

GREETING MESSAGE FROM THE CANRC.

Esteemed and honourable brothers, delegates to the 2017 synod of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa.

Thank you heartily for the invitation you extended to the Canadian Reformed Churches to be present here with you. We pray that our visit may serve to mutually encourage, bless, and assist each other as churches and brothers. On behalf of your sister churches in Canada and the United States, Dr. Arjan deVisser and I bring you greetings in the Name of our blessed Saviour. Our federation is made up of about 55 churches, mostly in Canada, with a total membership of just over 19,000. Mission activity takes place inside our own country in a variety of (primarily) urban locations, as well as outside of North America in Brazil, China, Papua New Guinea, and Indonesia.

At your last synod, held in Bethal in 2014, Rev. Lodder shared with you various developments from our federation. Since then, life has continued without major federational upheavals. I trust that you have received a copy of the Acts of the 2016 General Synod, held in Dunnville. If there is anything in these Acts which would be of particular interest to you, and that you have further questions about, Dr. deVisser and I would be happy to engage in discussion regarding that. Aside from the numerous ecclesiastical relationships, both inside and outside of North America, that our churches have been busy with, the formal presentation of a completed Anglo-Genevan Psalter, more popularly known as our Book of Praise, was a memorable occasion at our most recent synod.

It is worth noting that life in North America has substantial challenges for our churches. In our increasingly secular society, where all truth is considered relative, it is harder and harder to maintain clear and consistent Biblical convictions. The devil's onslaughts on our families are relentless, as becomes evident in matters related to family structures, sexual norms, and transgender pressures. We live in a stunningly beautiful part of the world; perhaps that contributes to many in our society worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. Environmentalism is alive and well on our continent, which contributes to understandings that conflict with Psalm 8. Furthermore, many in our federation live in substantial affluence, and the pressures created by the lure of materialism also pulls people away from maintaining a focus on service to God and our neighbor. Please pray that our families and federation remain faithful to God and his Word.

A high priority for many in our federation continues to be Christian education. That's been a priority for me personally, as I've been working in our schools for 30 years. Tremendous amounts of money are directed to ongoing efforts related to Christian education. From our 55 congregations, we have some 30 schools, ranging in size from some small schools with only about 50 or 60 students to regional schools with three or four hundred children. In some parts of the country, provincial governments contribute considerable amounts of financial support to our schools; in other jurisdictions families need to provide all the support on their own. Across the country, families sacrifice substantially for Christian education. We often speak of four defining aspects of our schools:

- they are covenantal. They have been established for covenant children, where covenant promises and covenant obligations are continuously kept in focus for our children.
- they are confessional. Truth is not relative.
- we want our children to understand the antithesis. This world is a spiritual battlefield, and our children need to become equipped to recognize their role in it.
- our schools work in close association and in alignment with our homes and churches.

In our inter-church relations a particular struggle for our federation has been our relationship with our sister churches in The Netherlands. We are burdened and saddened that there is toleration for their new way of explaining Scripture, such that they decided that women should be allowed to serve with authority in God's church. When one of our North American sister churches introduced a motion at the recent International Conference of Reformed Churches, to initiate an eviction process from the ICRC, our representatives at the meeting supported this initiative. The following Sunday, in my local Lynden church bulletin, our pastor wrote the following: "The ICRC did make the difficult but necessary decision to suspend the membership of our sister churches in the Netherlands from the ICRC, due to their recent decision to allow women in all the offices of the church, contrary to the Word of God. May the Lord use this ICRC action against the RCN to have a corrective effect in that federation of churches." Such an assessment by my pastor is quite typical and indicative of federative-wide understandings of this regrettable development.

We hope we can continue to be a blessing to you through our Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Hamilton. We join you in giving thanks that Johan Brintjes, after his American upbringing and Canadian seminary training, could see his way clear to enter the ministry here in South Africa. Though we are happy to share some seminary graduates with you, the challenges associated with his re-entry into your beautiful country make clear that his circumstances are unique; you are painfully aware that you will not be able to rely on many Canadian graduates to fill your pulpits. Our most recent General Synod again encouraged the CRTS "to support the FRCSA in the training of their theological students, because of the unique circumstances of the FRCSA theological training program." Perhaps that encouragement was a factor in Dr. VanVliet's mind as he recently came here to engage in some teaching. It was certainly a factor in the mind of our Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad, when we requested Dr. deVisser to accompany one of us here. May the ongoing relationships which are evident between your churches and our seminary intensify and be a blessing to both of us.

Since it is the duty of sister churches to look out for each other's cares and concerns, we are happy to take over a practice of one of our North American sister churches; we welcome your responses to the following questions. Don't feel pressure to respond immediately, but if you choose to respond at some point during synod, please feel free.

1. *Are there specific occasions where you believe we have failed to live up to our commitments to you or have caused you grief?*
2. *Speaking the truth in love, where do you perceive our testimony or practice to be weak?*

Brothers, may the Lord bless you in your deliberations. May you as individuals and as churches serve as hands and feet to one another, outdoing one another in being servants for the sake of Christ. May the blessing of our heavenly God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with you in all you do.

Our prayer for you is the prayer recorded in Ephesians 3:14-21.