussed in depth. The next conference, in 2026, is to be hosted by the Korean Kosin churches.

6.12 Looking Back on Ten Conferences (1982–2022)

First, identity and discipline. Passing through the founding era (1982–1993) and the beginnings of globalization (1997), the ICRC of the twenty-first century has walked the hard road of stern discipline and separation for the sake of the authority of Scripture and its own identity. It preserved that identity by embracing historically orthodox secession bodies — the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKv), born of painful divisions over worship, ministry, and theological direction — while resolutely severing, in the end, the mother church (the Dutch GKv) that had accepted secularization and women’s ordination.

Second, structural expansion from missions to diaconal work and education. The missions-centered committee system, through the creation of the Diaconal Committee in 2013 and the takeover of Lux Mundi in 2017, matured into a solid institutional whole embracing a worldwide Reformed disaster-relief network and the publication of a theological journal.

Third, persons, and the influence of the Korean church. The role of the Korean (Kosin) churches grew, cresting



Delegates at ICRC 2022

with the 1997 Seoul conference, when Soon Gil Hur and others served in the executive. From the 2000s came the admission of the Independent Reformed Church in Korea (Hun Soo Kim, IRCK) and the introduction of the theological legacy of Hong Jeon Kim. Through the continuing counsel of the next generation of theologians such as Koeng Ho Bae and Aaron Bae, and the cooperation of Kosin missionaries in Asian and African mission fields, the Korean contribution settled from a diplomacy of persons into the practical and enduring channels of global theological education and cooperation in field missions.

7. KEY THEMES DISCUSSED AT ICRC CONFERENCES

7.1 Women's Ordination: A Shared Premise, Not a Matter of Debate

Within the ICRC the ordination of women has never been a matter of internal controversy. (In the REC, by way of comparison, the debate over women's ordination was pursued at length and brought to a conclusion; but there the issue never became a question of the REC's identity.) The churches that founded the ICRC were all churches which, on the ground of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, admit only men to the permanent offices. Women's ordination was therefore never an agenda item to be contested on the conference floor, but a confessional premise shared by the member churches — and for that very reason it would later function as the boundary line determining whether fellowship could continue.

This is not to say that the matter is wholly absent from the minutes. At Zwolle in 1993 the chairman, opening one session's devotions with the reading of 1 Timothy 2:8–15, remarked that the passage had become a subject of dispute in our day, yet urged that its teaching on the inner disposition of the true worshiper not be overlooked. The same conference included "Women and the Church" in its list of candidate themes for the 1997 conference. But the ICRC never adopted an independent study report or statement on women's ordination. For the member churches this was not a question requiring argument.^{16,17}

The issue was put to the test by none other than the church that had led the founding: the GKv itself. When the GKv resolved at its synod of Meppel in June 2017 to open all the offices to women, the ICRC suspended its membership on July 17 of the same year and urged reconsideration; and when the GKv did not retract, the Windhoek conference of 2022 terminated its membership. The question of women's ordination thus became the episode that demonstrated most starkly, in the history of the ICRC, that confessional unity is

the substantive condition of fellowship. The details are treated in 7.4 below.^{18,19,20}

7.2 Ecumenical Relations: The Precedent of the RES and the ICRC's Path

The ICRC's ecumenical course cannot be understood apart from the circumstances of its birth. As we have seen, the RES, founded in 1946, originally aimed at an international union of confessional Reformed churches over against the inclusivist ecumenism of the WCC line; but as it failed to discipline the theological shift of the GKN, it drifted from its founding spirit, and in 2010 it merged with the WARC to become the WCRC. The ICRC proved the alternative erected in 1982 by churches that had watched precisely this process — a confessional body failing to uphold its own constitution and dissolving.

Accordingly the ICRC maintains no official relations of fellowship with the WCC or the WCRC. The character of the unity the ICRC pursues found clear expression in the constitutional revision of the 1997 Seoul conference, which amended the membership article to make explicit that a member church is one that faithfully adheres to the Reformed faith set forth in the confessional documents listed in the Basis of the constitution — the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards — and whose own confessional standards agree with that Reformed faith. The ground of unity is not an organization, nor a series of declarations addressed to society or to the churches, but faithfulness to the confession: this is the point at which the ICRC parts company with the mainstream of twentieth-century ecumenism.²¹

7.3 The Criterion of Church Fellowship: The 1993 Report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation

The theological criterion of church fellowship is a subject the ICRC actually appointed a committee to study. On the proposal of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA), the 1989 Langley conference established a Committee on Theological Affirmation to examine what constitutes the true church and what implications such a statement carries for mutual admission to the Lord's table and related matters. Chaired by J. Faber, with N. H. Gootjes serving in place of B. Kamphuis, who had resigned, the committee met at the Free Church College in Edinburgh in the summer of 1992 and submitted its report to the Zwolle conference of 1993. That Gootjes was a member of this committee deserves particular notice.²²

The report's conclusions are striking on two counts. First, the committee judged that no new consensus

statement on the true church was needed: chapter 18 of the Scots Confession (1560) and Article 29 of the Belgic Confession (1561) already display a remarkable consensus on the marks of the true church — the pure preaching of the Word, the pure administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline — so that an agreed statement between the Presbyterian and Reformed traditions in effect already exists. Second, the committee defined with precision what ICRC membership implies. Since the ICRC is a Conference and not a Synod, its decisions are advisory in character; the admission of a church implies that at least two-thirds of the member churches acknowledge it as a true church, yet without infringing each church's right to decide its own sister-church relations — while membership should nonetheless spur each church to pursue fellowship with the other member churches. The report was received and referred to the member churches for study. Here the ICRC's self-understanding — not a hierarchical institution but a conference of churches holding fellowship on the basis of confessional unity — found its most refined expression.^{23,24}

7.4 The GKv's Decision on Women's Ordination and the Loss of Its Membership

The gravest event in the history of the ICRC is the loss of membership by the GKv, the church that led its founding. The GKv opened the discussion in earnest at its synod of Ede in 2014, which dealt with a report on men, women, and office, and at Meppel on June 16–17, 2017, it finally resolved to open all the offices — minister, elder, and deacon — to women. The decision came as a great shock to the sister churches that had long looked to the GKv as the home of Reformed faith and theology.

The ICRC's response was swift. The ninth conference, meeting at Jordan, Canada, in July 2017, resolved on July 17 to suspend the GKv's membership and urged reconsideration of the decision. The church that had led the founding stood, thirty-three years on, on the brink of exclusion from the very body it had built. But the GKv did not comply with the request; it continued to ordain women, and in 2022 the tenth conference at Windhoek, upon motion of the GKv's daughter church, the CanRC, seconded by the OPC, finally terminated its membership. In 2023 the GKv then united with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken to launch a new denomination (the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken), and the history of the liberated Reformed churches turned yet another corner.

The historical irony runs deep. The church that forty years earlier had founded the ICRC after watching the change in the GKN and the impotence of the REC walked, forty years later, the same road on the same issue and was put out of the body it had itself established. Where the RES had collapsed for failing to discipline the GKN, the ICRC proved its reason for being by disciplining the GKv — but the price was parting with its founding church. Seldom in church history has the word rung more solemnly: "Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).



Dr. Nicolaas Gootjes, who taught for several years in Korea

7.5 Worship and the Regulative Principle

Worship, likewise, has been handled at ICRC conferences less in the form of resolutions than in papers, discussion, and the diversity confirmed within fellowship. The discussion of Gootjes's 1993 Zwolle paper on Catechism Preaching reached beyond the question of the legitimacy of catechism preaching to the application of the regulative principle of worship — the Reformed principle that in worship only what God has commanded in his Word is to be done. Whether catechism preaching is compatible with that principle was a question that could hardly be avoided in a body where the Presbyterian and continental Reformed traditions meet.²⁵

The ICRC is in fact a gathering of churches of considerable diversity in the practice of worship. An observer at the Zwolle conference memorably recalls the scene of churches of exclusive psalmody, churches opposed to the use of instruments in worship, and churches devoted to the Genevan psalter all gathered in one place, singing together. No record has been found of the ICRC resolving on a uniform rule of worship in the face of this diversity. Its way has rather been to share the principle that worship must be regulated by the Word of God while respecting each church's confessional tradition in the concrete application — precisely in keeping with the conference's self-understanding described above.²⁶

7.6 Financial Principles

Article IX of the current ICRC Regulations (as amended in 2013 and 2017) governs the finances of the Conference as follows. The Conference maintains a single Treasury; all assessments and income are deposited in it, and all expenses are paid from it alone, according to the decisions

and policies of the Conference. The conference approves a four-year budget, and each member church's assessment is calculated according to its share of the whole, weighting its communicant membership by the per-capita national income of its country. Two limits apply: no church's assessment may be less than fifty dollars (the floor), and none may exceed twenty-five percent of the total budget (the ceiling). Assessments are paid in equal annual installments across the four years. The Treasury bears only the following: meals during the conference (for all present), lodging for up to four delegates per denomination, the travel, lodging, and modest honoraria of the speakers, and the operating costs of committees and special meetings. Delegates' travel is in principle borne by the sending churches, though the Interim Committee may at its discretion support the travel of one delegate for a church in straitened circumstances. The Treasurer submits an annual financial report, and the Interim Committee arranges regular audits. To date the ICRC has been served by two treasurers, H. Berends (CanRC) and K. Lodder (CanRC).^{27,28}

These provisions are not mere administrative rules; they express the Conference's self-understanding in the language of finance.

First, frugality. The four-year budget for 2023–2026 totals 155,000 US dollars — a scale that presupposes neither a permanent headquarters nor salaried staff. This may be read as the financial embodiment of the constitution's limiting clause, that the Conference is not a synodical or classical assembly and that all its decisions apart from membership are advisory in character.²⁹

Second, brotherly equity. The income-weighted formula and the fifty-dollar floor allow the churches of poor nations to enjoy full and equal membership at a nominal contribution, and the travel-support clause institutionalizes the principle of bearing one another's burdens — the very language the 1997 Seoul conference used in budgeting eight thousand dollars a year for the regional mission conferences.³⁰

Third, the prevention of dominance. The twenty-five percent ceiling ensures that no denomination can sway the Conference by money. The point of the clause stands out when one recalls that in the accounts of 1993 a single church — the founding GKv — bore about 63 percent of all assessments. It is telling that the only denomination to reach that ceiling in the 2023–2026 period is Kosin, which by communicant membership makes up about half of the whole. Inscribed in the regulation is the demand that leadership within the Conference be exercised not through numbers or money but through confessional faithfulness.³¹

The WCC and the WCRC are institutional ecumenism — permanent headquarters in Geneva and Hannover and salaried staff executing programs and declarations — and their finances are in essence the cost of maintaining an organization. The ICRC's finances, by contrast, are spent only on the quadrennial meeting and the promotion of cooperation among the member churches: the cost, so to speak, of maintaining fellowship. Since the substance of unity lies not in an organization but in confessional agreement, money is needed not to grow an apparatus but only to make fellowship possible. That Regulation X.5 names the WCC and the WCRC as bodies whose aims and practices conflict with the Basis of the Conference shows that this difference is one of ecclesiology before it is one of financial method. Article IX, in short, engraves the ICRC's founding conviction — that true church unity rests not on institutions and budgets but on faithfulness to the confession — in the plainest of forms: a financial regulation.³²

8. THE ICRC AND THE KOREAN KOSIN CHURCHES

8.1 *Kosin as a Founding Member*

The Kosin churches are a founding member of the ICRC. As the official research report of the faculty of Korea Theological Seminary confirms, the Kosin General Assembly participated as a founding member in the ICRC, organized at Groningen in 1982 under the leadership of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) (the "Article 31" churches, GKv). The bridge that brought Kosin into the ICRC was its sister relationship with the GKv. The intercourse between the two churches, formed after the Korean War, took concrete shape in financial support for Korea Theological Seminary and in the education of theological students, and on this capital of trust Kosin could stand with the GKv's new international body from the very beginning.³³

From the outset Kosin carried real weight in the ICRC. According to the 1991 table of assessments printed in the 1993 minutes, Kosin was recorded with 94,000 communicant members, bearing 15.9 percent of all assessments — the second largest share after the GKv (63.5 percent). Moreover, the 1989 Langley conference resolved to hold the third conference (1993) in Korea. Though the venue was changed to Zwolle owing to unexpected delays in the construction of the assembly hall in Seoul, the minutes record Kosin's renewed invitation to hold the next conference in Korea as soon as the hall was completed. To Zwolle Kosin sent two delegates, Kun Sam Lee and Soon Gil Hur; Hur served as vice-chairman until his early return home, handing the office over to Lee, who presided over a number of sessions.^{34,35,36}



Kosin Theological Seminary

8.2 The 1997 Seoul Conference

On October 16–23, 1997, the fourth ICRC conference met at Seomun Church in Seoul. Hosted by the Kosin General Assembly, it was the first ICRC conference held in Asia. Its most important achievement was the revision of the constitution: by defining a member church clearly as one faithful to the Reformed faith set forth in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, it inscribed the ICRC's confessional identity yet more plainly in its constitutional text. Following the decision of the 1993 conference, the Seoul conference also encouraged the holding of continental regional mission conferences in the interim years and budgeted for them. That a church planted by Western missions should, within less than a century, host the conference of the world's Reformed churches and preside over the revision of its constitution is itself a measure of the place Kosin had come to occupy within the ICRC.³⁷

8.3 The GKv Question and the Kosin Churches

For Kosin, the GKv's decision on women's ordination was no mere item of international news but a matter concerning its oldest sister church. At the 67th Kosin General Assembly in September 2017 a delegate sent by the GKv brought greetings, expressing the hope that the decision on women's ordination would not weaken the relationship between the two churches. Kosin had already dispatched Professor Hae Moo Yoo to the Netherlands to convey its opposition officially. The following year, the 68th Assembly (2018) received the faculty's year-long study, the "Report on the Relationship between the Dutch Reformed Churches and

the Kosin General Assembly," and resolved to admonish the Dutch churches to reconsider women's ordination and, in line with the ICRC's decision, to watch developments closely until the next conference. It chose the path of admonition and patience rather than immediate severance — while locating the criterion of judgment within the international frame of fellowship that is the ICRC. With the ICRC's final termination of the GKv's membership in 2022, the relationship between Kosin and the GKv likewise entered a new phase.^{38,39}

8.4 The 2026 Seoul Conference and Kosin's Task

The eleventh ICRC conference meets in Korea on October 14–21, 2026. Thirty-eight denominations from twenty-six countries are to take part. The theme is "The Identity of Reformed Theology and the Role of the Church in Contemporary Society." From Kosin, Professor Sung Ho Lee of Korea Theological Seminary will present a paper on "The History, Identity, and Future of the Kosin Churches," and Professor Aaron Bae of Kosin University is to chair the conference — the second Korean to do so, after the late Soon Gil Hur.⁴⁰

This is the first Korean conference in twenty-nine years, and in the interval Kosin's position has changed greatly. Since the departure of the GKv, Kosin has become the largest single denomination in the ICRC, accounting for about half of its total membership. A church that received the gospel from Western missionaries a century ago, and that built its seminary with the support of the Dutch churches half a century ago, now stands where it shares responsibility

for the theological direction of the worldwide Reformed community.⁴¹

This fact means responsibility and obligation before it means honor. As the history of the GKv shows, a reputation as the home of Reformed faith is no guarantee of faithfulness. The 2026 Seoul conference must be an occasion for Kosin to examine, and to testify to before the world church, the inheritance it has received — the faithful resolve of the refusal of Shinto shrine worship, and its tradition of Reformed faith and life. In the ICRC's journey of more than forty years, asking what true unity in the truth is, Kosin now stands first in line to answer that question.

Nor is this warning about someone else. Kosin could be present in the ICRC from the beginning thanks to the bridge the Dutch liberated Reformed churches laid — but can the church that crossed that bridge be confident today that it is a church faithful to its confession? How much are the local churches actually reading and teaching the Westminster Confession of Faith? Is the Kosin church handing the Westminster catechisms on to the next generation?

What profit is there in declaring that one stands upon the confessional documents, if faith and life in practice are being secularized? When life collapses, faith collapses; and when faith collapses, life collapses. That is exactly where the GKv fell.

The task before Kosin as 2026 approaches is therefore clear: before representing confessional identity before the world's Reformed churches, it must first recover that identity in its own pulpits, its catechesis, and its discipline. For only the church that lives by its confession — not the church that merely possesses confessional documents — is a confessional church.

9. CONCLUSION AND ASSESSMENT

Over more than forty years since its founding in 1982, the ICRC has established itself as the confessional center of fellowship among the world's Reformed churches. Its historical significance may be assessed in three dimensions.

First, the preservation of theological identity. The ICRC began as a conscious alternative to the road the RES had traveled — that of a confessional body failing to keep its own constitution and dissolving. By taking the confessional documents — the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession — as the basis of unity, and by sharpening that standard further in the constitutional revision of the 1997 Seoul conference, the ICRC created and maintained, in the late-twentieth-century ecumenical landscape where confessional standards were being diluted, a space of international fellowship and unity

faithful to the legacy of the Reformation.

Second, the establishment of a conference model of fellowship. The ICRC deliberately styles itself a Conference, not a Synod, and its decisions are advisory in character. As the 1993 report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation formalized, membership implies mutual recognition as true churches without infringing each church's right to determine its own sister relations — indeed, it spurs the pursuit of deeper fellowship. This is a third way — neither a superior body lording it over the churches nor a club that asks nothing of anyone: a Reformed model of ecumenism, a union of churches recognizing one another as true churches and holding fellowship on the basis of confessional unity.

Third, the practice of confessional unity. The ICRC paid the price of this principle at the very moment it was tested. When the GKv, the church that had led its founding, decided for women's ordination, the ICRC took the hard decisions — suspension and a call to reconsider in 2017, termination of membership in 2022. What the RES could not do before the GKN, the ICRC did before its own founding church. It thereby testified, in deed and not in word only, that church fellowship is not mere friendship but unity in the truth. Yet the testimony bears a deep wound: the history of the home of Reformed faith being expelled from the body it had itself established. It stands as a solemn warning to every member church — and now to the Kosin churches, preparing the 2026 Seoul conference as the largest member — that no church may rest upon its past.

Tasks still remain before the ICRC: the differences between the Presbyterian and continental Reformed traditions in the understanding of worship and office, the shifts of balance that come with the growth of the churches of the global South, substantive cooperation in world mission. But these very tasks are evidence that the ICRC is not a mounted monument but a living theological community. As an international solidarity of churches committed to confessional Reformed theology, the ICRC is a precious witness that the legacy of the Reformation is alive in the twenty-first century — and the next chapter of its life and work will take a step forward at Seoul in 2026.

⁴¹The official ICRC website, <https://icrconline.com>. PDFs of the Proceedings of all conferences since 1982 are available on this site.

²⁴"International Council of Reformed Churches," *The Outlook (Reformed Fellowship)*: an observer's account of the 1993 Zwolle conference.

³²zh hv On the 2010 merger of the REC and the WARC, see the official WCRC website (<https://warc.eu>).

⁴Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, 1982 (PDF published at icrconline.com). The official ICRC website describes the 1982 gathering as the first preliminary meeting and Edinburgh 1985 as the first regular conference.

⁵Faculty of Korea Theological Seminary, “Report on the Relationship between the Dutch Reformed Churches and the Kosin General Assembly” (화란개혁신교회와 고신총회의 관계에 대한 연구보고서), in Reports to the 68th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin), 2018. The report states explicitly that the Kosin General Assembly participated in the ICRC as a founding member. The full text is reproduced in the KoramDeo.com article of September 12, 2018.

⁶“Constitution and Regulations of the ICRC,” in Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, September 1–9, 1993, Zwolle, The Netherlands (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publications, 1993), 229ff. This volume is hereafter cited as Proceedings 1993.

⁷On the composition and reception history of the Heidelberg Catechism, see W. van ‘t Spijker (ed.), *The Church’s Book of Comfort* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

⁸For a detailed discussion of the establishment of the sister–church relationship between the GKv and Kosin in the 1960s and of the GKv synod’s examination of the Westminster Standards, see the author’s studies of the Dutch–Kosin sister–church relationship.

⁹J. van Bruggen, *The Ancient Text of the New Testament* (Winnipeg: Premier, 1976).

¹⁰See Proceedings 1993, “Report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation,” 73ff., which states that since the ICRC is a Conference and not a Synod, its decisions carry an advisory character.

¹¹Proceedings 1993, Minutes Art. 75. The Missions Committee was mandated to organize, within two years of the conference, mission conferences in four regions: the West (Curaçao, Suriname, Brazil, Peru), Africa, East Asia (Japan, Indonesia, the Philippines, Taiwan, India, etc.), and Europe.

¹²The list of conferences is based on the official ICRC website (icrconline.com) and the Proceedings of the several conferences.

¹³“CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY for the International Conference of Reformed Churches held in the Refajah Church at Groningen, The Netherlands, from October 26 to November 4, 1982,” in Proceedings 1982, 3.

¹⁴“ARTICLE 1 OPENING AND ADDRESS. On behalf of the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the Rev. G. van Rongen of The Netherlands opens the meeting and reads from the Scriptures Psalm 120 and Psalm 133. He asks the meeting to sing Psalm 133, and leads in prayer. In his opening address he welcomes especially the brethren who have been delegated by their Churches to attend this Constituent Assembly. He then shows that the Churches are ‘in line with history’ when on the basis of the Holy Scriptures and in accordance with the Reformed confessions they seek the unity of the faith and the fellowship in the Lord by means of a council or conference. He emphasizes that while the Churches which are represented here today may have adopted either the Westminster Standards or the Three Forms of Unity, they are on common ground. Both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards submit unconditionally to the Lord as He has revealed Himself in the Scriptures. The speaker expresses the hope that the Conference may be a blessing for the Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ in this world.” Proceedings 1982, Conference Minutes, 1–2.

¹⁵“ARTICLE II — BASIS. The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).” Proceedings 1989, 301.

¹⁶Proceedings 1993, Minutes Art. 86.

¹⁷Proceedings 1993, Minutes Art. 93.3. “Women and the Church” appears as the seventh item on the list of themes proposed for the 1997 conference.

¹⁸Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt), *Acta van de Generale Synode Meppel 2017*. The Meppel synod resolved on June 16–17, 2017, to open the offices of minister, elder, and deacon to women.

¹⁹Faculty of Korea Theological Seminary, “Report on the Relationship between the Dutch Reformed Churches and the Kosin General Assembly” (2018).

²⁰ICRC Press Release 2022 (icrconline.com). The tenth conference at Windhoek (2022) definitively terminated the membership of the GKv, which had been suspended at the ninth conference in 2017.

²¹“ICRC 1997 Press Release,” *The Messenger* (Free Reformed Churches of North America), 1997. The Seoul conference amended Article I.a of the Constitution to define a member church as one that faithfully adheres to the Reformed faith set forth in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with this Reformed faith.

²²Proceedings 1993, “Report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation,” 73ff. The report also records the composition of the committee and its meeting (June 30 – July 2, 1992, at the Free Church College, Edinburgh).

²³*Ibid.* The committee cited chapter 18 of the Scots Confession (1560) and Article 29 of the Belgic Confession (1561) in parallel and concluded that “a remarkable consensus” exists between the two confessional traditions.

²⁴Proceedings 1993, Minutes Art. 44.

²⁵Proceedings 1993, Minutes Arts. 50, 55. Gootjes’s paper was delivered on the evening of September 3, 1993 (Session 9); the discussion followed on the morning of September 6 (Session 10).

²⁶“International Council of Reformed Churches,” *The Outlook*. The observer recalls Zwolle as “a singing conference.”

²⁷ICRC Regulations (as amended by the 8th [2013] and 9th [2017] Meetings of the Conference), IX. Finances (<https://icrconline.com/governance/>).

²⁸ICRC Regulations, II.1; IX.2.a.(3).

²⁹“Basis of Membership Assessments, Years 2023–2026” (ICRC financial document). The income index used for the assessments is World Bank per-capita GDP (as of September 2022).

³⁰Proceedings of the ICRC 1997 (Seoul), Minutes Arts. 66, 89.

³¹Financial Report (Balance Sheet as of April 30, 1993), in Proceedings of the ICRC 1997, 53; “Basis of Membership Assessments, 2023–2026.”

³²ICRC Regulations, X.5.

³³Faculty of Korea Theological Seminary, “Report on the Relationship between the Dutch Reformed Churches and the Kosin General Assembly” (2018).

³⁴Proceedings 1993, “Financial Report: Basis for Assessments 1991.”

³⁵Proceedings 1993, “Chairman’s Opening Remarks” and “Report of the Corresponding Secretary.” The secretary, M. van Beveren, reported that when the Korean churches proved unable to host the conference owing to unexpected delays in the construction of their new assembly hall, the Dutch churches undertook the preparations; he also conveyed Kosin’s renewed invitation to hold the next conference in Korea as soon as the hall was completed.

³⁶Proceedings 1993, Minutes Arts. 2, 3, 45, 52. Hur served as vice-chairman until September 3, when he stepped down; Lee succeeded him and presided over several sessions.

³⁷“ICRC 1997 Press Release,” The fourth conference was held October 16–23, 1997, at Seomun Church, Seoul, hosted by the Kosin General Assembly.

³⁸“Ten Years of Discussion up to the Decision on Women’s Ordination” (여성 안수 결의까지 10년 논의), NewsNJoy, September 20, 2017.

³⁹Faculty of Korea Theological Seminary, “Report on the Relationship between the Dutch Reformed Churches and the Kosin General Assembly” (2018); “Dutch Reformed Churches’ Women’s Ordination: Admonition to Reconsider, Watching Closely” (화란개혁교회 여성안수, 재고 권면 예의주시), KoramDeo.com, September 12, 2018.

⁴⁰The official ICRC website (icrconline.com). The conference is scheduled to run for seven days (six nights) at a hotel in Incheon.

⁴¹“The Global Reformed Union Movement and Kosin’s Role: Toward the 2026 ICRC Conference in Korea” (글로벌 개혁주의 연합 운동과 고신의 역할: 2026년 ICRC 한국 총회를 기점으로) (editorial), Kosin News KNC, 2026.

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ICRC Member Churches

MEMBER CHURCH	ACRONYMS	
Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Kenya)	AEPC	
Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bangalore (India)	ARPCB	
Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (USA)	ARPC	
Canadian Reformed Churches (Canada/USA)	CanRC	
Christian Reformed Churches of Australia	CRCA	
Calvinist Reformed Churches in Indonesia	CRCIdn	GGRCI
Christian Reformed Churches (The Netherlands)	CRC(N)	CGK
Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Ireland)	EPC(Ire)	
Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales	EPCEW	
Evangelical Reformed Church in India	ERCInd	
Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)	FCC	
Free Church of Scotland	FCS	
Free Church in Southern Africa	FCSA	
Free Reformed Churches of North America	FRCNA	
Free Reformed Churches in South Africa	FRCSA	
Heritage Reformed Congregations (USA/Canada)	HRC	
Independent Reformed Church of Korea	IRCK	
Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea	KPCK	
Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA/Canada)	OPC	
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia	PCEA	
Presbyterian Church in Uganda	PCU	
Presbyterian Free Church (India)	PFC(Ind)	
Reformed Churches (The Netherlands)	RC(N)	GK
Reformed Churches of Brazil	RCB	IRB
Reformed Churches in Indonesia	RCIdn	GGRI
Reformed Churches of New Zealand	RCNZ	
Reformed Churches of Spain	RCS	IRE
Reformed Churches in South Africa	RCSA	GKSA
Reformed Church of the United States	RCUS	
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Africa (Uganda)	RPCA(Ug)	
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe	RPCCEE	
Reformed Presbyterian Church of India	RPCInd	
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland	RPCIre	
Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America	RPCNA	
Reformed Presbyterian Church North-East India Synod	RPCNEI	
Sudanese Reformed Churches	SRC	
United Reformed Church in Congo	URCC	
United Reformed Churches in North America	URCNA	