

Addendum Report of Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad

July 2017

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APPENDIX A: Letter from Synod Meppel 2017 of the RCN concerning their decision on allowing women in the special church offices

APPENDIX B: Report on the ICRC Conference 2017 in Jordan Station, Ontario, Canada

1 General

Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA) have submitted their main report to Synod Soshanguve North 2017 during May 2017. Since then, important decisions were taken by Synod Meppel 2017 of our sister churches, the Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands: RCN). These developments and decisions are reported in this Addendum Report (Section 2), contributed by Rev F J Bijzet and br J Moes. Furthermore, a conference of the ICRC was held in Canada in July 2017. A report on this conference is also included in this Addendum Report (Section 3), contributed by Rev P G Boon, who attended this conference as FRCSA delegate.

1.1 Deputies

In the main DRCA report of May 2017, in Section 1.6.5, it was recommended to Synod to appoint the following sister and brothers as deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad for the 2017 – 2020 period: sr G van den Berg and br J Moes (as continuing members of the previous deputies) and Rev J Bruintjes, br JF Raimond, well as Rev P Kgatle (for the ICRC / Africa) as new deputies. DRCA recommends to Synod to also appoint br H (Henri) Luyk as additional DRCA deputy. In line with Ground 3 of the recommendation in the main report, it will be good to appoint a young member as deputy, so that also the opinion and conviction of young church members are being heard and incorporated into the work of the DRCA and that young church members become involved in activities of the church federation. All these DRCA members have accepted being proposed for nomination.

1.2 Meeting date of FRCSA Synods

In the main report of DRCA, Section 1.4, a proposal was made to Synod to change the meeting date of our synods: “DRCA would like to suggest to move the meeting date of our synods to September / October”. The motivation was that sister church and ICRC meetings take place in the period April to July, which renders it difficult to provide quality feed-back to our synod in time. We realised afterwards that ICRC meetings only take place every four years, while our synods meet every three years. Therefore, the ICRC motivation is only an issue again in twelve years time (2029) and is, therefore, not a critical motivation. The other motivations remain unchanged.

2 Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

2.1 Theological Training

The General Synod Meppel of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCN) decided on 20 April 2017 to work towards establishing a Reformed Theological University (“Gereformeerde Theologische Universiteit”: GTU), a combined training institute from the RCN, the Christian Reformed Churches (Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken: CRC) and the Dutch Reformed Churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken: DRC). Synod Meppel discussed the following aspects: the future influence of the churches on the training of ministers, the temporary extra contribution of the RCN and the choice of Utrecht as the new location for establishing the university. Synod recommended that also Apeldoorn and Kampen should be considered as candidate locations.

The intention is that each of the three participating churches have their own Master programme on ministry studies at the GTU, as well as their own governing body. In this way the churches retain direct

influence over the end phase of the training. Regarding the policy of the university as a whole the RCN, CRC and the DRC can exercise influence through the members-council, in which they are represented.

Now that the RCN have decided to open all special church offices to women also (see Section 2.4 below), the possibility exists that the CRC, who have in the past decided not to open the offices to women, may withdraw from the plans for setting up a combined theological university. The CRC synod meeting on this matter has been postponed to October 2017.

2.2 Relations with other churches in the Netherlands

The synod of the RCN has decided to thankfully and positively respond to an invitation from the Protestant Church Netherlands (Protestantse Kerk Nederland: PKN) for rapprochement and pulpit exchange of ministers. The PKN is an amalgamation of the Dutch Hervormde Church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk), the Reformed Churches (synodical) (Gereformeerde Kerken sinodaal) and the Lutheran Church. The PKN accommodates both orthodox and liberal ministers and members.

On 18 May 2017 the synod of the RCN also sought closer interaction with the continuing Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland). This small church federation consists of 7 churches. They pursued their own course when the PKN was established and base themselves on Scripture and Confessions. There is already one location where close cooperation with the local RCN exists. The PKN has female elders and deacons and one female minister, because this possibility already existed in the Reformed Churches (synodical) before the PKN was formed. However this remains an issue which is currently being considered in this federation. "It is not a conclusive matter", was the response the representative of these churches gave at the RCN synod. Synod decided by majority vote to seek closer contacts which aim to promote church unity.

2.3 Departure from the Reformed Confession

Under the Recommendations in the main report (Section 2.3.2, point 1) it was mentioned with regard to the RCN the "minimising of the reformed confessions of faith in the contacts with the DRC". Unfortunately, in the preaching of some RCN ministers this "minimising" and even departure from the reformed confessions becomes more pronounced. On 13 May 2017 Prof. Ad de Bruijne wrote a column in the *Nederlands Dagblad* under the title "Old errors making a comeback amongst Christians", wherein he related that on a number of occasions a consistory member would approach him after the evening service and say: *'You claimed exactly the opposite to what the minister said this morning.'* (...) *I had emphasised that as a Christian you are bound to obey God and do what is good. But the minister that morning had said, with the same conviction, that Christians are free from all responsibilities and need not feel compelled to have to do anything.*

The second example is similar to the first. I had exhorted the church-goers to exert themselves and do their very best to live a holy life before God. But a few hours earlier a colleague had invoked God's Name to allege that every form of 'doing your best' was unnecessary. Christians are spontaneous in doing good. It grows by itself, out of love. The third example related to the judgement of God. I had said that we will all appear before the judgement seat of God to give account of our deeds and words. God's punishment is a real threat that can only be averted in Jesus Christ. But according to the preacher in the morning we were to leave the image of a wrathful God behind us once and for all. A Christian no longer has anything to do with God's judgement.

Prof. de Bruijne writes that he is convinced that regarding each of these points he has just articulated the classic Christian doctrine. He can underpin this liberally and directly from the Bible and Confessions. But the carrying capacity for these classic convictions appears to be shrinking today, even among reformed ministers in our sister churches in the Netherlands. We acknowledge that these are incidents, but mention them because it underlines the recommendations in our main report.

2.4 All offices open to women

The General Synod Meppel 2017 of the RCN lived up to the recommendation from the previous synod, to include their international sister churches as much as possible in the decision making regarding the question whether the special church offices should be opened to women. Apart from a discussion on this matter with the international representatives on 6 April 2017, the synod commission dealing with the preparation of the matter also sent an extensive questionnaire to their international sister-churches. DRCA answered this to the best of their ability. The questionnaire with the answers are included as Appendix B.2 of our main report.

Despite many cautioning responses from the international church federations, the general synod decided on 15 and 16 June 2017 to open all church offices to women. The implementation of this decision has been left to the local churches. A suggestion to first make just a decision-in-principle and to place this in the realm of the churches for further consideration, was rejected. The motivation and grounds for the decision are reproduced in Appendix A of this Addendum Report.

After the decision was taken to open all offices to women, it was decided on 17 June to steer towards a rapid reuniting with the DRC. One of the most important stumbling blocks to unification, female elders and ministers, has now effectively been removed. A combined synod of the RCN and the DRC is scheduled for October 2017.

After the decision of Synod Meppel, a number of meetings have been held in the Netherlands by disenchanted RCN members to discuss the consequences of the synod decision and the way forward. Four retired ministers have sent public letters to the RCN churches not to leave the RCN (as individual or as congregation) and that church councils should decide not to appoint female deacons, elders and ministers, but to work towards submitting a revision request to the next synod in 2020. To the DRCA, there is yet no clear direction into which the disenchanted RCN members are moving and the situation in these churches remains therefore somewhat fluid. A decision by the ICRC Conference of 2017 to suspend the ICRC membership of the RCN is outlined in Section 3.2.8 of this report.

2.5 Conclusion and Recommendation

The developments in the RCN after May 2017 support the Recommendations as formulated in the main DRCA report in Section 2.3.2. Until the next RCN synod in 2020, the DRCA of the FRCSA should stay in contact with the RCN deputies and try to convince them to apply a hermeneutics that fully accepts the authority of Scripture, even if it results in conflict with modern western culture.

3 ICRC Conference, July 2017

3.1 Mandate

The Mandate of the DRCA concerning the ICRC is listed in the Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, Art. 25.8 :

Mandate regarding contacts with the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC):

1. To continue ICRC membership.
2. To authorise DRCA to send one delegate to the ICRC 2017 meeting in Canada.

3.2 Conference overview

Based on Mandate 2, DRCA appointed Rev PG Boon as delegate to attend the ICRC meeting. The ICRC 2017 meeting was organised by the United Reformed Church (URC) of Jordan, Ontario, Canada, and took place at the Reformed school and URC church in Jordan. The conference started with a prayer service on Wednesday, 12 July and continued from Thursday 13 until Wednesday 19 July 2017. The full report of Rev Boon on the proceedings of the Conference is attached as Appendix B.

1. Membership

At the beginning of the conference the membership list contained 32 member churches. The conference closed with a list of 34 member churches.

Three church federations applied for ICRC membership:

1. the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)
2. the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU)
3. the United Reformed Churches in Myanmar (URCM)

The CRCA and PCU were accepted as members, with thanksgiving to the Lord.

There was nobody present from the URCM, so their application could not be considered.

2. Executive Committee

A new executive Committee was elected to serve for the next four years, including Rev. Dr. James Visscher as Secretary and Br. Kyle Lodder as Treasurer.

3. Church introductions and Observers

Representatives of some church federations were requested to introduce their churches to the conference. The following churches were introduced:

1. the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC) (North America), represented by Rev. Kevin Backus
2. the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE) (Hungary), represented by Rev. Imre Szoke
3. the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (PCB), represented by Rev. Dr. Davi Charles Gomes.
4. The Reformed Churches of Spain (RCS), represented by Rev. Jose Manuel Lopez Franco

4. Advisory Committees

Several Advisory Committees were appointed to provide advice concerning a number of agenda items.

5. Presentations and Workshop arrangements

The ICRC 2017 focused on two main themes:

- celebration of 500 years Reformation
- the church in India, to host the next ICRC Conference – see para. 10 below.

See Appendix B for more information on the lectures.

6. Review of the ICRC Constitution and Regulations

The changes to the Constitution and the Regulations, as proposed by the previous ICRC (Wales 2013), were accepted by the member churches.

7. Regional meetings

Regional meetings are the platforms where ICRC member churches are offered opportunities to plan and work together to promote mission activities, theological training and ministries of mercy in their specific region. An ICRC Regional meeting was organised by the Presbyterian Church of Uganda in August 2016. Unfortunately, due to miscommunication, Rev Boersma was not able to attend or liaise on this matter, so unfortunately this regional conference was not attended by the FRCSA. The planning is, God willing, to organize the next Africa regional conference in 2020 in Namibia.

8. Suspension of the RCN

For the first time in its existence the ICRC had to take the step to suspend an existing member church, the *Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (RCN)*. The RCN, after more than a decade of preparation, have decided on their 2017 synod to open all ecclesiastical offices to women. Through this decision, they came in conflict with the ICRC Constitution, which is very clear on this point. According to the ICRC constitution, the suspension of a member church can only be requested by the synod / major assembly of another member church. The major assembly of the *Orthodox Presbyterian Church* had sent a letter to the ICRC in this regard. The *Canadian Reformed Churches* seconded the letter. The suspension was a sad measure.

The RCN had disseminated their decisions and grounds to all delegates. The RCN synod chairman Dr Melle Oosterhuis, also one of the RCN delegates to the ICRC, elaborately addressed the conference and explained the RCN decision. Several questions were asked and the RCN received ample opportunity to explain their position.

In the following days, the delegates of the other member churches communicated their views. There was not much appreciation for the RCN's endeavour to drive a wedge between Scripture and Confession on the one hand, and the ICRC's constitution on the other. During the last decade several member churches were closely involved in this doctrinal dispute in the RCN. The experience was throughout that the RCN were not prepared to listen.

According to the ICRC constitution a 67% majority vote is needed to suspend a member church. In this case, 86% of the member churches voted for suspension, which testifies that the ICRC had no doubt that the RCN had not adhered to the Scriptures and Confession with their synod decision. A substitute motion of the *Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken* not to suspend, but to allow the RCN to reconsider their position in the ICRC at their next synod, was rejected. The ICRC was convinced that firm action was needed against an erring church. However, it was emphasized that suspension is not a punishment, but, with love, to point them to the seriousness of the situation. The conference does not want the RCN to leave the ICRC, but to retract their unbiblical synod decisions. The RCN remains suspended until

the next conference in 2021. A suspended church loses its voting right, but retains the right to send delegates and to serve in committees.

9. Appointments

A list of all appointments is available but appointments which are specifically of interest for the FRCSA are the following:

- 1) Rev. D M Boersma, missions committee
- 2) Rev. P G Boon, diaconal committee.

10. Next ICRC Conference

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI) was appointed as host church for the next Conference, to be held, God willing, in 2021. The exact month is not yet known. See Appendix B for more details with regard to the challenges of hosting the conference in India. As second option, the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA) were appointed to host the conference.

3.3 Conclusions

- The ICRC 2017 conference was well organised and proved to be very informative and educational.
- The ICRC, by suspending the RCN, proved that it is serious and sincere about its Reformed basis (see Appendix B for more detail).
- The conference proved to be an excellent platform for face-to-face contacts with the representatives from Africa and other parts of the world.
- The opportunities for co-operation with other member-churches of the ICRC can be utilised much more extensively by the FRCSA.
- Regional ICRC conferences in Africa should be promoted and attended.

3.4 Recommendations to Synod

- 1) To continue ICRC membership.

Grounds:

- a. The ICRC is an organisation which adheres to its Reformed basis.
- b. The ICRC provides a platform to maintain contacts with Reformed churches over the world as well as regionally.
- c. The ICRC offers opportunities to promote the proclamation of the gospel in word and deed in our African continent.

- 2) To authorise DRCA to maintain and improve contacts with African ICRC member churches through the appointment of a special ICRC–Africa deputy within the DRCA

Ground:

It is practically impossible for the FRCSA to work towards full ecclesiastical fellowship with all ICRC member churches. The FRCSA should focus on Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Africa, where by God's grace we are located.

- 3) To enhance the ICRC profile within the FRCSA by instructing the ICRC deputy to provide more and regular information to the churches.

Grounds:

- a. The FRCSA are not fully utilising the opportunities provided by our ICRC contacts.
- b. Delegates of the FRCSA who have attended an ICRC Conference, are involved in ICRC regional meetings and are members of ICRC working groups should provide regular feed back to the churches.

- 4) To authorise the DRCA to send two delegates to the ICRC Conference 2021 in Delhi, India (or in Australia), yet only to budget for one

Grounds:

- a. Representation at ICRC Conferences is important in order to be aware of the opportunities the ICRC offers.
- b. By sending a new delegate along with an experienced delegate the awareness in our churches of the benefits of the ICRC will increase.
- c. Since two pastors of our churches serve as members in ICRC committees, and since these committees have budgets to pay their members' travelling costs to the conferences, we need to budget for only one delegate.
- d. Although the next ICRC Conference will take place after our own next Synod, the Lord willing in 2020, it will be good to already approve attendance now so that the necessary preparations can be made.

APPENDIX A

**LETTER FROM SYNOD MEPPPEL 2017 OF THE RCN
CONCERNING THEIR DECISION ON ALLOWING WOMEN IN THE
SPECIAL CHURCH OFFICES**



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To all the church councils and all the
classes of the Reformed Churches

Almelo, July 4, 2017
Concerns: Decisions Male/Female and office
Mark: 25-MVEA-170704

Dear brothers and sisters,

Synod has requested its moderamen to explain and provide information concerning its decisions in relation to *Male/Female and the Office* in the letter below.

In this letter we would like to tell you something about the background to the decisions that were taken. We also describe the decision-making process that we as General Synod have followed. Finally, we make it clear that it is for the churches to make the next move. We express the hope that we may, with the help of God, find our way together in this matter.

The Background

In 2005, at the General Synod of Amersfoort-Centrum, the matter 'Women in the Church' first found its way onto the table of Synod. The immediate cause of this was a letter sent by the church council of the GKv of Voorthuizen-Barneveld. In it, the council raised the issue that in our contact with the Netherlands Reformed Churches the matter of 'women and office' brought with it questions that *"could not be addressed in a simple manner by Biblical answers"*. Furthermore, the council pointed out that *"we are dealing with a gradually growing practice of sisters who are deploying their gifts within the congregation in the absence of a clear Biblical rationale. Upon closer study, complex exegetical and hermeneutical questions quickly come to the surface; this is a task that goes beyond our capacity to deal with. What is more, we believe that this matter transcends local significance."*

The General Synod, upon a proposal by the Regional Synod of Gelderland, instituted Deputies for 'Women in the Church', with the following mandate:

- To investigate, by means of a problem analysis, chiefly on the basis of empirical research, and in collaboration with the Theological University, the questions and problems the churches have identified around the subject of 'women in the church';
- To develop an approach that sets out in which way we may come to sound, Scripturally founded answers to the questions and problems that this investigation brings to the fore.

That was the beginning of the process that led to the decisions we have now made, in the year 2017.

We briefly outline the intermediate steps that followed:

- In 2008 the first report of Deputies was released; it contained a great deal of basic information. On the basis of a review of literature and empirical research the deputies observed that several different lines of argument played out in this matter, and that a range of views existed within the church around it. At that time, the Deputies proposed to keep this matter on the churches' agenda, by undertaking a theoretical study, and also by engaging in a dialogue within the churches.
- The Deputies that followed (2011) published a set of guidelines, and reported on how they were used in the churches. In addition, the book *Als vrouwen het woord doen (When women speak)* by Myriam Klinker-de Klerk (2011) saw publication: this theoretical study was carried out at the request of the Deputies. New Deputies were appointed, who were to prepare a pathway providing directions for the decision-making process.
- In 2014 the majority of Deputies presented the conclusion that *"The position that besides men, women also may serve in the offices of the church, as described in this report, fits within the breadth of what can be affirmed as Biblical and Reformed"*. The discussion that ensued at Synod centred especially on culture, hermeneutics and the offices. Synod did not agree with the supporting arguments to the Deputies' conclusion, but at the same time did decide that *"the view that beside men women may also serve in the ecclesiastical offices must be open for free debate, provided that arguments are based on Scripture."* Synod appointed two new deputyships, one to conduct discussions within the churches, and the other to focus on a study of the matter.
- In 2016 the study Deputies (*Male/Female and the Office*) released a preliminary report, in which the sore points in the discussion were identified, and in which the two lines that can be seen in Scripture were explicitly explored: one line can be discerned that curtails the contribution of women, while the other line clearly acknowledges such a contribution. Do we do an injustice to Scripture if we do not give this room to women, or rather if we do? With this report, the Deputies aimed to encourage the churches to begin a spiritual process of finding a shared course in addressing this problem. This was done in collaboration with the Deputies *Male/Female in the Church*, who had made an inventory of the current role of women in the local churches, and who had guided the process in the churches through local and regional discussion evenings.
- In their final report, *"Serving Together"*, the Deputies *Male/Female and the Office* articulated their findings about: what the Bible says about women; what the Bible says about the offices; the historical development of the offices; the practice in our churches; and the insights of sister churches within our own country and abroad.

Why is this a currently relevant issue?

In its discussions, the General Synod of Meppel (2017) has been continually and especially mindful of the urgency of this matter, which had been on the table of Synods since 2005. This urgency was highlighted in 2016 by the Deputies *Male/Female in the Church*.

A practice has grown of increasing deployment of our sisters and their gifts in all kinds of tasks in the congregations. Sisters perform pastoral, leadership and instructional tasks that in the past had only been carried out by office-bearers. This sets up a tension between our doctrine of the office and congregational practice. What is the Biblical underpinning and justification of the deployment of women in the congregation?

At the same time, the delegates to Synod were constantly confronted with the differences of view that exist concerning this matter. That is the situation in which we as churches find ourselves: we tasted it in the variety of letters that were sent to us from the churches; we encountered it in the meetings we had with sister churches throughout the world during Synod's "days for churches abroad". And in our meeting sessions at Synod we wrestled with the same differences in insight.

Inside and outside the meetings at Synod we spoke to each other about the doctrine of the office, hermeneutics, the texts requiring women to be silent, and the different roles of men and women.

We considered alternative proposals: for example, we considered the possibility of opening the office of deacon to women, and at the same time to broaden our view of this office beyond our current practice; similarly, giving women permission to preach, while the office of elder (incorporating the final responsibility for the congregation) would then be reserved for men.

The decisions of Synod

First of all, Synod decided to encourage the churches to make careful arrangements with regard to the appointment of men and women in various kinds of service that do not belong to the offices. See decision 2. This decision gives expression to our appreciation for and recognition of the possibilities the Spirit has given to women, gifts that they deploy in the congregation.

Further, Synod declared that there are Scriptural grounds to call, next to men, also women to the office of deacon, elder and minister. The text of the decisions articulates that *next to* the view that (certain) offices are to be reserved for men, there is *also* room for the view that these offices may be filled by women. (See decision 3). We did not easily resign ourselves to the difference in interpretation of the relevant texts. A careful weighing of the *content* of what Scripture says preceded these decisions, and this is reflected in the grounds provided. See decisions 3, 4 and 5.

We were able, on a number of points, to come to agreement; at the same time differences of insight remained, especially in relation to the calling of women to the offices of elder or minister. These differences in insight mirror the situation that exists within the churches.

The next move: up to the churches

Next, Synod decided to leave room for the local churches to decide for themselves whether, if so in what manner, and when they want to act in line with these decisions. See decision 7.

It is now up to each of the churches to discuss the decisions of Synod, and to address what lives in their own congregations. What is the level of support in the congregation for opening the offices to sisters? Do female members of the congregation feel called to an office? How ought we to deal with this in practice from here? It is vital that reflection and discussion about this matter does not come to a halt. That is what Synod has tried to establish in decision 8.

In order to facilitate this process of reflection, discussion and decision-making, Synod decided to appoint new Deputies *Male/Female in the Church*, in order to provide support to congregations and classes, to investigate what lives in the churches following on from the decisions that have been made, and to report to the next Synod. See decision 10.

Our Prayer

Synod is well aware that the decisions it has taken concerning the fulfilling of the offices by women will be received in different ways. For years already, differences of view have existed within the churches. This could easily hinder a genuine conversation between brothers and sisters.

That is why Synod issues an urgent plea to the churches and its members to carefully consider, with an open Bible, and before the face of God, the decisions it has taken and the grounds presented in support of them.

In the meantime, Synod is also cognizant of the fact that this approach to its decisions will not automatically lead to agreement concerning the opening of the offices to women. As a result, there will be growing differences in practice, from congregation to congregation, in relation to the filling of the offices.

Mindful of this, Synod makes an appeal to the churches and its members, even when there is difference of opinion on this point, to keep accepting one another (Romans 15:7). Let us heed the appeal of the apostle Paul to be eager to maintain the unity that the Spirit gives us in Christ in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3).

Let us realize that for now we see in a mirror dimly, and only know in part (I Corinthians 13:12). And may we have strength to comprehend, together with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:18,19). Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

“Peace be to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible”. (Ephesians 6:23,24)

in unity through Christ,
on behalf of the Synod,



ds. Frans Wisselink,
scriba II

Supplement: decisions of Synod MF and office

Supplement: Decisions MFAO

Materials:

1. Preliminary Report of Deputies Male/ Female and Office – *The Sore Points* (08-07-2016);
2. Final Report of Deputies Male/Female and Office – *Serving Together* (01-11-2016);
3. Letter from GK Brunssum-Treebeek (23-12-2016), indicating it is pleased with the report *Serving Together*, and expressing heartfelt agreement with draft decision 4;
4. Letter from GK Sint Jansklooster-Kadoelen (13-01-2017), interacting with the report *Serving Together*: taking the starting point in the creation of man and women is good; however, only the man was created in the image of God, not the woman; the ‘four layers’ model is incorrect; it is desirable that women are optimally deployed in the church, but that the differences between man and woman are not glossed over;
5. Letter from GK Kantens (23-01-2017), interacting with the report *Samen Dienen*: the manner in which chapter 2 gives attention to the historical contours provides valuable insights; however, it seems that the concept of equality between man and woman figures too prominently; chapter 3 seems to aim at providing room for women within the current structures of the office; broadening the office of deacons and (later) opening the office of deacons to women would be a good option; this matter ought not to be left in the freedom of the churches;
6. Letter from GK Bussum-Huizen (24-01-2107), providing an analysis of the report *Samen Dienen*: the report arrives at a different stance concerning the position of women in the congregation than has hitherto been taught in the churches; its discussion concerning the texts requiring women to be silent is too sketchy;
7. Letter from GK Emmeloord (26-01-2017), requesting that Synod limits itself to a declaration that ‘women in office’ is not in conflict with the Word of God, and that it leaves till the next Synod a decision to actually open the offices to sisters;
8. Supplementary report of ‘Deputies Male/Female in Office’ (31-01-2017): supplement to chapter 5 of the report *Samen Dienen*;
9. Letter from the Canadian Reformed Church (24-10-2017), interacting with chapter 2 of the report *Samen Dienen*: the manner in which the ‘four layers’ are described shows that ‘culture’ has determined the direction of the report; it is clear from I Corinthians 14:33b-35 and I Timothy 2:11-14 that the Bible leaves no grounds for the ordination of women; the report does not offer a clear description of what the Bible means with ‘prophesying’; man and women have equal value, but according to Ephesians 5:22 women are to recognize the authority of their husband, and in this context the reference to I Corinthians 7:4b is inappropriate; the report falls short in failing to pay attention to I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6;
10. Letter from GK Capelle a/d IJssel-Noord (10-02-2017): asserting that the report *Samen Dienen* fails to do justice to the Word of God: in Chapter 2 the deputies wrongly state that Paul’s interpretation of Genesis 1-3 is not to be regarded as normative; hence, the deputies have not done proper justice to the ‘line of authority’; in Chapter 3 the difference between the ruling office and all kinds of service within the church has been watered down;

11. Letter from GK Spakenburg-Noord (24-01-2017): requesting not to go beyond decisions-in-principle at this stage, and only implementing these decisions if the next Synod agrees to do so with a great majority;
12. Letter from GK Veenendaal-Oost (27-01-2017): asserting that the line the Bible gives concerning leadership of the congregation points to the man's role; in its view, insufficient weight has been given to the fact that at the Fall it was Adam who bore ultimate responsibility, and that Jesus appointed 12 male disciples; expressing objections against the deputies' reformulation of their mandate; and making a plea for option e., possibly to be extended by opening the office of deacons to sisters;
13. Letter from Deputies BBK (Deputies for relations with churches abroad)(15-05-2017): Advice not to proceed further at this point than the conclusion that in the light of Scripture it can be justified to open the offices to sisters, and to leave the decision to actually open the offices to the General Synod of 2020 at the earliest;
14. From the VGKSA (22-05-2017): written response to questions sent by the Synod Committee *M/F and Office*: under the influence of the 'new hermeneutic', present-day culture has become dominant in the report *Samen Dienen*; Genesis 3:16 is in itself not a curse; rather, the curse lies in the manner in which it functions after the Fall; hence, it is an artifice for the report to place this text in the after-the-Fall layer.

Decision 1:

To discharge the Deputies *Male/Female and Office*

Ground:

The Deputies Male/Female and Office have properly carried out the mandate given to them by the General Synod of Ede.

Decision 2:

To encourage the churches:

- a. to make grateful use, in instruction, pastorate and diaconate, of all the gifts that the Lord gives to both men and women.
- b. to make careful arrangements with regard to the appointment of men and women in various kinds of service that do not belong to the offices.

Grounds:

1. Next to men, women are also active at all levels in the congregation, without having been ordained to the office of minister, elder or deacon. They participate in the liturgy, in catechesis, and in committees and other positions (sometimes those of leadership). In recent years, this participation has become increasingly intensive, and that is a good thing.
2. Those who, serving in a special office, bear broad responsibility for the congregation must believe that they are called to this office, possess the necessary gifts, and by means of election and ordination are authorized by Jesus Christ to dedicate themselves to this task. This affords protection, both to the office-bearer and to the congregation. This protection is also important in relation to positions of service that do not belong to the offices.

Decision 3:

To declare that there are Scriptural grounds to provide ample room for the deployment of the gifts of women in task areas such as preaching, instruction, pastorate and diaconate.

Grounds:

1. Under the Old Covenant, men fulfilled all the regular offices in the church, those of prophet, priest and king. They were anointed to these offices, as a sign of having been appointed to and equipped for them. It was also men who served in numerous extraordinary functions of leadership in the church, such as the patriarchs, Moses, Joshua and the Judges. Finally, men fulfilled the roles of elders in the community. The few exceptional cases where women occupied leadership (Deborah, Judges 4:4; Miriam, Micah 6:4) or prophetic roles (Deborah, Judges 4:4; Hannah, I Samuel 2:1-10; Huldah, II Kings 22:14; Mary, Luke 1:46-55; Anna, Luke 2:36), confirms this rule under the Old Covenant.
2. At the same time, in the story of the Old Covenant, the pivotal roles are portrayed that women have fulfilled among God's people in the course of the history of salvation (Eve, Genesis 3:15; Sarah, Genesis 17:15,16; Tamar, Genesis 38:13ff; Jochebed, Exodus 1:22-2:10; Rahab, Joshua 2:2-7; Deborah, Judges 4 and 5; Ruth, Ruth 1:16,17; Esther, Esther 4:15,16; Mary, Luke 1:38). We also read the story of the woman in Revelation 12:1-6, who courageously endured the threats of the dragon. This story stands in stark contrast to the failures of men (Abraham, Genesis 12:12,13; Genesis 20:2; Judah, Genesis 38:24; Aaron, Exodus 32:2-6; Eli, I Samuel 1:14; David, II Samuel 11 and 12; Solomon, I Kings 11:1-8). In Matthew 1:17 the Lord reviews this history, holding it up as a mirror to the male leaders of the church of that time and of all ages, and as a warning to them.
3. Among those who lived under the Old Covenant, there was a yearning for the coming of the New. The New Testament reveals the fulfilment of that longing. In the coming of the God's unique Anointed One, our Lord Jesus Christ, thanks to his official ministry, and thanks to the anointing with his Spirit, God's people might truly be what they since the covenant of Mount Sinai had already been called, a 'royal priesthood' (Exodus 19:6; I Peter 2:9). For all of His people, His coming is at the same time the coming of and the anointing with the Spirit of prophecy (Acts 1:8,14 and 2:4), for which Moses had been hoping (Numbers 11:29), and of which the prophets spoke (Joel 3:1,2). It is the perspective of their freedom in Christ, in which there is no longer any difference between male and female (Galatians 3:28). All will be prophets, priests and kings. In the New Covenant, the law carved in stone, the law of commandments and regulations, has been set aside (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ephesians 2:15-17; II Corinthians 3:6) because it, also and especially in relation to the ordering of the Old Testament offices, had proved to be ineffective (Hebrews 8:8) and declared to be obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). The New Covenant, characterized by equality, has replaced it. All will know the Lord, from the least of them to the greatest. (Jeremiah 31:34; Acts 2:17,18; I John 2:20,27).
4. For the Christian church, this revelation of the Old and New Testament gives cause for continuing reflection. Throughout the ages, until Christ's return, the church will have to critically examine itself: the ordering of its church life, the functions that according to Scripture are to be carried out in it, the roles that all its members, male and female, from the least to the greatest, are to fulfil in it. In this way it will be continually exhorted, with a view to the organization of the offices, to critically examine its own understanding of Scripture.

5. In response to this calling, Synod has come to the conclusion that the witness of Scripture gives the congregation every reason to allow men and women to serve equally in all prophetic, priestly and royal tasks in the church, tasks which their shared name as Christians addresses equally (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 12). Synod has further come to the conclusion that those places in which Scripture speaks of an apostolic command to keep silent, or a prohibition against women teaching or exercising authority, do not, in themselves, supply indisputable grounds to categorically exclude, in our time and circumstances, women from teaching and ruling offices in the church, since the exegesis of these texts is too greatly in dispute.
6. Within these offices, next to this equality there will also be distinctiveness, and men and women are called to mutual acceptance of each other in the place and manner in which they serve, in accordance with the various and distinctive talents they have been given.

Decision 4:

To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, next to men, also to call women to the ministry of mercy and therefore to the office of deacon.

Grounds:

1. According to the testimony of Scripture, in apostolic times women shared in the office of the deacons (I Timothy 3:11, 5:9), and they too were called 'deacons' (Romans 16:1-2).
2. The office of deaconess was also known in the early Christian church. In a number of Reformed churches this office still continues.

Decision 5:

To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, next to men, also to call women to the ministry of oversight, pastorate and instruction, and therefore to the office of elder.

Grounds:

1. Women such as Miriam and Deborah portray women in the Old Testament who, in collaboration with men, acted as rulers and judges.
2. They could also be called to this service by God Himself, as is evident from Micah 6:4, where the Lord teaches Israel: "I sent before you ... Miriam".
3. While the New Testament refers to men as elders, older women are also called to exemplary and pastoral tasks (Titus 2:3-5).
4. Paul's reference to Junia and her husband Andronicus as highly regarded apostles (Romans 16:7), and to other married couples as his fellow workers (Romans 16:3), and his mention of married couples and of a brother and sister, at whose home a church meets (Romans 16:5,15), create the impression that men and women, from a position of equality, together gave leadership in Christ's congregations.

Decision 6:

- a. To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, that next to men, women also, who have received the necessary gifts, may be given permission to preach; and hence to delete the word 'male' from Article 1 of the general regulations governing permission to preach.

- b. To declare that there are Scriptural grounds, next to men, also to call women to the ministry of preaching and instruction, and therefore to the office of minister.

Grounds:

1. The Old Testament already makes mention of prophetesses (Exodus 15:20,21; Judges 4:4-7; II Kings 22:14), or of prophetic activity by women (I Samuel 2:1-10). In the New Testament also, already before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we read about prophetic activity by women. We note Mary and her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55). We also read of Anna, who prophesied together with Simeon on the occasion of the infant Jesus' presentation in the temple, and who served the Lord day and night in the temple (Luke 2:36-38).
2. The fulfilment of the promise of Pentecost (Joel 3:1-2; Acts 2:17-18) is that sons and daughters, young and old, will share in the gift of prophecy. The New Testament displays that reality. On the day of Pentecost the apostles, together with other disciples, among whom possibly women (Acts 1:14), anointed by the Holy Spirit, acted as Jesus' witnesses (Acts 1:8; 2:4-8). Other places, too, make mention of women who prophesied (Acts 21:8; I Corinthians 11:4-5).
3. The meaning of Scripture is that "*the one who prophesies speaks to people for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation*" (I Corinthians 14:3). This manner of prophesying applies to both men and women.
4. New Testament prophecy, as to its content, has always been understood within the Reformed tradition as the explanation of Holy Scripture, and a Spirit-guided application to the present day, specifically in the preaching.
5. While there is a great deal of uncertainty surrounding the precise interpretation of the apostolic command to 'be silent', comparative examination of I Corinthians 14:34 and I Corinthians 11:5 and 14:26 shows that in any case this prescription cannot be understood as an absolute prohibition to speak (or preach) in the worship service.

Decision 7:

To leave room to the local churches to determine for themselves whether, if so in what manner, and when they want to act in line with these decisions.

Grounds:

1. It is for each church to consider how the gifts given to its members are to be deployed, in order to bring the congregation further on the road to the kingdom of God.
2. Each church ought to follow its own process of reflection, and come to its own decision if, if so in what manner, and when they will take action in line with these decisions.

Decision 8:

To encourage the churches to engage in further reflection as to how justice can be done to the differences between men and women in the execution of tasks and offices in the congregation.

Grounds:

1. The Bible speaks about both the equal value and position of man and woman, and the distinctive place God has given them within it, in marriage and in the congregation. In our present-day culture, which is strongly oriented towards equality, this aspect deserves special attention.
2. The Bible repeatedly sounds warnings that man and women ought not to intrude into each others place, nor lord it over each other (I Peter 3:7, 4:15, 5:3; I Timothy 2:8-15; I Corinthians 14:34-35; III John:9).

Decision 9:

To send the decisions concerning *Male/Female and Office* to sister churches abroad.

Ground:

A number of sister churches abroad have responded in writing to the reports of Deputies, and/or participated in discussion of these reports during the days allocated to relations with churches abroad at the Synod.

Decision 10:

To appoint *Deputies Male/Female in the church*, with the following instructions:

1. To explain and provide further information concerning the shared service of men and women in the local churches and the classes;
2. To gather and develop material that will serve the process of reflection in the local churches and the classes;
3. To provide advice and guidance at points of difficulty regarding the decisions that have been taken (in collaboration with the Deputies for Church Polity);
4. To provide advice in relation to the ordination of men and women to tasks that belong, and do not belong, to the offices (co-ordinated with the Deputies for worship services);
5. To make an inventory of the manner in which the local churches and the classes deal with the decisions that have been taken (in collaboration with the *Praktijkcentrum*).

Grounds:

1. The decisions that have been taken call for careful communication with the churches
2. There is already a great deal of material available in the form of reports to Synods of 2008, 2011, 2014 and 2017. However, it is good to develop a coherent package of materials for the benefit of the churches.
3. The decisions that have been taken regarding the joint service of men and women have a sizeable impact, and will be received in quite different ways. That is why it is beneficial for the churches to be able to turn to a single address to obtain advice in relation to these decisions.
4. Now that it is in the freedom of the churches whether and to how to take action in line with these decisions, it will be beneficial to gain an overview of the manner in which the churches respond to them.

5. An insight into what lives within the churches in relation to these decisions may assist determining whether, in the longer term, the offices need to be described or organized differently.

Decision 11:

To allocate a budget of € 20.500 in total to the Deputies *Male/Female in the church*.

APPENDIX B

**REPORT ON THE ICRC CONFERENCE 2017
HELD IN JORDAN STATION, ONTARIO, CANADA**

“Together with all the saints”

by Rev P G Boon

Report on ICRC 2017 in Jordan, Canada **“Together with all the saints”**

Impression of the ICRC 2017 by delegate Rev P G Boon

Not far from where the mist of the spectacular Niagara Falls ascends, the ICRC recently held their 9th conference. The *International Conference of Reformed Churches* consists of 34 Reformed and Presbyterian church federations from all over the world. I was privileged to be delegated by the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. The conference reminded me of the beautiful text from Ephesians 3: “and I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ”. It was refreshing to meet so many fellow believers from all corners of the world, who also endeavour to build their personal and ecclesiastical life on God’s Word alone. In this report I give a short impression of the 9th conference in Jordan, Ontario. The value of the ICRC for the FRCSA will come to the fore automatically, I hope.

Hosting Church

The ICRC was established in 1982 with the purpose to bring Scripturally-sound churches worldwide in contact with each other. It is a platform where churches meet to mutually edify and strengthen each other. It is called a *conference* with good reason, as it does not have any decision-making power over member churches. The conference is held every fourth year, organised by one of the member churches somewhere in the world. This time the *Immanuel Church* in the town Jordan (Ontario Canada) served as host church. They are part of the *United Reformed Churches in North America*. This is a federation which was formed in the 1990’s after the mother federation turned liberal. Our sister churches in Canada maintain close cooperation with them (e.g. pulpit exchange). The members of the *Immanuel* congregation, young and old, did a fantastic job to lodge the more than hundred guests, serve meals and many more things. I stayed together with two brothers from Indonesia and a Canadian from another part of the country, with one family.

Lectures

During the conference there were four lectures. The celebration of 500 years Reformation received special attention.

- Dr. Derek Thomas from South Carolina (and associated to the Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia) spoke on John Calvin’s commentary on Job. The question why the just have to suffer is central to this Bible book. What made his presentation special is that he interwove the historic circumstances in Geneva at the time when Calvin was preaching on Job, into his lecture. In those days Geneva was full of refugees and the question why the just have to suffer, was keeping the city busy.
- Dr. Joel Beeke (associated to the Puritan Reformed Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan) lectured on *Reformed Piety: covenantal and experiential*. He paid attention to what Calvin had written on piety (*pietas*), as well as Reformed theology in subsequent ages. He pleaded for a healthy Biblical balance between *covenantal* and *experiential*. Five-hundred years of history after the Reformation showed aberrations to different sides when one of these two aspects was overemphasized at the cost of the other.

- Rev. Hiralal Solanki of the *Reformed Presbyterian Church in India*'s lecture dealt with "A Brief Overview of Christian Missions in India". What remained with me about this lecture was that it was very long and that it contained an almost incomprehensible number of names and dates, subdivided over the different states of India. But what should one expect else from a country where almost 20% of the world's population is living? Indeed Christ has not forgotten this country and the current developments in this country can promise great things for the church!
- Dr. Matthew Ebenezer, also from the *Reformed Presbyterian Church in India*, lectured on "Bringing the Reformed Faith to India". He pointed at the possibilities for evangelisation, and which approach should be followed. India is a country that is rising between the giants of the world and there are many misplaced perceptions about the Christian faith. The status of Christians differs per state / province. Persecution and discrimination of the church is a reality in many places.

These last two lectures focused on India in view of the ICRC's plans to have the next conference in India (further details later).

Membership

The ICRC is an organisation that is busy to grow steadily. More and more Scripturally-sound church federations from all over the world get acquainted with it and are sending observers. This time there were observers from the United States, Hungary, Brazil and South India. During the conference two new member churches were admitted :

- *the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia (CRCA)*
- *the Presbyterian Church in Uganda (PCU).*

According to the ICRC constitution a federation is only allowed to join, when it is proposed by two existing member churches. They have to testify as to the Scriptural soundness of the applying federation, and whether they are in line with the ICRC basis and constitution, namely the Three Forms of Unity and/or the Westminster Confession. During the conference a committee was appointed to investigate whether the correct procedure was followed and whether the applying churches are indeed Biblically sound in doctrine and life.

Once a member, however, does not mean always a member. This became clear especially during this conference. For the first time in its existence the ICRC had to take the step to suspend an existing member church. This was a sad measure, yet at the same time courageous, when the conference decided to suspend the *Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (RCN)*. Since the RCN, after more than a decade of preparations, have decided on their 2017 synod to open all ecclesiastical offices for women, they became in conflict with the ICRC constitution, which is very clear on this point:

"IV.4 Suspension or termination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes that 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".

Suspension is something that does not happen easily. According to the ICRC constitution it can only be requested by the synod / major assembly of another member church. The major assembly of the *Orthodox Presbyterian Church* (also a member church) had sent in this regard a letter to the ICRC. The *Canadian Reformed Churches* seconded the letter.

During the conference the RCN first received opportunity to enlighten their synod decisions. They had translated their decisions with all grounds in English and disseminated them to all delegates. Subsequently the RCN synod chairman Dr. Melle Oosterhuis, one of the RCN's delegates to the ICRC, elaborately addressed the conference. Several questions were asked to him, and the RCN received ample opportunity to explain their position.

In the following days, the delegates of the other member churches communicated their views, on the basis of Scripture and Confession. There was not much appreciation for the RCN's endeavour to drive a wedge between Scripture and Confession on the one hand, and the ICRC's constitution on the other. The fact that the constitution looks as it does, is because member churches had chosen in the past to remain Scripturally-sound! It struck me how many federations from around the world have experienced themselves this specific doctrinal dispute in the past. There was neither much appreciation for the fact that the RCN had tried to 're-invent the wheel' on its own. During the last decade several member churches were closely involved in this doctrinal dispute in the RCN. The experience was throughout that the RCN were not prepared to listen.

According to the ICRC constitution a two thirds majority is needed to suspend a member church. The fact that 86% voted to suspend them, testifies to the fact that the ICRC had no doubt that the RCN had transgressed the boundaries of Scripture and Confession with their synod decision. A substitute motion of the *Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken* not to suspend, but to allow the RCN to reconsider their own position in the ICRC during their next synod, was rejected in a preceding vote. Clearly the ICRC was convinced that firm action was needed against an erring church. It was emphasized though that suspension is not a punishment, but, with love, to point them to the seriousness of the situation. The conference does not want the RCN to leave the ICRC, but to retract their unbiblical synod decisions. The RCN remains suspended until the next conference in 2021. A suspended church loses its voting right, but retains the right to send delegates and to serve in committees.

Value for the FRCSA

What is the value of the ICRC for the FRCSA? Does it make sense for a small federation to spend time and money on being a member? I would like to share with you my personal conviction, which grew by attending this conference. Because of the constant pressure of the world, churches can develop the feeling that they will have to 'adapt or die'. This can also happen because of the pressure of other denominations in their direct vicinity, who have chosen the direction of liberalism and adaption to society. Once Elijah was depressed, because he was under the impression that he had remained as the only faithful prophet. But the LORD opened his eyes to the fact that there were seven thousand more who would not bow before Baäl (1 Kings 19:18).

The ICRC opened my eyes again for the fact that there are not only a multitude of Christians across the world who want to remain Scripturally-sound, but also many federations who build on the same foundation of Scripture and Confession. Many of these federations have no historical

connections with us. The ICRC opened my eyes to how many fellow believers we also have in the Presbyterian tradition. To be truly Reformed (or Presbyterian) means to remain Scripturally-sound. This is the inner strength of the ICRC. It is a growing network of church federations from all over the world, who recognize one another on the basis of God's Word alone.

Finances

What does the ICRC cost? Each member church pays a contribution, which is calculated with the World Bank's standardised system indicating the average per capita income for each country. Since South Africa is a third world country, our contribution is low: only 1 dollar cent per member per year. But also for churches from the first world the contributions are surprisingly low: our sister churches in Canada for example pay 7 dollar cents per member per year. These extremely low membership fees are due to the fact that the ICRC consist of many federations, who carry the costs together. Additional for each member church is however to pay the travelling costs of their delegates. Historically the FRCSA had sent only one delegate, which then implies an additional amount of about R 12,50 per member per year (based on 1500 church members). A relatively small amount for what one receives back in the ICRC.

During the Jordan conference a decision was made also that no member church will be allowed to pay more than 25% of the total budget of the ICRC. The motive behind this decision is that a single member church should not receive, by way of its contributions, an unduly influence on the conference. This decision is actual in the case of a federation like the *Presbyterian Church of Korea*, who has almost half a million members. There was also a federation from South America present during the conference as observers, counting more than a million members.

At the other hand it was also decided that the minimum contribution for a member church should be US\$ 50. In case of for example the *Presbyterian Church of Uganda* or the *Sudanese Reformed Churches*, the calculation of their contribution resulted in 0 dollar cent per member. Yet according to the ICRC free membership is not a good thing either.

Committees

The ICRC has a number of committees, with the purpose especially to encourage networking among the member churches:

- missions committee
- theological training committee
- diaconal committee
- website committee
- committee for regional conferences.

Each committee gave feedback during the meeting on their activities, after which they received mandates for the coming years.

The mission work that is being done by all the member churches made a profound impression on me. There was also feedback on mission in countries where Christians are being persecuted or discriminated. The next two occurrences I want to share with you:

- A house church having their services every Sunday in the flat apartment of one of the members was betrayed by a neighbour to the police. One Sunday during the service it then happened that the police stood at the door. They searched the flat and took notice

of what was happening there. At the moment the police was leaving the officer looked over his shoulder and commented: “May the Lord bless you!”

- In another country a congregation received an invitation by the town’s city council to the annual national festive day proceedings. On that day it is expected also from the delegations of the churches to bow before the statue of the emperor / president. This specific church however regarded it as a sin against the 1st commandment. They then decided to be honest and wrote an answer to the city council, explaining their conviction. They were prepared to give full honour to the government, yet their conscience did not allow them to bow before the emperor / president. Although the local city council is relatively tolerant against the churches who are not registered with the national government, the congregation feared that their refusal to bow on the festive day would attract the attention of the officials of national government attending, causing perilous consequences to them. But to their utter astonishment, a few days before the festivities, they received a letter from the local municipality, in which the latter apologized for the fact that accidentally it was forgotten to add their church’s name to the list on the program ... They were still welcome to attend, but it was up to them to decide ...

These are two examples of how Christ is taking care of his church, often in unexpected ways! Both happened only recently. The conference did request us, though, to be careful with the mentioning of names, when publicizing happenings like these. For that reason I did not mention the names of these countries.

Next ICRC

The ICRC strives towards having its conferences every time in a new part of the world. So that the awareness of the ICRC members can grow and federations in the area receive opportunity to get first-hand experience with the conference. For this reason it was decided to organise the next ICRC, God willing, in 2021 in India. It will most probably be held in the capital, Delhi. A Christian conference in India is however not obvious. The majority religion is Hinduism, and as mentioned earlier, in India the churches often face resistance. There is a real chance that the present government will reject visa for persons wanting to attend a Christian conference in India. They are not interested in more Christian influence in India. To travel on a tourist visa can also face difficulties, since many delegates are pastors, and on their visa application they will have to fill in their employer, which is a church.

The ICRC therefore granted the Indian churches a window period of one year. In the coming year they will endeavour to register the conference with the authorities, which will make the obtaining of visas possible. Although the government is not Christian, there are officials who are Christian, and who show goodwill towards the church. Who knows – and so we hope – that the Lord will open a door to have the next conference in India. Would this not work, the conference designated Australia as second option.

To close, the ICRC is a body which can help us to open our eyes for how wide and long and high and deep the work of Christ on earth is, also in our times.