

Report of Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad

Main Report with Appendices

March 2024

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1 General

As instructed by Synod Belhar of 2021, Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA) herewith submit to Synod Mamelodi 2024 their report for the period 2021-2024 and their recommendations to Synod for the period 2024-2027.

1.1 Mandate

The mandate given by Synod Belhar 2021 to the DRCA can be found in the Acts of Synod Belhar 2021, Arts. 16, 21, 22, 35 and 37. The associated Synod decisions are reproduced below. The mandate for each specific task is repeated at the beginning of each relevant section in this report.

Synod Belhar 2021 gave the following mandate to the DRCA and took the following decisions concerning the DRCA for the period 2021 to 2024 (with Article numbers from the Acts):

16.1.1. To continue the sister church relation with the **Free Reformed Churches of Australia** (FRCA) according to the adopted rules.

16.1.2. To authorise deputies to send a recorded address, which is also submitted in writing, containing our greetings and encouragement, to Synod Albany convening in June 2021, and to participate by way of electronic means.

16.1.3. To provide regular feedback to the churches on developments in the FRCA

21.1. To maintain sister-church relations with the **Canadian and American Reformed Churches** (CanRC) according to the adopted rules.

21.2. To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.

21.3. To provide regular feedback to the churches on developments in the CanRC.

35.1. That the **Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands** (RCNL), by the decisions of Synod Meppel 2017 regarding women in office as well as the trajectory of unification with the NGK, both of which were upheld by the Synod of Goes 2020, have deviated from the Word of God and undermined its authority.

35.2. These decisions by RCNL synods are sufficient to terminate sister-church relations (in line with Synod Soshanguve North 2017, Art 44).

35.3. Despite sufficient grounds as per points 35.1 and 35.2 above, for the sake of local churches and church members in the RCNL who have objections to the decisions of the Synods of Meppel and Goes, to continue the restricted sister-church relationship as decided at Soshanguve-North 2017, Art 44.

35.4. FRCSA synod 2024 will make a final decision, unless in the meantime the RCNL unite with the NGK.

35.5. Although not included in the rules for sister-church relationships, the situation has forced Synod to mandate deputies:

35.5.1. To engage directly with concerned churches and members within the RCNL who object to the decisions of RCNL Synods with the purpose of discussing the way forward.

35.5.2. To write a letter to all church councils of the FRCSA, informing them of this decision and making it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of the decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.

35.5.3. To educate the congregations of the FRCSA on the grounds for this decision, and to make it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.

35.5.4. To communicate with and explain to the Dutch deputies the FRCSA's intentions with the decisions made, and to mandate the FRCSA's DRCA to stay informed about developments in the RCNL, especially among those concerned.

35.5.5. To communicate Synod's decisions to our Canadian and Australian sister churches, as well as to the ICRC.

37.1. To maintain contact and to continue discussions with **De Gereformeerde Kerken** (DGK) in the Netherlands as well as with the **Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland** (GKN), but not to progress towards ecclesiastical fellowship with these church federations.

37.2. In cases where members from these federations come to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests at the Lord's Supper – should they make such a request – only after an agreeable discussion with them.

37.3. To inform the DGK and the GKN in writing on these decisions concerning them and our decision regarding the RCNL.

37.4. To monitor the developments in any regrouping of churches and advise the next synod on relevant progress.

37.5. To coordinate with deputies abroad from CanRC and FRCA regarding developments of the DGK and GKN.

16.2.1. To put in more effort to promote the **International Conference of Reformed Churches** (ICRC) profile in the FRCSA by providing feedback to the churches,

16.2.2. To send a delegation, in consultation with other deputyships, to the next ICRC Conference in Windhoek, Namibia, along with an open invitation to church members.

16.2.3. To expand the DRCA by one more deputy, specifically designated for the ICRC (preferably one of our missionaries) to stimulate our involvement in ICRC activities.

16.3.1. To authorise DRCA to maintain contacts with African ICRC member churches and to find ways to support the proclamation of the Word of God and leadership training by those churches in their home countries, in cooperation with other ICRC member churches.

16.3.2. To support efforts to organise a Regional Africa Conference of ICRC member churches, if requested by the organizing committee.

16.3.3. To coordinate the efforts of the FRCSA and the RCSA concerning regional ICRC activities.

16.3.4. To send one delegate to the next ICRC Regional Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, and to solicit further delegation from FRCSA missionaries.

22.2. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in **Asia - Pacific**, mainly via the FRCA and the ICRC.

22.3. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in **North America**, mainly via the CanRC and the ICRC.

22.4. To absolve the DRCA from further responsibilities concerning the **FRCSA website**.

22.5.1. To provide the **church councils** with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.

22.5.2. To coordinate the contacts and **requests of the FRCSA** with churches abroad.

22.1.1. To appoint **new deputies** for the 2021 – 2024 period, until the next Synod.

22.1.2. To provide regular feed-back to the churches on developments in our sister-churches and the ICRC.

22.1.3. To submit an interim report for discussion during an **Indaba** to be held more or less halfway between Synod 2021 and the next Synod.

22.1.4. To report to the **next Synod** and formulate recommendations according to Article 10 and 11 of the Synod Rules.

46. To allocate a four-year **budget** of R 107 800 for the DRCA to carry out the above tasks during the period 2024 to 2027.

1.2 Recommendations

The following is an overview of the DRCA's recommendations to Synod Mamelodi 2024. The grounds for each recommendation are listed in the relevant report sections.

1. To continue the sister-church relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), according to the adopted rules.
2. To authorize DRCA to send one delegate to the next FRCA synod in 2027 and to instruct the delegate to convey our greetings, to give a presentation on the FRCSA and to promote co-operation.
3. To continue the sister-church relationship with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), according to the adopted rules.

4. To authorize the DRCA to send one delegate to the CanRC Synod Aldergrove in 2025 and to instruct the delegate to convey our greetings, to give a presentation on the FRCSA and to promote co-operation.
5. To maintain ecclesiastical contact with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) and De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands and specifically to monitor their progress with unification.
6. To maintain contact with the “Kerngroep Bezinning” within the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken and specifically to monitor their progress with unification with other Reformed believers in the Netherlands.
7. To monitor developments in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands, especially related to church unity.
8. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in the Asia – Pacific region through the FRCA and the ICRC.
9. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in Northern America through the CanRC and the ICRC.
10. To continue membership of the ICRC and participate in their Working Groups.
11. To send two delegates to the next international ICRC conference, scheduled for 2026 in South Korea, yet budget for one.
12. To remain in contact with the ICRC regarding future African regional ICRC conferences and send one delegate to the next conference, probably in 2028.
13. To raise the ICRC profile within the FRCSA by providing regular feedback on ICRC activities and articles in *Lux Mundi* to the churches, e.g. through a *DRCA Newsletter* or through *Kompas*.
14. To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad, e.g. through a *DRCA Newsletter* or through *Kompas*.
15. To submit an interim report for discussion during an Indaba to be held more or less halfway between Synod 2024 and Synod 2027.
16. To report to the next Synod and propose recommendations according to the Synod Rules as adopted by Synod 2017.

1.3 Deputies

Synod Belhar 2021 appointed the following brothers and sister as Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA): Rev J Bruintjes, br J Moes (convener), br JF Raimond, sr G van den Berg, Rev P Kgatle (for the ICRC) and Rev PG Boon (for the ICRC). These five brothers and one sister have served as deputies for the full period of three years.

1.4 Activities

To spread the workload, the deputies assigned geographical regions to the members for their specific focus as follows:

Australia	: Sr G van den Berg
North America	: Rev J Bruintjes
Netherlands	: Br JF Raimond
ICRC	: Rev P Kgatle and Rev PG Boon (as instructed by Synod 2021)
Convener / secretary	: Br J Moes

Deputies met, so far, nine times, more or less quarterly, i.e. on 4 November 2021; 17 February 2022; 23 June 2022; 8 September 2022; 2 February 2023; 4 May 2023; 10 August 2023; 9 November 2023 and 7 March 2024. The meetings were held in Cape Town and attended by Rev Kgatle and Rev Boon through the internet. The minutes of these meetings are available in the Synod Archives. By email of 18 February 2022, our sister churches were advised that the Acts of Synod Belhar 2021 were available on the FRCSA website.

It is noted that instructions 35.5.2 to 35.5.3 were handled by the Moderamen of Synod Belhar, by letters dated 30 August 2021 (Appendices A.1 and A.2). A letter of invitation to attend the unification celebrations of the RCNL and the NGK on 12 May 2023 was received (Appendix A.3). A response letter was sent by the DRCA on 24 March 2023, in which the termination of our sister-church relationship with the RCNL on 1 May 2023 was re-stated, as per our Synod Belhar decision 35.4 (Appendix A.4). Instruction 35.5.5 was implemented by a letter to the FRCA, the CanRC the “Core Group” within the RCNL, the GKN, the DGK and the ICRC, dated 6 May 2023 (Appendix A.5). A note on practical aspects of our relationship with the RCNL, after their unification with the NGK on 1 May 2023, was sent by the DRCA to all FRCSA churches (Appendix A.6).

Because of the Covid pandemic, we were not able to send a personal delegate to Synod Albany of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) in June 2021. Instead, in line with our mandate of Synod Belhar 2021, Art. 16.1, Rev Bruintjes did compile and send a message of greetings by email. This address is attached as Appendix B.

In accordance with Art. 21.2 of the mandate given by Synod 2021, the DRCA delegated Rev. PG Boon to attend Synod Guelph-Emmanuel of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), from 9 to 18 May 2022. He conveyed the greetings of our churches to this synod (Appendix C.1). The report of Rev Boon on his attendance is attached as Appendix C.2.

In accordance with Art.16.2 of the mandate given by Synod 2021, a delegation of four ministers has attended the 10th General Meeting of the ICRC in Windhoek, Namibia, from 13 to 18 October 2022. The FRCSA delegation consisted of Rev PG Boon, Rev P Kgatle (on behalf of the DRCA), Rev T Matlaela and Rev G Mnisi (as missionaries). A review of the

proceedings of this General Meeting was published on pp. 6 to 8 of the October 2022 issue of the ICRC journal *Lux Mundi* (<https://www.icrconline.com/lux-mundi>). Rev Boon wrote an article (in Afrikaans) on this conference in *Kompas* of December 2022.

In accordance with Art. 22.1 of the mandate given by Synod 2021, Rev PG Boon and Sr G van den Berg provided feedback to the churches on progress with the work of the DRCA at the Indaba in Johannesburg on 17 and 18 February 2023. They presented an interim report on the activities of the DRCA, which is attached as Appendix D.

1.5 Compilation of this report

The main body of this report was compiled with inputs from all deputies, where each deputy focused on his/her specific area of responsibility (see under para. 1.4). The appendices are compiled and finalised after circulation by the members of the DRCA.

1.6 General recommendations

DRCA requests Synod to adopt the following general recommendations:

- 1) To discharge the present members of the DRCA and thank them for their work over the past three years. Sr G van den Berg and br J Moes have decided not to be available for re-appointment.
- 2) To appoint the following brothers and sister as deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad for the 2024 – 2027 period: Rev J Bruintjes, br JF Raimond, br G Klapwijk and sr D van der Linden, all located in Cape Town, as well as Rev P Kgatle and Rev PG Boon in Gauteng. The latter two pastors are to focus on ICRC matters. Br Klapwijk and sr van der Linden are new appointments in the DRCA, while the others are continuing members.
- 3) DRCA should provide regular feedback to the FRCSA churches on developments in our sister churches and the ICRC.

Grounds

- 1) Continuity within the DRCA is important to maintain active and cordial sister church relationships and to stay aware of each other's ecclesiastical developments.
- 2) The work of the DRCA is only useful for the churches (who carry the costs) if regular information / feed-back is given to the churches. This requires a profound interest in church matters and good reporting skills.
- 3) The activities of the ICRC become more and more prominent in our international ecclesiastical relationships. It will be good to strengthen our relations with other ICRC member churches in Africa for mutual support. To stay actively involved in regional ICRC activities requires a strong presentation in the DRCA from persons with trans-cultural and organisational skills and knowledge of our mission work.

2 Contact with sister churches

This chapter describes the activities of deputies in carrying out the mandates of Synod Belhar 2021 to maintain relations with our initially three and presently two sister churches. But besides this formal ecclesiastical relationship of sister church, we have been in contact with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the world at an informal level or through the ICRC.

2.1 Rules for sister church relations

DRCA are carrying out their tasks in line with the latest version of the Rules for Sister Church Relations, as adopted by Synod Bethal 2014 (Acts Bethal, Art. 25, § 2.1).

2.2 Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Belhar 2021, Art.16.1)

To continue the sister church relation with the FRCA and to issue the following mandates to deputies:

1. To maintain the sister church relation with the FRCA according to the adopted rules.
2. To authorize deputies to send a recorded address (also submitted in writing) containing our greetings and encouragement to Synod Albany convening in June 2021, and to participate by electronic means.
3. To provide regular feedback to the churches on developments within the FRCA.

2.2.1 Activities

Deputies maintained the sister church relationship with the FRCA throughout the Covid pandemic by sending a voice note and written greetings compiled by Rev. J. Brintjes to their last Synod Albany 2021. This message can be found in Appendix B. The full Acts of the previous Synod Albany 2021 are available on website <https://frca.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Acts-of-Synod-2021.pdf>.

The FRCA has a membership of about 5 000, distributed over 17 congregations (15 in Western Australia, 2 in Tasmania, and a home congregation in Cairns, Queensland).

Besides the exchange of emails, we have also remained up to date with the developments in the FRCA through their magazine *Una Sancta*, which we receive monthly in electronic format. We have advised the FRCA about the termination of our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) upon their unification with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken on 1 May 2023.

The SA deputies requested the report of the FRCA deputies to Synod Darling Downs to be held in June 2024, specifically to take note of the recommendations of the FRCA deputies regarding GKN and DGK. This report was made available online (<https://frca.org.au/government/synod/2024synod/>)

At the request of the FRCA deputies, deputies had an online video meeting with the FRCA deputies on 10 August 2023 about matters of mutual concern. This interaction we have found to be helpful and the intention is to use this medium again in future.

For the upcoming FRCA Synod to be held at Darling Downs, in June 2024. Rev J. Bruintjes has been appointed as delegate to attend on behalf of the FRCSA. If he is unavailable, br J. Moes will attend, the Lord willing.

2.2.2 Decisions of Synod Albany 2021

Relations with Churches Abroad:

a) Investigation of Guidelines for Church Relations

The FRCA deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad have conducted a very detailed and lengthy study of guidelines for church relations, to be submitted to Synod Darling Downs 2024. It is an admirable piece of work.

The conclusion they come to is that relations with other churches should meet each of the three following criteria in order to determine whether sister church relations should be pursued or not: faithful, meaningful and manageable.

Deputies recommend that contact with other churches, with whom they do not pursue sister-church relations, will be termed 'Ecclesiastical Contact'.

This is in line with the FRCSA's approach.

b) International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

The FRCA is one of the founding members of the ICRC, the first meeting of which was held in 1982, but withdrew 14 years later. Since then the FRCA have grappled with conflicting views on the legitimacy and veracity of the ICRC. It remains a contentious issue in the churches.

Deputies are mandated to continue their study of reasons for FRCA withdrawal from the ICRC. They have compiled an extensive study with alternative proposals for submission to Synod Darling Downs 2024.

c) Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)

The sister-church relations with the RCNZ are gratefully continued, as they remain faithful in teaching and life to Scripture.

There is a need to monitor and report on the efforts being undertaken by the Emeritus Fund of the Free Reformed Churches to address the discrepancies between the emeritus funds of the two church federations with a view to removing the obstacles faced in calling each other's ministers. Deputies are mandated to meet with the RCNZ's Inter-church Relations Committee during the inter-synodical period subject to finances and to send two delegates to attend the next synod of the RCNZ.

An invitation will be extended to up to two delegates from the RCNZ to attend the next synod in Australia.

d) Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in the USA

Synod Albany expresses thanks to God for the Reformed witness evident in the OPC throughout its history, its constant repudiation of theological liberalism, its commitment to being confessionally Reformed, and its commitment to the authority and truth of the holy Scriptures. There are however concerns, particularly in regards to the differences in church polity and practice of the OPC. The FRCA acknowledges the desire of some of the churches to pursue further ecumenical relations with the OPC.

New deputies are to maintain ecclesiastical contact with the following mandate to: a. maintain contact with the OPC via its Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations (CEIR); b. further investigate the differences in church polity and practice of the OPC; c. send one delegate to a General Assembly of the OPC during the next inter-synodical period; and d. invite the OPC to send a fraternal delegate to the next synod in Darling Downs 2024 DV.

e) De Gereformeerde Ketrken (DGK) and Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)

The FRCA express thankfulness to God for positive developments towards unity of the DGK and GKN.

New deputies are appointed with the mandate to: a. continue contact with these two federations of churches; Acts of Synod 2021 38 b. encourage them to continue to work towards a united federation; c. encourage the DGK to sever its sister church relationship with the LRCA; d. confirm that the DGK/GKN have the marks of the true church; e. subject to the outcome of this contact, work towards entering a sister church relationship; f. keep the churches informed of developments; g. send one or two delegates to their respective synods; h. invite a delegate from DGK/GKN to the next FRCA synod.

f) Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

Synod decides the FRCSA give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, maintaining the Reformed Confessions and Church Order. Visits to South Africa have proven to be very beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement. Due to the South African churches', in addition to their own contributions, request for ongoing financial support for theological training, synod decides that such support should be coordinated, the churches kept informed and financial accountability maintained.

Synod expresses thankfulness that sister relations with the FRCSA continue according to the established rules and aim to send two delegates to the next FRCSA synod when it is convened. Deputies are to coordinate responses to any requests for support from Deputies Curators of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa and to involve the local congregations of the FRCA as appropriate and to keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the support provided, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via Una Sancta.

g) Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea (KPCK)

The FRCA have a sister church relation with the KPCK and thankfully this can continue as they show faithfulness to the Word of God, and maintain the Reformed Confessions. There is also contact with mission work of the KPCK in the Perth metro area, which is a

meaningful way to mutually assist and encourage one another. Synod expresses that it is brotherly for sister-churches to inform us when they are doing mission work within Australia, so that support and encouragement is prayerfully offered.

The sister-church relations with the KPCK is continued. Two delegates are to attend the KPCK General Assembly in 2022, there is to be continued contact with the KPCK mission undertaken locally in Australia, offering support where feasible and appropriate; and to discuss with the KPCK deputies the FRCA desire to coordinate with them as they engage in mission activities in Australia.

h) First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (FERC)

The FERC of Singapore is a single congregation, and as such, isolated. It gives evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God. The FERC of Singapore has an official bond with only one other church, and may be able to benefit from assistance from time to time, and from the resources the Lord has given the FRCA. Visits to Singapore and their visits to the FRCA have proven beneficial in terms of mutual support and encouragement.

The sister church relationship with the FERC of Singapore continues and they also continue to accept the agreement made which addresses the unique way that a sister church relationship with a single church can function: a. it is not always feasible, nor is it always necessary, to attend each other's meetings; b. when the FERC is deliberating important matters such as (1) external relationships with other churches, (2) doctrinal and (3) liturgical issues, the FERC will inform the FRCA. Deputies should also promote increased familiarization of the memberships of the FRCA and the FERC by way of exchange speakers where the opportunity arises, and good communication concerning events that might be of interest for one another's members to attend and participate in. The FERS benefits from FRCA financial support.

i) Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

The Australian (FRCA) and Canadian (CanRC) churches have always had an especially strong relationship. No language differences exist and theological students from Australia have mainly studied at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary in Hamilton. Financial support for the seminary in Hamilton is a continuing commitment. Ministers from both shores regularly serve in each other's congregations. They also largely share the same hymnal.

Synod thankfully expresses that it will continue sister church relations with the CanRC according to the established rules. Deputies are to monitor and report to synod on developments within the CanRC in relation to areas of discussion about church polity and liturgy. It wishes to stay informed on the developments concerning the discussions between the CanRC and the URCNA; and sent two delegates to the CanRC General Synod held in May 2022 in Guelph-Emmanuel CanRC (Ontario). The FRCA wish to foster mutual understanding and support regarding matters that the respective federations face, including their sister church relations in North America. The FRCA value the bond with the CanRC and the personal contact at the synodical level, which reinforces contacts with them.

j) The Reformed Churches in Indonesia (GGRI)

The FRCA have a sister-church relation with the GGRI. These churches continue to give evidence of striving to remain faithful to the Word of God, and synod gratefully continues the sister church relations with them. The FRCA aim to send two delegates to the next GGRI regional and national synods, continue to offer assistance in improving the Reformed character of the GGRI and addressing existing concerns by the current means of theological training support and seminars. The FRCA wish to encourage the GGRI in their efforts to work towards federative unity with the Calvinis Reformed Churches of Indonesia (GGRC) and the GGRI-Timor, continue contact with the GGRC, to visit their synods and to help them wherever possible to strengthen the Reformed character of these churches.

k) Training for the Ministry

Previous deputies were asked to explore the feasibility of establishing an affiliate to the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) in Australia. This work is ongoing and will be a long-term project. There are many administrative obstacles to overcome and government standards to be met. Synod decides to work towards agreements on a. a responsible timeline b. governance c. financing and infrastructure d. faculty e. accreditation requirements.

2.2.3 Conclusion

Deputies conclude that the FRCA remain faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions. Therefore we submit the following recommendations.

2.2.4 Recommendations

DRCA recommends to **Synod Mamelodi** the following:

Synod decides:

- 1) To maintain sister-church relations with the FRCA according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To authorize deputies to send a delegate to the following synod and to instruct the delegate to give a presentation on the FRCSA.
- 3) To provide regular feedback on developments in the FRCA.

Grounds:

- 1) The FRCA give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
- 2) Personal interaction has been invaluable to both churches, and support and understanding of each other is promoted.
- 3) Both church federations come from a similar background, grapple with similar problems and will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ in a rapidly secularizing world.
- 4) The financial support that the FRCA offers has been a great encouragement in the spreading of the gospel in South Africa and support to local churches.

2.3 Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Belhar 2021, Art. 21)

To continue the sister church relation with the CanRC with the following mandates:

1. To maintain sister-church relations with the **Canadian and American Reformed Churches** (CanRC) according to the adopted rules.
2. To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.
3. To provide regular feedback to the churches on developments in the CanRC.

2.3.1 Activities

Deputies maintained the sister-church relationship with the CanRC by attending their Synod Guelph (Emmanuel) 2022 and meeting with some of their deputies. Deputies have also tried as much as possible to stay updated on the cultural and theological discussion in the churches by reading their magazine publication, *Clarion*, as well as regularly checking the homepage of the federation for further news. As of March, the CanRC have 69 congregations (five more than the last synod), 19 692 members (2022), 71 pastors and 5 professors in active service, and 16 vacancies.

In accordance with mandate 2 above, Rev. Boon was delegated to attend Synod Guelph, which met from 10 to 23 May 2022. Rev. Boon brought our greetings and addressed synod (Appendix C.1). He expressed our gratitude for the unity of faith and the assistance that the FRCSA receives from the CRTS in theological training. He also spoke to the need for financial support for mission projects in South Africa, as well as ongoing support for our students.

One other thing of note is that the Canadian and American Reformed Churches now have one umbrella committee dealing with churches domestic, and international. The committee is called the Committee for Ecumenical Relations (CER).

Rev. Boon also wrote a report sharing his impressions of the synod (Appendix C.2). You can also find a copy of the Acts of Synod Guelph of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches at [this link](https://canrc.org/documents/9191). (<https://canrc.org/documents/9191>). There will be parts of the following report which use sections of his report.

2.3.2 Decisions of Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022

a) Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

It was with deep gratitude for the many years of faithful service provided by Dr. Arjan de Visser to the seminary that Synod approved his retirement at the conclusion of the 2022/2023 academic year. As his replacement Dr. Reuben Bredenhof (former Pastor of FRCA Mt. Nasura) was appointed as Professor of Ministry & Mission.

As for the South African students, synod also dealt with a request from the FRCSA, together with CRTS, on how to fund their studies in Hamilton. In the past a *Memorandum of Understanding* was

already reached between CRTS and the Curators of the FRCSA, specifying the financial responsibilities of each party:

Paid by the FRCSA	Paid by CRTS' Foreign Student Bursary Fund
Travel costs Medical costs Tuition fees Textbooks	Living costs in Canada

Synod did decide “that financial assistance for theological students of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) be provided by means of freewill giving to the Foreign Students’ Bursary Fund (FSBF).” This letter has since then been sent out to the churches. We can praise the Lord for their continued support.

b) Relationship with Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

The CanRC and FRCA enjoy a special relationship through the frequent exchange of pastors and students for the ministry and they also share a common language.

At this point, theological students from the FRCA receive their training at the CRTS. The FRCA contributes financially (equally per church member) to the college. The CRTS professors regularly visit the Australian churches for teaching and speaking engagements. Even so, the FRCA are exploring the option of starting their own Seminary. Synod Geulph (Emmanuel) 2022 decided:

To encourage the Board of Governors and Senate of the CRTS to continue contact with the deputyship for theological education in the FRCA to explore the feasibility and benefits of delivering theological education in Australia.

It will be good to follow this development closely and see if CRTS allows for a hybrid study while the FRCA work on establishing their own center for theological education. This might also benefit our students.

Although on opposite sides of the world, the relationship between these two federations is strong. And although the FRCA are growing more independent and self-sustaining (moving to establishing a seminary and having published their own *Book of Praise*) the bonds between the two federations are valued and do not appear to show any problems.

c) Relationship with Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

Synod decided to continue the sister-church relationship with the FRCSA and to mandate the Committee for Ecumenical Relations (CER) to send a delegation to our next synod, like they did in 2019. They look forward to even closer ties with the FRCSA and cooperation where possible.

They also decided “to continue involvement in discussions regarding financial requests from the FRCSA and provide coordination assistance where possible.” The grounds for this decision was that,

...in this situation it may be appropriate to mandate the CER to facilitate assistance for the FRCSA, should further financial assistance be necessary. In collaboration with others involved, the CER could seek out appropriate

churches or organizations to responsibly interact with requests for financial assistance.”

Therefore, it should be noted that when seeking financial assistance, it would be good to involve the CER.

Synod was positive towards CRTS supporting the training of theological students, also from South Africa. Over the past three years CRTS has been supporting theological education in the FRCSA through the use of online lectures, as well as guest lecturers from CRTS. It was also noted that the financial needs of the FRCSA continue to be substantial and merit attention.

Now that all the professors have attended, it was decided that the professors of CRTS will no longer come every year but will come on a rotating basis every third year.

d) Relationship with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)

The CanRC and URCNA share a couple of ecumenical bodies – both are part of the ICRC, and both are part of North America Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (NAPARC). They continue to be in “Phase 2” of federated unity – and at a local level work very closely together. Synod encouraged the churches to continue to foster relationships with the local URCNA churches. These activities could include, but are not limited to, pulpit exchanges, joint community and mission projects, and joint study opportunities.

Nevertheless, several decisions made by the URCNA synods seem to have put “Phase 3”, i.e. federative unity, out of reach for the near term. There are some differences in church polity matters. Furthermore, in 2018, the URCNA published a song book together with the OPC churches called the *Trinity Psalter Hymnal (TPH)*. This Psalter has been accepted with gratitude and is already in use in most URCNA churches. The URCNA delegate encouraged the Synod to also look into adopting it for the CanRC.

URCNA delegate Steve Swets’ address spoke to some of the difficulties in moving toward Phase 3A:

Our committee is not proposing to our Synod 2022 to change the phase of our relationship with the Canadian Reformed. This might be discouraging to you.... The possibility of merger seems to still be years away unless something dramatically changes. Some of the greatest hurdles still seem to relate to church polity and church order issues. Because of this Synod decided to not reappoint the Committee for Church Unity – including the coordinators, the sub-committees, and related committees (Church Order, Theological Education, Common Songbook, and Creeds and Forms). This decision shifted the church’s focus toward first working more at unity at a local level where possible. The difference in church polity is that the order of worship, the songs sung, and permission to lead worship is directed by the consistory in the URCNA and lies more with the Synods in the CanRC.

One third of all URCNA churches are in the USA. And the CanRC has only three congregations in the USA (less the 5%). These congregations are found in Lynden, WA, Nooksack, WA and in Grand Rapids, MI. So, the large majority of churches are simply not in regular contact with each other.

e) Relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCNL)

In regard to the RCNL (GKv) the Synod Guelph has completely cut the ties, and there is little to no more correspondence taking place. Because of their continued “disobedience to the Lord” synod decided, “to give the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) no further mandate specific to the GKv.”

f) The Reformed Churches (DGK) & Reformed Churches Netherlands (GKN)

The Canadian Reformed churches are continuing to keep a close eye on the developments in the Netherlands, especially as it concerns the DGK and the GKN. They note that both these federations display the mark of the true church and are deeply grateful for that.

The DGK still has relations with the Liberated Reformed Church of Abbotsford¹ which the CanRC do not acknowledge. The DGK have rebuked them and encouraged them to seek reunification. There are fruitful discussions taking place and for that we can give thanks!

Both the DGK and the GKN broke off from the RCNL at different times, and are in the process of reunification. You can read more of this elsewhere in the report.

Synod Guelph 2022 was of the opinion that, “When working towards Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with two federations of churches in the same geographical location who are working on merging, it is wisest to wait until the new federation has formed. If EF is deemed necessary prior to the merger, EF should be entered into with both federations at the same time.”

g) Relations with other churches

The CanRC continue to be part of the NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches) locally, as well the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches) internationally.

h) Book of Praise (BoP)

There is an ongoing discussion regarding hymns and their usage in the church.

Interestingly enough both regional synods requested that the hymn cap of 100 hymns be removed, but synod decided to “To deny the recommendation of both overtures to remove the cap of 100 hymns regarding the Book of Praise.” The primary reason was because of the “predominate place” the Psalms hold in liturgy.

This decision was taken while at the same time they approved 36 new hymns for testing in the church, which would take them over the 100 hymn cap.

¹ They were members that broke off when CanRC entered ecumenical relationships with Presbyterian churches. There was issues with fencing the Lord’s Supper and the way of celebration (small cups or one, grape juice or wine).

There are a number of questions here that continue to come up and there will be continued discussions around the Psalm and Hymnody of the church. In this we can learn from each other.

i) Bible Translation

In terms of Bible Translation, the Synod continues to recommend the English Standard Version (ESV) for use in the churches.

j) Publications

The website (<https://canrc.org/>) is a wonderful place to keep up to date on any calls that are extended and accepted or declined, as well as contact details for churches and pastors, for any of our members who may be moving to Canada.

Clarion (<https://clarionmagazine.ca/>) is also a publication of the CanRC churches. Since last synod Rev. P. Holtvlüwer has taken over as the chief editor of magazine. It includes several articles, reviews, and devotional material. It is a good way to stay informed regarding our sister churches in Canada and to stay current on the things that live within the federation.

2.3.3 Conclusion

What deputies have heard and is compiled in the last three years, as well as what is evident in the Acts of Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022, gives confidence that the CanRC remain faithful to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions. Therefore, we submit to Synod the following recommendations.

2.3.4 Recommendations

Synod decides:

- 1) To maintain sister-church relations with the CanRC according to the adopted rules.
- 2) To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Aldergrove to be convened on 6 May 2025 and to instruct the delegate to give presentations on the FRCSA.
- 3) To provide regular feed-back to the churches on developments in the CanRC.

Grounds:

- 1) The CanRC give evidence of continuing faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed confessions, and the Church Order.
- 2) Personal visits are an effective means of developing, building and maintaining good relations.
- 3) Both the CanRC and the FRCSA are church federations with a similar background and some similar challenges. By maintaining good contacts and by learning from each other, both church federations will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of Christ in a secular world.
- 4) We have benefitted from having CRTS as a centre for theological training.

2.4 Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCNL)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Belhar 2021, Art. 35)

1. That the **Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (RCNL)**, by the decisions of Synod Meppel 2017 regarding women in office as well as the trajectory of unification with the NGK, both of which were upheld by the Synod of Goes 2020, have deviated from the Word of God and undermined its authority.
2. These decisions by RCNL synods are sufficient to terminate sister-church relations (in line with Synod Soshanguve North 2017, Art 44).
3. Despite sufficient grounds as per points 35.1 and 35.2 above, for the sake of local churches and church members in the RCNL who have objections to the decisions of the Synods of Meppel and Goes, to continue the restricted sister-church relationship as decided at Soshanguve-North 2017, Art 44.
4. FRCSA synod 2024 will make a final decision, unless in the meantime the RCNL unite with the NGK.
5. Although not included in the rules for sister-church relationships, the situation has forced Synod to mandate deputies:
 - 5.1. To engage directly with concerned churches and members within the RCNL who object to the decisions of RCNL Synods with the purpose of discussing the way forward.
 - 5.2. To write a letter to all church councils of the FRCSA, informing them of this decision and making it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of the decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.
 - 5.3. To educate the congregations of the FRCSA on the grounds for this decision, and to make it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.
 - 5.4. To communicate with and explain to the Dutch deputies the FRCSA's intentions with the decisions made, and to mandate the FRCSA's DRCA to stay informed about developments in the RCNL, especially among those concerned.
 - 5.5. To communicate Synod's decisions to our Canadian and Australian sister churches, as well as to the ICRC.

2.4.1 Activities 1

The RCNL united with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) on 1 May 2023 to form together the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NeGK or the “Reformed Churches in the Netherlands - RCNL). As a consequence of the decision of Synod Belhar 2021, decision 4 above, our sister-church relation with the RCNL ended on that date. A letter was sent to the RCNL deputies, in response to their invitation to attend a unification celebration meeting and confirming again the termination of our sister-church relationship (Appendix A.4). In line with decision 5.5, a letter of information on this

decision was sent to our two sister churches, the FRCA and the CanRC (Appendix A.5), who had terminated their sister-church relationship with the RCNL earlier. A similar letter was sent, for their information, to as well as to the “Core Group” (see para. 2.4.2.b below), the DGK, the GKN and the ICRC, while a statement was sent to all FRCSA churches (Appendix A.6). It is sad that after about 70 years of a cordial and supportive relationship we had to come to this decision.

At the 10th ICRC General Meeting at Windhoek, Namibia, of October 2022 the membership of the RCNL was terminated because of weakening of Scriptural authority in accepting women in all ecclesiastical offices. The RCNL responded in a letter of disappointment on this decision to their sister churches (Appendix A.7). The DRCA replied to this letter by stressing that this is due to the new course of the RCNL with respect to Scriptural authority (Appendix A.8).

The way the Bible is used in two controversial reports accepted by the RCNL Synod, i.e. on “women in office” and “homosexual relations” (“Ruimte en Richting” – Zoetermeer 2022) is a continuation of the way which led to the decisions of the RCNL synods of Meppel and Goes, and does not bode well for the authority of Scripture in these churches. This can lead to more concerned members and ministers leaving the RCNL.

2.4.2 Activities 2

Mandate Art. 35.5.1 instructed deputies to engage directly with concerned churches and members in the RCNL. These concerned churches and members can be distinguished in two groups, as listed below.

a) Independent RCNL churches

Three churches did not go along with the unification of the RCNL with the NGK, namely Urk, Capelle aan den IJssel – Noord en Vroomshoop. For the time being, these churches continue as independent Reformed churches, but they do not intend to remain separate churches, nor form a new federation, but are striving towards ‘Gereformeerde Oecumene’ together with other churches and members who want to stay faithful to Scripture and the Confessions. The church at Vroomshoop has in the meantime decided to join the federation of Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK).

Rev. B. Van Egmond of Capelle aan den IJssel – Noord brought the DRCA deputies in contact with the ‘Kerngroep Bezinning GKv’, henceforth called “Core Group”. As the independent churches are working closely together with the Core Group, the SA deputies maintained further contact through this Core Group.

b) Core Group

The Core Group is a group of members and ministers that originated from the RCNL (GKv). Their mission is to establish contact between people from all churches who are concerned with the subversion of the authority of the Word of God and wish to stay

Reformed in the true sense of the word. The aim of the Core Group is not to establish another federation alongside DGK and GKN (see below), but to try to bring them all together in one Reformed Church, built on Scripture and the Reformed Confessions.

The Core Group has initiated the following activities:

Website: bezinninggkv.nl

This website aims to point out the cause of the issues and decay in the RCNL. It also provides information about the activities of the Core Group.

Manifesto

On the website there is a manifesto which spells out what the Core Group wants to hold on to.

Information meetings

During January and February 2023, the Core Group organised Regional Meetings in nine different cities / towns, to help the members of the GKv (RCNL) to make a conscious decision at the unification of the RCNL with the NGK on 1 May 2023.

After the unification of the GKv (RCNL) with the NGK, the Core Group organised

Study and Interaction days

such as in Hoevelaken on 13 May 2023 about “Hoe nu verder” (the way forward) and in Ermelo on 23 September 2023, where Prof H Selderhuis of the CGK gave a lecture on (the authority of the) Church Order.

Publication of the book “Het Woord in geding” (The Word in dispute).

The Core Group has many contacts and discussions: with DGK and GKN, with various concerned ministers that are still serving in the unified RCN, as well as ministers in the CGK. The three independent GKv (RCN) churches that did not go along with the unification, do agree wholeheartedly with the aim of the Core Group. The Core Group is encouraging concerned members of the NGK to establish ‘preaching points’ under the supervision of the independent GKv churches. Such ‘preaching points’ have been established in Drachten, Vollenhove and Buitenpost.

At the invitation of GKN Synod Kampen 2023, the Core Group had a meeting with the delegates of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) and Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC) that attended this GKN synod as observers. It is interesting to note that Rev Gerben Meijer, who was delegated by the Gereformeerde Kerken in SA (RCSA) to attend the general synod of the NGK, also had a meeting with the Core Group.

c) Regrouping of Reformed churches

Mandate 37.40 instructed the DRCA to monitor the developments in any regrouping of churches and advise the next synod on the relevant progress.

The following developments are taking place in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK):

- The CGK synod of 2022 decided with a two-third majority on Scriptural grounds to not allow women in offices, nor to condone homosexual relations.
- However, one third had an opinion which was directly opposed to the majority, including two professors of the CGK's Theological University Apeldoorn.
- Some CGK churches have appointed women in church offices, contrary to the decisions of their own synod.
- This has caused a deep division in the CGK. For example, the CGK church at Urk has broken ties with the CGK church at Zwolle.
- This is the reason why delegates of all the 180 CGK churches have been called to a Convent on 20 April 2024 to discuss four possible scenarios for the future of the church federation:
 - o All local churches adhere to the decisions of the CGK synods.
 - o Local churches get more freedom to decide independently on issues.
 - o All CGK churches will, if possible, jointly be accommodated in a different church federation. This will mean the end of the CGK church federation.
 - o All local CGK churches will join a different church federation of their choice. This scenario will also mean the end of the CGK church federation.

There is a possibility that the result of the Convent will be an unbundling of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken.

d) Turbulent times for Reformed churches in the Netherlands

The above sections provide some aspects of the turbulent times which Reformed believers and churches in the Netherlands are experiencing:

- The consequences of making the authority of the Word of God relative are clearly visible with every issue that is under discussion in the RCNL.
- The sad reality is that many concerned members of the RCNL are reluctant to join the DGK or GKN even after their union, mostly because of historic reasons and conflicts.
- Concerned members who want to leave the RCNL are often reluctant to join the CGK because these churches are plagued by the same issues.
- Different, and often totally opposed, beliefs in the CGK appear to have grown to such an extent that their federation may break up.

The aim of the Core Group is worthy of our continued support, as their vision is (in translation): “Our goal and endeavor are to connect all churches and believers who want to remain Reformed, and to grow together to a new church community, a Reformed Ecumenism based on Scripture and Confession only.”

2.4.3 Conclusions

The independent Reformed churches and the Core Group are in a transition phase. It was good to have contact with them, encourage them, stimulate them towards unification with fellow-believers and follow the developments.

In this present fluid situation in which Reformed churches in the Netherlands are, it is wise to hold back on new inter-church relationships and see in what way the Lord is going to gather His people from churches that have become unfaithful to His Word. During this period, we should encourage and support Reformed believers in the Netherlands. We expect to address this issue again in our Supplementary Report to Synod Mamelodi later in 2024.

2.4.4 Coordinate with deputies from the FRCA and the CanRC

Mandate 37.5 instructed deputies to coordinate with deputies abroad from CanRC and FRCA regarding developments of the DGK and GKN. Deputies had an online meeting with deputies of the FRCA on 10 August 2023, where we concluded that both our church federations are awaiting the unification of the DGK and the GKN before we will consider a sister-church relationship. The SA deputies are planning to have an online meeting with the CanRC Deputies on 17 April 2024 and will make the coordination of our approach to the GKN and DGK a point of discussion.

2.4.5 Recommendations

Synod decides:

To instruct the DRCA to monitor the developments of Reformed churches and groupings in the Netherlands and to coordinate observations and possible actions with our sister churches.

3 Contacts with other churches

3.1 De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)

Mandate (Acts of Synod Belhar 2021, Art. 37)

1. To maintain contact and to continue discussions with **De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)** in the Netherlands as well as with the **Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)**, but not to progress towards ecclesiastical fellowship with these church federations.
2. In cases where members from these federations come to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests at the Lord's Supper – should they make such a request – only after an agreeable discussion with them.
3. To inform the DGK and the GKN in writing on these decisions concerning them and our decision regarding the RCNL.
4. To monitor the developments in any regrouping of churches and advise the next synod on relevant progress.
5. To coordinate with deputies abroad from CanRC and FRCA regarding developments of the DGK and GKN.

3.1.1 Activities

In line with mandate Art. 37.1, the DRCA maintained a low-level of contact with **De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK)** in the Netherlands as well as with the **Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)**. This is mainly caused by their process of unification, of which we await the result with eager expectation. A combined synod of these two church federations is scheduled for October 2024. Deputies stayed informed about development in these churches through sources such as the official websites of both churches, the GKN magazine 'Weerklank' and the DGK website www.eeninwaarheid.info. It is encouraging to note that members and ministers of both churches are actively involved in the activities of the Core Group.

The GKN have been unanimously accepted as member of the ICRC on 18 October 2022, during the same session where the RCNL were suspended. Apparently, the request for membership by the GKN was made with the full agreement of the DGK.

a) Synod Kampen 2023

The SA deputies received a letter from 'Deputaten Buitenlandse Kerken' (BBK) of the GKN, dated 25 September 2023, informing us about their Synod Kampen 2023 (Appendix E.1). On the agenda would be items like ecumenical contacts and the relation between GKN and DGK. In this letter it was assumed that the FRCSA intended to send one or two

delegates to the synod. In a letter dated 5 October 2023 (Appendix E.2), deputies responded that we were thankful to be informed about the synod, but that there must be a misunderstanding of our intention to send delegates. It is still unclear how this impression was created as there was no formal correspondence on this matter. As deputies had no mandate and budget to send a delegate to Kampen, we had to decline the invitation.

On 11 November 2023 the SA deputies received an invitation to attend a ‘Convocation’ of a select group of foreign churches, as a special session of Synod Kampen on 1 and 2 December 2023, where the report of deputies BBK of the GKN would be discussed (Appendix E.3). Attached to the convocation was the report of deputies BBK of the GKN.

It is interesting to note the following in the Instructions of the previous GKN synod to their deputies BBK: “*Contact onderhouden met de kerken waarmee we op weg willen naar de zusterkerk relatie*” (Maintain contact with the churches with whom we want to move towards a sister-church relationship). The churches that are mentioned are: the FRCA, the CanRC and the FRCSA.

b) Unification process of DGK and GKN

The GS of GKN Kampen 2023 decided in its session on 2 December 2023 to recognize the DGK as true churches of Christ.

The GS of DGK Dalftsien 2024 decided in its session on 20 January 2024 to recognize the GKN as true churches of Christ.

This means recognizing each other’s church offices, opening the pulpits to each other’s ministers and accepting each other’s attestations.

The way forward was discussed by GS GKN Kampen 2023 in a meeting on 27 January 2024, in the presence and in consultation with a delegation of the moderamen of GS DGK Dalftsien 2024. It was decided that a delegation of both synods was jointly going to discuss the best way to shape the union of the two church federations. This joint meeting has taken place on 16 March 2024.

With great thankfulness we can report that it was decided to merge the two church federations. It was further decided to convene a joint extraordinary synod on 5 October 2024 to arrange and coordinate matters in the one united church federation.

3.1.2 Conclusions

The following is an overview of the DRCA’s recommendations to Synod Mamelodi 2024. The grounds for each recommendation are numbered the same as the recommendations.

Deputies are *contemplating* a proposal to Synod Mamelodi for a less intensive form of relationship with a number of ICRC member churches. This may be called *Ecclesiastical Contact*, in line with a proposal tabled at Synod Darling Downs 2024 of our sister church the FRCA. This proposal still needs further discussion, also with our sister churches, and if accepted, it will be formulated in our Supplementary Report later this year.

Synod decides:

To appoint new deputies with the following mandate:

1. To monitor the unification progress of the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) and De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) in the Netherlands, and advise the next synod on developments.
2. To monitor developments in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK) in the Netherlands, especially related to the possibility of “regrouping of church federations”, and advise the next synod on developments.
3. To maintain contact with the “Kerngroep Bezinning” (“Core Group”) and especially monitor the progress towards their aim of a ‘Reformed Ecumenism’ based on Scripture and Confession, and advise the next synod on developments.
4. To continue to coordinate with deputies from the CanRC and the FRCA regarding our approach to the DGK and GKN, as well as developments regarding a regrouping of church federations in the Netherlands.

Grounds:

1. The expectation is that GKN/DGK will unite after their joint synod of 5 October 2024. The approach of previous synods has been to wait for the actual union to materialise.
2. There is a possibility of a regrouping of CGK churches after their Convent of 20 April 2024, where the four options for the future of this church federation will be discussed.
3. The aim of the Core Group is worthy of the support of our churches. They have contact with many concerned members and churches. There is a likelihood of more concerned members leaving the RCNL. By maintaining contact with the Core Group we can see in which way the Lord is leading these churches and believers. The Core Group has also expressed a “feeling of loneliness” and need for contact and support.
4. It would be beneficial to learn from the deputies of the CanRC and the FRCA what their thoughts are after the contacts and discussions they have had at GKN Synod Kampen 2023. It would be good to come to a coordinated approach as sister-churches.
5. Every Reformed church has the calling to seek contact with other Reformed churches in the world, since we are called by Our Saviour Jesus Christ to encourage and support each other, as members of one flock (Mat. 16:18). The FRCSA is a small church federation, with insufficient manpower to maintain full sister-church relationship with many church federations. Contact with other churches through the ICRC and its Working Groups is useful, but may not be fully adequate and satisfactory.

3.2 Contact with other churches abroad

Mandate (Acts of Synod Belhar 2021, Art. 22.2 and 22.3)

This section describes what deputies did to monitor developments in other reformed churches in the world. The mandate of Synod Belhar was:

22.2. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in **Asia - Pacific**, mainly via the FRCA and the ICRC.

22.3. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in **North America**, mainly via the CanRC and the ICRC.

3.2.1 Activities

By attending Synods of our sister churches and ICRC General Meetings, Working Group meetings and Conferences, delegates from our churches meet delegates from other Reformed and Presbyterian churches in the world and hear their presentations at these gatherings. In that way, we learn about the world-wide Church of Jesus Christ in our time and the spreading of the gospel in many countries. Churches in the Western world experience the influence of secularization but in general have abundant material resources. Churches in the so-called Third World experience social and poverty pressures and challenges. In Muslim, Hindu and communist countries Christian churches are often persecuted. But it is good to see that churches remain faithful to the authority of God's Word and trust in the Lord for strength to cope with their difficulties and adversities.

The FRC in Cape Town is organizing the next Regional Conference of African member churches of the ICRC (16 to 20 October 2024). This offers an opportunity for getting to know other Reformed churches in Africa. Our sister church, the FRCA, has active relations with churches in the South-East Asia and Pacific region, specifically in Indonesia, Papua New-Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Korea and New Zealand. These contacts are documented in the Acts of their synods. In the same way have the CanRC active relations with churches in North and South America, but also in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Korea. They cooperate in mission and training work with the FRCA. We learn about these activities during their synods and read about it in the Acts of synods.

A very useful source of information of Reformed and Presbyterian churches world-wide is also through the ICRC journal *Lux Mundi*, which is published every four months. This journal is on the public domain on the internet (<https://www.icrconline.com/lux-mundi>). Members of our churches should be alerted and stimulated through our local church bulletins to read new issues.

3.2.2 Recommendations

1. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in the **Asia - Pacific** region, mainly via the FRCA and the ICRC.
2. To remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in **North and South America**, mainly via the CanRC and the ICRC.

Grounds:

1. Our churches should remain aware of the world-wide church gathering of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we can pray for churches who struggle, and encourage and support when and where we have an opportunity.

2. According to the policy adopted by Synod Bethal 2000, the FRCSA should focus on our own Africa region. It is better to leave more intensive ecclesiastical contacts related to Reformed churches outside Africa to our sister churches.

4 ICRC

This chapter describes what deputies did to carry out the mandate of Synod Belhar 2021 to participate in the activities of the ICRC. Rev P Kgatle and Rev PG Boon were specifically appointed by Synod Belhar as DRCA members with the portfolio ICRC.

Mandate (Acts of Synod Belhar 2021, Art. 16.1 and 16.2)

To expand the DRCA by one more deputy, specifically designated for the ICRC (preferably one of our missionaries) to stimulate our involvement in ICRC activities, and to issue the following mandates to deputies:

1. To put in more effort to promote the ICRC profile in the FRCSA by providing feedback to the churches.
2. To send a delegation, in consultation with other deputyships, to the next ICRC conference to be held in Windhoek,

Synod decides regarding Regional ICRC Conferences in Africa to authorise DRCA:

1. To maintain contacts with African ICRC member churches and to find ways to support the proclamation of the Word of God and leadership training by those churches in their home countries, in co-operation with other ICRC member churches.
2. To support efforts to organise a Regional Africa Conference of ICRC member churches, if requested by the organizing committee.
3. To co-ordinate the efforts of the FRCSA and RCSA concerning regional ICRC activities.
4. To send one delegate to the next regional ICRC conference in Nairobi, Kenya, and to solicit further delegation from FRCSA missionaries.

4.1 ICRC Conference 2021 in Namibia

- The ICRC 2022 was hosted in an excellent way by the Reformed Churches in Windhoek, Namibia. It was held in the Windhoek Country Club Resort.
- The lectures during this conference focused on theological training. Matters discussed were amongst others in person training and/or online training; state accreditation and/or church accreditation; academic development and/or spiritual development.
- The ICRC has three facilitating committees: Missions, Diaconal and Theological Education. They gave feedback on their activities. Both the Missions and Diaconal Committees disseminated a booklet with all the contact details of the member churches regarding missions and diaconal outreach. These booklets are available via Rev Boon (fampgboon@gmail.com).
- An important yet sensitive matter on the agenda was the evaluation of the suspension of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated). After their delegates were heard, and after extensive deliberations and prayer, the conference decided not to lift the suspension (by the ICRC 2017), but to permanently remove the

RCNL as a member church. This was the first time in ICRC history that such a sad step had to be taken.

- However, with gratitude to our Lord, after investigation, new member churches were welcomed into the ICRC, which brought the membership to 38 churches:
 - o Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bangalore, India (ARPCBI)
 - o Evangelical Reformed Church in India (ERCI-India)
 - o Reformed Churches The Netherlands (GKN)
 - o Reformed Presbyterian Church of Africa (RPCA-Uganda)
 - o Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE in Hungary, Ukraine, Romania)
- On behalf of the FRCSA, the ministers Phineas Kgatle, Pieter Boon, Thabo Matlaela and George Mnisi attended the conference. Apart from the official proceedings, it was a precious time to network and meet brothers in the faith.

4.2 Other activities

a) ICRC Missions Conference in Philadelphia USA, September 2022

One of the ICRC's facilitating committees is the Missions Committee. Their regular consultation meeting was held in September 2022 in Philadelphia USA. Rev. Dirk Boersma, a member of this committee, attended the meeting. In addition, Rev Pieter Boon (member of the Diaconal Committee) was invited since the topic to be discussed overlapped between mission and diaconal matters. He was asked to address the meeting on *Dependency issues in meeting diaconal needs on the mission field*.

b) ICRC Diaconal Meeting in Brazil, January 2024

Once every four years, the Diaconal Committee of the ICRC has an in-person meeting, with the purpose of working on their mandates and reaching out to regional churches. Since one of the committee's members live in the area of the city of Recife in Northern Brazil, the meeting was held there. A Diaconal Conference was also organised for deacons, which was attended by deacons from local Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Rev Boon held a presentation on *Diaconal challenges and opportunities in an unequal world*.

c) ICRC African Regional Conference, October 2024

The next ICRC Regional African Conference will be held God willing in **Cape Town**, October 23-28, 2024. The FRC Cape Town has availed itself to organise this conference, for which DRCA are very thankful. At the moment of writing this report, preparations are well underway.

d) ICRC General Meeting, South Korea, 2026

God willing the next international conference will be held in South Korea. Deputies hope to delegate one person to attend this ICRC General Meeting, in addition to Rev PG Boon, who will attend in his capacity as member of the ICRC Diaconal Committee.

e) ICRC Journal "Lux Mundi"

The ICRC publishes a four-monthly magazine on the internet with information about the ICRC and articles on matters of common interest. The magazine can be downloaded from the open website: <https://www.icrconline.com/lux-mundi>.

4.3 Conclusion

Our contacts with the ICRC are intensifying, and via the ICRC also with other member church federations in Africa and across the world. In this way, we become more and more informed about the church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ across the globe. We thank God for what we as small federation receive in and via the ICRC.

4.4 Recommendations

Proposed Mandates to be given by Synod concerning the ICRC are:

1. To send two delegates to the ICRC Korea 2026 (budget for one).

Ground: Member churches are expected to send delegates to the international conferences. Each member church can send two delegates with voting rights.

2. To send two delegates to the next ICRC African Regional Conference (budget for one) and solicit the churches and mission committees to send delegates as well.

Ground: FRCSA synods have repeatedly emphasized to focus our attention more on contacts with ICRC member churches on the African continent. The 2024 African regional conference will be hosted God willing by the FRCSA (Cape Town). Synod Belhar 2021 already budgeted for this. Where the next African regional conference will be, is not yet decided.

3. To intensify contacts with:

3.1 the Free Church of Southern Africa, this in cooperation with Deputies for Relations with Churches in South Africa.

Ground: The international conferences in Canada (2017) and Namibia (2022) have asked the other SA member churches to reach out to the FCSA. Although they haven't attended an ICRC in quite some years, they have indicated that they desire to remain members.

3.2 other African ICRC member churches.

Ground: Although there are five other church federations (apart from the 3 in South Africa) that are ICRC member churches, we know very little about them.

4. To inform the churches on a regular basis about the activities of the ICRC and important happenings in other member church federations.

Ground: It is to the benefit of the churches and each believer to know more about our fellow believers in the world, so that we can grow more and more in our love and faith "toward to Lord Jesus and for all the saints" (Philemon 1:5).

6 Liaison for the Churches

Mandate (Acts of Synod Bethal 2014, art. 25.10)

- 1) To provide the FRCSA church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
- 2) To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad.

6.1 Activities

The church at Johannesburg requested information about financial retirement arrangements for ministers who have served as pastor in different sister churches. There appears to be some cooperation in this regard between the FRCA, the Reformed Churches of New Zealand and the CanRC. This information was passed on to the church at Johannesburg by email. Financial retirement arrangements within the FRCSA are the sole responsibility of the local congregation where the minister retires. In the past, there have been initiatives to reach more uniformity and cooperation, but it remains “ad hoc”.

The CanRC experience restrictions from the Canadian government in financially supporting projects (like mission work) of organizations outside Canada. This has the attention of our deputies for mission work and of theological training. Some liaison activities were undertaken, but this needs to be resolved by those deputies mutually and directly with the supporting sister churches or mission support congregations.

General information about our sister churches and other Reformed churches in the world was published through articles in *Kompas*, on a fairly regular basis. This would reach members of our churches directly, but is restricted to the subscribers of *Kompas* and is published in Afrikaans. New DRCA deputies may consider publishing information on foreign churches also in English and send these for publication in the local church bulletins.

6.2 Conclusion

DRCA did fulfil its specific mandate concerning the local churches in our federation. Our membership of the ICRC is experienced as stimulating, but needs effort to become practical for our churches (such as will be the case with the “Diaconal Tool Box”) and for our mission work.

6.3 Recommendation

Synod decides to instruct the DRCA:

- 1) To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
- 2) To coordinate the contacts and requests of the FRCSA with churches abroad.

Grounds:

There is an on-going need for the liaison and information function of the DRCA since they continuously gather information regarding churches abroad.

7 Budget

	Item	ZAR
1	Four delegates to attend the ICRC Regional Africa Congress in Cape Town in October 2024, @ R2 500 p.p.	10 000
2	One delegate to attend the CanRC Synod in Aldergrove, British Columbia, during May 2025	25 000
3	One delegate to attend the next FRCA Synod in Australia, during June 2027	25 000
4	One delegate to attend the ICRC General Meeting, South Korea, 2027	25 000
5	ICRC membership fee 2024-2027	2 000
6	One deputy to attend the Indaba 2025 and the FRCSA Synod in 2027	5 000
7	One deputy to attend the next Regional Africa conference, 2028 (provisional)	(13000)
	Total budget for 2024-2027	92 000

Signed:

Rev. J Bruintjes

Rev. P Kgatle



Rev. PG Boon

Br. JF Raimond



Sr. G van den Berg



Br. J Moes

Appendix A.1

Letter of Synod Belhar 2021 to the RCNL

30 August 2021

All Churches and Mission Congregations within the FRCSA
Alle Kerke en Sendingsgemeentes in die VGKSA

RE: SYNOD DECISION REGARDING RELATIONS WITH THE RCNL (GKvNL)

Dear brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ our Lord,

At this last synod we as delegates wrestled together, and with the Lord in prayer on what decision to make regarding our relationship with the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt (RCNL). Because of the impact and seriousness of this decision much of synod's time was devoted to this discussion (as is evidenced in the Acts), and the decision that was made was not taken lightly.

The decision that was reached was as follows:

1. That the RCNL, by the decisions of Synod Meppel 2017 regarding women in office as well as the trajectory of unification with the NGK, both of which were upheld by the Synod of Goes 2020, have deviated from the Word of God, and undermined its authority.
2. These decisions by RCNL synods are sufficient to terminate sister-church relations (in line with synod Soshanguve North 2017, art 44).
3. Despite sufficient grounds as per points 1 and 2 above, for the sake of local churches and church members in the RCNL who have objections to the decisions of the Synods of Meppel and Goes, to continue the restricted sister-church relationship as decided at Soshanguve-North 2017, art 44, 17.
4. FRCSA synod 2024 will make a final decision, unless in the meantime the RCNL unite with the NGK.
5. Although not included in the rules for sister-church relationships, the situation has forced synod to mandate Deputies to engage with concerned churches and members who object to the decisions of RCNL synods, with the purpose of discussing the way forward.
6. To write a letter to all church councils of the FRCSA, informing them of this decision and making it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.

7. To mandate Deputies to educate congregations of the FRCSA on the grounds for this decision, and to make it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.
8. To communicate with and explain to the RCNL deputies the FRCSA's intentions with the decisions made, and to mandate the FRCSA's DRCA to stay informed about developments in the RCNL, especially among those concerned.
9. To mandate DRCA to communicate synod's decisions to our Canadian and Australian sister churches as well as to the ICRC.

As you can see this letter that you are now receiving is being sent in accordance with point 6 of the decision. We knew that the discussion that was taking place between delegates was a microcosm of the discussion taking place among yourselves in the churches. Synod decided, therefore, to also communicate the decision personally to you all and offer some further clarification.

The primary reason for this letter is that Synod wishes **to make it abundantly clear that this decision is in no way an approval of the decisions that the RCNL have made. Not at all. On the contrary we state unequivocally in points 1 and 2 that the decisions they have made give us reason enough to break ties.** We stand on the word of God as expressed in that famous Latin phrase "Sola Scriptura"! If you still have doubts and are wondering where we stand you may refer to a letter Synod Bethal 2014 sent to synod Meppel 2017 outlining our position (Appendix 13 Synod Acts Bethal 2014 p169). We as churches still hold to that and we encourage you to read it.

The delegates had clear and sound deliberations with the Dutch representatives and we voiced our concerns that in the documents of Synod Goes and the report "Elkaar van harte dienen" there is no mention of any of the objections and these are not being addressed in any way, therefore not clarifying why these many objections from within and outside of The Netherlands are not accepted. The response in fact from the representatives was that we just don't understand their way of thinking and we will get there over time.

Now, many may be asking, if points number one and two are true, why did we not sever ties with our sister churches. In response to this, allow us to offer just a couple of considerations. The first and foremost consideration of our decision is that the dust has not even settled in our sister churches and there are still many churches and more members who are within the RCNL but disagree strongly with the direction their federation has taken. We believe that by retaining a limited sister church relationship with the RCNL it will help us to best love them in Christ and show that we stand with them in the struggle, and we want to walk a path with them – walking next to them and not ahead of them.

This is the reason we are also taking the extraordinary step of breaking the rules of sister church relationship by sending an open letter to the RCNL churches, and not only communicating at a synodical level. We believe that the truth of the Word of God, and the integrity of the church is worth the cost of taking this extraordinary step.

Secondly, by making this decision, we are not overlooking the danger in which our sister church has placed herself, rather we wish to address it head on, and we believe that this is the best way we can do so.


Just like our God does not judge his people immediately but is patient and longsuffering to bring us to repentance, so we wish to reflect that patience in how we deal with a wandering brother or sister in faith. Although from a human perspective it seems unlikely, it is our heartfelt desire that those who are straying would see this decision as a call to repentance. True patience is not a sign of weakness, but rather a call to repentance. As the Apostle Paul warns Israel, "Or do you disregard the riches of His kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance?"

Finally, this does not mean that we hold onto our sister church relationship with the RCNL indefinitely. On the contrary, we know that we are moving towards a breaking point. Therefore, the synod also decided that a decision will have to be made at the next synod to break ties with the RCNL if they continue the same trajectory as they are now. And if they join the NGK then by nature of that decision, they will have broken ties with us.

We ask that you please remember the RCNL in prayer and ask the Lord to grant wisdom to all those disenfranchised churches and members who feel betrayed by the federation which nurtured them in the Faith.

In Christ,

On behalf of synod Belhar 2021,



Rev J Bruintjes
Chairman
Synod Belhar 2021



Br R Snijder
Scribe
Synod Belhar 2021

Appendix A.2

Letter of Synod Belhar 2021 to the FRCSA churches

30 August 2021

Deputies Betrekkingen Buitelandse Kerken
Reformed Churches (Liberated) Netherlands

Attention: Rev H Venema and br A Pedro

RE: SYNOD DECISION REGARDING OUR SISTER CHURCH RELATIONS

The churches which you represent have been a great blessing for us over the last seventy years. In so many ways you have truly been like a nurturing mother in the faith to us over the last 70 years. We praise the Lord for that.

It is also because of the depth of our relationship and commitment to each other that we have felt that we could be open and honest with one another throughout the years. Particularly over the last decade or more we have pleaded with you not to go down the path which you have chosen to walk. Although it may not have always seemed that way, each of these letters was written in spirit of love for Christ and his body – the church.

Yet you have continued down that path, disregarding our repeated warnings, and numerous warnings from other federations from around the world. We both acknowledge that our unity is not found in familial ties (although there are many), nor in financial support (although you prove your generosity time and again) but in Christ and his word. Therefore, because of the differences we have on the interpretation of that Word we feel like our relationship can no longer continue if you as a federation continue down the same trajectory. It truly pains us to say that for we love you in Christ.

At this last synod we as delegates wrestled together, and with the Lord in prayer on what decision to make regarding our relationship with you, the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt (RCNL). Because of the impact and seriousness of this decision much of synod's time was devoted to this discussion (as is evidenced in the Acts), and the decision that was made was not taken lightly.

Our decision is as follows

1. That the RCNL, by the decisions of Synod Meppel 2017 regarding women in office as well as the trajectory of unification with the NGK, both of which were upheld by the Synod of Goes 2020, have deviated from the Word of God, and undermined its authority.
2. These decisions by RCNL synods are sufficient to terminate sister-church relations (in line with synod Soshanguve North 2017, art 44).
3. Despite sufficient grounds as per points 1 and 2 above, for the sake of local churches and church members in the RCNL who have objections to the decisions of the Synods of Meppel and Goes, to continue the restricted sister-church relationship as decided at Soshanguve-North 2017, art 44, 17.
4. FRCSA synod 2024 will make a final decision, unless in the meantime the RCNL unite with the NGK.
5. Although not included in the rules for sister-church relationships, the situation has forced synod to mandate Deputies to engage with concerned churches and members who object to the decisions of RCNL synods, with the purpose of discussing the way forward.
6. To write a letter to all church councils of the FRCSA, informing them of this decision and making it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.
7. To mandate Deputies to educate congregations of the FRCSA on the grounds for this decision, and to make it clear that this decision is in no way an approval of decisions made by the Synods of Meppel and Goes.
8. To communicate with and explain to the RCNL deputies the FRCSA's intentions with the decisions made, and to mandate the FRCSA's DRCA to stay informed about developments in the RCNL, especially among those concerned.
9. To mandate DRCA to communicate synod's decisions to our Canadian and Australian sister churches as well as to the ICRC.

These points make clear that although we sense that we are coming toward a breaking point, we have decided to continue our restricted sister church relationship. We do this because we want to particularly encourage those churches and members who feel lost and abandoned by the federation in which they grew up and who nurtured them in the faith.

As we see things from the outside there are still many churches and more members who are within the RCNL but disagree strongly with the direction their federation has taken. We believe that by retaining a limited sister church relationship with you it will help us to best love them in Christ and show that we stand with them in the struggle, and we want to walk a path with them – walking next to them and not ahead of them.

This is also the reason we as synod have mandated our deputies “to engage with concerned churches and members who object to the decisions of RCNL synods, with the purpose of

discussing the way forward.” Our intention is not to work around you, or behind your backs. On the contrary we would love for you to help us in this, and even place us in contact with those churches and members. In this way, although we may disagree, we can together support those churches within your federation who oppose the decisions of the RCNL and who have the same mindset as we do.


Therefore, we have made this unusual decision, and also have taken the step of addressing you as synod openly and personally. We understand that it is an extraordinary step of allowing our deputies to send an open letter to the RCNL churches and take up communication with other members. We acknowledge that this is not fully in line with the rules for sister church relationships. Yet, we do this because we feel there is no other route open to us.

We love you, and we believe that the truth of the word of God, and the integrity of the church is worth the cost of taking this step.

Again, we love you in Christ, and we sincerely pray that God would bring about a change of direction in the churches there. We continue to look to Christ as the head of the Church as he guides us in this time, and in making these difficult decisions through his Word and Spirit.

In Christ,

On behalf of synod Belhar 2021,



Rev J Bruintjes
Chairman
Synod Belhar 2021



Br R Snijder
Scribe
Synod Belhar 2021

Appendix A.3

**Invitation letter from the RCNL to attend
their unification with the NGK**



Bureau/ Office DEPUTATEN BETREKKINGEN BUITENLANDSE KERKEN BBK

COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

POSTBUS / P.O. BOX 499 8000 AL ZWOLLE THE NETHERLANDS
TEL (0031) (0) 6 338 488 65 email:info@bbk.nl



Zwolle, March 2023

Dear brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ

In a time of international conflict and growing polarization, we, your sister churches in the Netherlands, are humbly thankful to be able to share with you our witness concerning the unity in Christ which His Spirit is working in our midst.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, appeals to his readers to “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” This call resounds through the centuries, demanding that we too “be completely humble and gentle... (that we) be patient, bearing with one another in love”. For, as the apostle says, “there is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4.2-5)

It is to our shame that we have not sufficiently heeded this call. Christ’s church has seen one schism after another, hot heads and cold hearts, inability and often unwillingness to consider that those with whom we differ may well be God’s instruments in calling us to repentance.

One of those schisms occurred in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the late sixties of the previous century, now more than five decades ago. We who belong together were torn asunder, to our own harm and to our Lord’s dishonour.

However, by His grace, apportioned to each of us as only Christ can (Ephesians 4.7), during the past decades we have come to realize that this situation may no longer continue. And the results have been both humbling and gratifying.

We are very, very thankful to be able to inform you that our respective churches, the Netherlands Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) will be coming to the full institutional unity which reflects our newfound but longstanding unity in Christ.

This final step in our process of unification will be marked in a celebratory gathering coming May 12, the Lord willing, at 08.00 pm, in the Jacobichurch in Utrecht. In the afternoon there will be a meeting at the Theological University with seminars and a book presentation.

It is our great privilege to invite you, as one of our sister churches, to attend this gathering, if you are able and wish to do so. Of course, a written word of thankfulness and joy would also be highly appreciated. Perhaps it is also worth mentioning that somewhere towards the end of this year and the beginning of 2024 a General Assembly/Synod will be convoked, to which your churches will of course also be invited. That may influence your decision with regard to the celebration on May 12. If you decide not to attend the latter, we hope to enable your participation online by means of a live stream. The language during the celebration will be Dutch, without translation, but if you are interested: please let us know so we can send you a link to participate.



Bureau/ Office DEPUTATEN BETREKKINGEN BUITENLANDSE KERKEN BBK

COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD
OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

POSTBUS / P.O. BOX 499 8000 AL ZWOLLE THE NETHERLANDS
TEL (0031) (0) 6 338 488 65 email:info@bbk.nl



We would appreciate hearing from you about your decision to attend (or not) by early March 20th. That will give us sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements for you accommodation and transportation.

We look forward to hearing from you, and – the Lord willing – to meeting you in the near future. May our gracious God bless you in every way and keep you safe in His care.

With Christian greetings,
on behalf of the deputies,

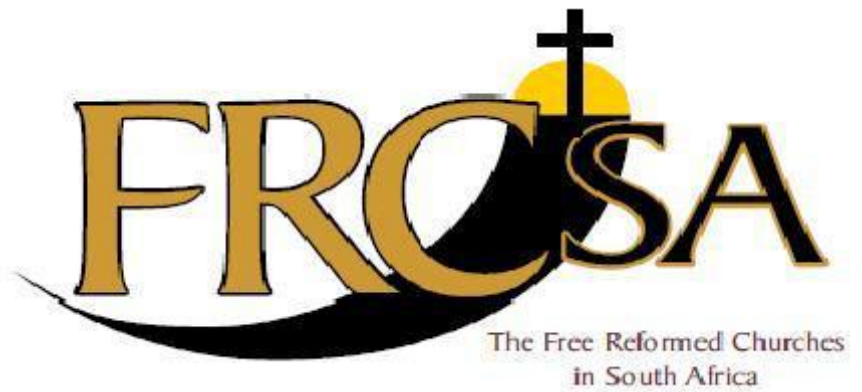
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'de Haan-Douma', is written over a light blue grid background.

Joke de Haan-Douma,

Secretary BBK/CCS

Appendix A.4

Response letter of the DRCA to the RCNL invitation



*Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad
c/o. Mrs. G.W.C. van den Berg-Kroeze
Bloukeurstraat 17
Blommendal
BELLVILLE 7530
South Africa*

24 March 2023

To: Deputies BBK of the
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)

Dear Sisters and Brothers

INVITATION TO ATTEND THE UNIFICATION MEETING OF THE RCNL AND THE NGK

Thank you for the invitation in your letter of March 2023 to attend the gathering in Utrecht on 12 May 2023, to celebrate the unification of the RCNL and the NGK. Indeed, the unity of the Church is a command of Christ.

As you are aware, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) have expressed their disagreement with some of the theological developments in the RCNL at your Synods and by letters to you during the past decade. These concerns relate basically to the way the Bible is used and which undermines the **authority of Scripture**. Unfortunately, our concerns have not resulted in a meaningful response, while the acceptance by Synod Goes of the report “Elkaar van harte dienen” has set a standard for this way of reading and applying the Bible in your churches. We see in your unification with the NGK a confirmation and strengthening of these developments.

The purpose of a sister-church relationship is to support each other in maintaining, defending and promoting the truth of Scripture. Our last Synods have come to the conclusion that by their decisions, Synods Meppel and Goes of the RCNL have undermined the authority of Scripture, while you evidently did not accept our appeals. We see a danger in exposing our churches to the present line of theological thinking in the RCNL if we maintain the relationship as sister churches.

Therefore, as you will be aware, our last Synod Belhar 2021 has decided that our sister-church relationship with the RCNL will come to an end when a unification with the NGK happens and a new church federation is established. As this is your plan to happen on 1 May 2023, the FRCSA will, therefore, not enter into a sister-church relationship with the newly formed *Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken*. As a result, we cannot accept your invitation to attend the ceremony on 12 May or a future Synod.

We trust you will understand our decision. We are very thankful for the fruitful relationship we have had with the RCNL through so many decades of our existence as FRCSA. This had a profound influence on our churches. May the Lord grant you a renewed spirit to follow His Word with the authority that it carries, also for our present-day life.

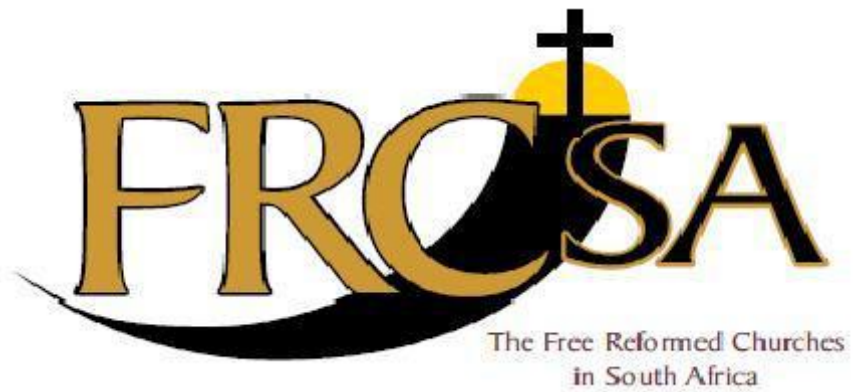
With brotherly greetings

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Moes', with a large, stylized initial 'J' and a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

J Moes, Convener of the DRCA of the FRCSA

Appendix A.5

**Letter to churches on termination of RCNL
sister church relationship**



*Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad
c/o. Mrs. G.W.C. van den Berg-Kroeze
Bloukeurstraat 17
Blommendal
BELLVILLE 7530
South Africa*

6 May 2023

To: Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad of the
Free Reformed Churches of Australia
c/o frcadeputies@gmail.com

Dear Brothers in Christ

Re: termination of sister-church relationship with the RCNL

You may be aware that the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) have consistently expressed their concerns about the theological developments in our sister-church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated), henceforth RCNL. These concerns were expressed both by FRCSA deputies attending the RCNL synods and through letters from deputies. These concerns relate basically to the view on the authority of Scripture for our present-day life. Unfortunately our concerns have not resulted in a meaningful response, while developments in this area of concern continue to progress in the RCNL. The decision by the RCNL to unify with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK) serves as a confirmation and strengthening of these developments.

A sister-church relationship should function to the mutual edification and benefit of the churches. Our last Synods have come to the conclusion that we do not experience these benefits with the RCNL anymore. Furthermore, we see a danger in exposing our churches to the present line of theological thinking in the RCNL. According to a decision taken at Synod Belhar 2021, Article 34, Decision 4 and Ground 4.b, the FRCSA sister-church relationship with the RCNL will come to an end when the RCNL unites with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, to form a new and united church federation. This unification has taken effect on 1 May 2023 and the new federation will be called: Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK-NL). Consequently our sister-church relationship with the RNCL will no longer exist after 1 May 2023.

We wish to inform you as sister-churches and churches with whom we correspond, of this development and to encourage you to keep our brothers and sisters in the Netherlands in your prayers.

Yours in Christ

Gwen van den Berg, on behalf of the DRCA of the FRCSA

Appendix A.6

Note of the DRCA to the FRCSA churches on practical aspects of visitors

NOTE CONCERNING THE RCNL AFTER 1 MAY 2023

DEPUTIES FOR RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD

2023 – 05 – 01

According to a decision of Synod Belhar 2021, Art. 34, Decision 4 with Ground 4.b, the sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (RCNL) will come to an end when the RCNL unites with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken, to form a new united church federation. It has been decided by both church federations that this unification will take effect on 1 May 2023 and that the new federation will be called: **Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NGK-NL)**. Consequently, our sister-church relationship with the RCNL is coming to an end on 1 May 2023. This development is the unfortunate outcome of many years of warning against the theological changes in the RCNL by our deputies and synods.

The RCNL churches at Capelle aan den IJssel-Noord, Urk and Vroomshoop have decided not to join the new NGK-NL federation, where the first two churches see it as a possibility in time to join the federation of the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK). These two churches call upon all concerned RCNL churches to decide not to join the new NGK-NL federation, but (including the earlier separated NGK and DGK) to co-operate in deciding on a common future.

Consequently, the FRCSA, after 1 May 2023, has no sister churches in the Netherlands anymore, until a possible decision by a future synod, and all **visiting Reformed members and ministers** from the Netherlands who request to participate in the Lord's Supper or to preach the Word of God in our churches will have to motivate their request to the local consistory. **Only upon the approval of the local consistory will they be accepted.** This is in line with the specific decision of Synod Belhar 2021, in Art. 2.4.1.2, concerning members of the DGK and the GKN: "In cases where members from these federations come to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests at the Lord's Supper – should they make such a request – only after an agreeable discussion with them."

Deputies emphasise that the **local consistory** is responsible for whom to allow to the Lord's Supper and on their pulpit. If visitors come from one of our sister churches in Australia or Canada / USA, they will usually have an attestation of good standing from their own church. In all other cases, the **local consistory** has to do its own investigation. In the case of members of the DGK and the GKN or of concerned ex-RCNL members, it should be fairly straight forward to ascertain a common Reformed faith. Furthermore, the local consistory is responsible that edifying reformed sermons are used by sermon readers during worship services where a minister is not available.

When members of one of our congregations are visiting or emigrating to the Netherlands, the consistory should advise them to search for and join a nearby Reformed congregation which upholds the authority of the Bible and where they will be able to be active members.

NOTA BETREFFENDE DIE GKv NA 1 MEI 2023
DEPUTATE VIR BETREKKINGE MET BUITENLANDSE KERKE
2023 – 05 – 01

Volgens 'n besluit van Sinode Belhar 2021, Art. 34, Besluit 4 met Grond 4.b, kom die susterkerk-verhouding met die Gereformeerde Kerke (vrijgemaakt) (GKv) in Nederland tot 'n einde wanneer die GKv verenig met die Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerke, om 'n nuwe verenigde kerkverband te vorm. Beide kerkverbande het besluit dat die vereniging sal plaasvind op 1 Mei 2023 en dat die nuwe kerkverband die **Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerke** (NGK-NL) genoem sal word. As gevolg hiervan sal ons susterkerk-verhouding met die GKv tot 'n einde kom op 1 Mei 2023. Hierdie ontwikkeling is die ongelukkige resultaat na baie jare van waarskuwing deur ons deputate en sinodes teen die teologiese veranderings in die GKv.

Die GKv kerke van Capelle aan den IJssel-Noord, Urk en Vroomshoop het besluit om nie by die nuwe NGK-NL kerkverband aan te sluit nie, waarby die eerste twee kerke dit as 'n moontlikheid sien om hulle uiteindelik aan te sluit by die verband van die Christelike Gereformeerde Kerke (CGK). Hierdie twee kerke roep alle ander verontruste GKv kerke op om te besluit om nie by die NGK-NL verband aan te sluit nie, maar (insluitende die vroeër afgeskeie NGK en DGK) om saam te werk en om te besluit tot 'n alternatiewe gemeenskaplike toekoms.

Omdat die VGKSA dus na 1 Mei 2023 nie meer 'n susterkerk-verhouding met kerke in Nederland het nie, totdat 'n toekomstige sinode daarvoor 'n besluit sou neem, beteken dit dat alle **besoekende Gereformeerde lidmate en predikante** vanuit Nederland, wat versoek om te mag deelneem aan die Heilige Nagmaal of wat die Woord wil bedien in 'n erediens in ons kerke dit moet motiveer teenoor die plaaslike kerkraad. **Slegs na goedkeuring deur die plaaslike kerkraad sal hulle aanvaar word.** Dit is in lyn met die spesifieke besluit van Sinode Belhar 2021, in Art. 2.4.1.2, betreffende lidmate van die DGK en die GKN: *“In cases where members from these federations come to South Africa, to advise consistories to allow them as members or as guests at the Lord’s Supper – should they make such a request – only after an agreeable discussion with them.”*

Deputate benadruk dus dat die **plaaslike kerkraad** steeds verantwoordelik is vir wie toegelaat word tot die Nagmaal en die kansel. As besoekers kom van een van ons susterkerke in Australië of Kanada/VSA dan sal hulle deurgaans 'n attestaat van goeie gedrag van hulle kerk saambring. In alle ander gevalle moet die **plaaslike kerkraad** sy eie ondersoek doen. In die geval van lidmate van die GKN of die DGK of van verontruste voormalige lidmate van die GKv sal dit taamlik eenvoudig wees om die gemeenskaplike Gereformeerde geloof vas te stel. Verder is die plaaslike kerkraad steeds verantwoordelik dat goeie Gereformeerde preke gelees word in erediens waneer daar geen predikant beskikbaar is nie.

Wanneer lidmate van een van ons kerke Nederland besoek of soontoe emigreer, dan moet die kerkraad 'n bewys van lidmaatskap saamgee en hulle adviseer om 'n Bybel-getroue kerk te soek en daarby aan te sluit sodat hulle daar aktiewe lidmate kan wees.

Appendix A.7

Letter of the RCNL on their termination of ICRC membership



Bureau/ Office
DEPUTATEN BETREKKINGEN BUITENLANDSE KERKEN BBK
COMMITTEE ON RELATIONS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD OF THE REFORMED
CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS

POSTBUS / P.O. BOX 499 8000 AL ZWOLLE THE NETHERLANDS
TEL (++) (0) 6 338 488 65 email:info@bbk.nl

Zwolle, November 2022

Dear brothers in our Lord Jesus Christ

We write this letter to you, our sister church, with mixed feelings. Our delegates to the recent meeting of the ICRC in Windhoek have reported on their visit there.

They were struck by the very cordial welcome and the most brotherly conversations, from the beginning to the end of the conference. As always, meeting with fellow believers and sharing in the joy of the gospel reinforced the sense that we are part of a worldwide community dedicated to the honour of our Lord and the upbuilding of His church.

However, they also relayed the decision of the ICRC to terminate our membership. They were painfully struck by the unanimity of the conference's support for the motion by one of its member churches, by the apparent lack of empathy for our sincere attempts to remain faithful to God's Word in a changing world, and by its omitting to voice recognition or appreciation of our longstanding membership of the ICRC.

The contrast was perplexing to them: being expelled as evidently unfaithful, and yet continuing to enjoy heartfelt Christian fellowship.

You too, as our sister church, voted to terminate our membership. And that leaves us with a fundamental question: *what impact does your vote have on our mutual relationship and our partnership in the gospel?*

It is clear that – on the basis of the one authoritative Word of God – we have come to differing insights on the role of women in the church. But what weight do you give to these differences: are they doctrinal, fundamental to the gospel, and therefore intolerable for continued communion? If that is not the case, what considerations convinced you that our continued membership in the ICRC was nonetheless impossible? And looking to the future, what possibilities do you see for continued contact and cooperation between our churches?

From where we stand, we dearly hope that our relationship will continue and bear fruit. We are and remain brothers and sisters in the one household of faith, and we would do everything in our power, with God's help, to avoid estrangement within His family. But that does require honest and open communication on what to us is a very painful choice on your part.

Please take the time to consider our questions. Reread the appeal which we sent to the conference prior to its coming together. And let us know how we can best approach these issues and resolve them in a way which pleases our Lord and strengthens our mutual service.

Yours in His Name,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Johan Plug'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev. Johan Plug, General Secretary BBK/CCS

Appendix A.8

**Response letter of the DRCA to the RCNL
about the ICRC**



*Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad
c/o. Mrs. G.W.C. van den Berg-Kroeze
Bloukeurstraat 17
Blommendal
BELLVILLE 7530
South Africa*

28 November 2022

To: Deputies BBK of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

Dear Sisters and Brothers

ICRC Membership and Sister-church Relationship

Thank you for your letter of 9 November 2022, concerning ICRC membership and sister-church relations. We respond to your comments and questions as follows.

1. Membership of ecclesiastical organizations and a sister church relationship are a matter of calling but also of mutual benefit. We are called to unity with all fellow believers in order to support and encourage each other in remaining faithful as churches. But at some stage, churches can decide that such a membership or relationship is not fruitful anymore due to diverging ways of adhering to God's Word. What you experienced at the ICRC was that the brothers endeavoured to reach out to you, in line with what the Bible teaches us, amongst others, in Phil. 4:5. Therefore, the difference between personal friendliness and ecclesiastical separation should not be a "perplexing contrast".
2. Over the past decade, the FRCSA have written several letters to you as our sister churches and have addressed your last synods in person. This communication dealt extensively with our concerns on the "new hermeneutics" in your churches, with adaptation to the western post-modern culture in which you and we live. To our regret and dismay, we have not received any substantial response to our letters of concern. We believe that our concerns are indeed of a fundamental nature and exposure to such a hermeneutics will be detrimental to our churches.
3. As you will be aware, our last Synod Belhar 2021 has decided that our sister-church relationship with the RCNL will terminate upon unification of the RCNL and the NGK, scheduled for 1 May 2023. This unification is, in our opinion, an indication that the

RCNL has, to a large extent, accepted the ecclesiastical culture of the NGK, which we rejected in 1969.

We trust that this letter has clarified the questions in your letter. We sincerely regret that our valued historic sister-church relation has developed in this way and that our ecclesiastical paths are separating. We hope and pray that the Lord will preserve your churches, notwithstanding your newly chosen direction.

With brotherly greetings

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Moes', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

J Moes, Convener of the DRCA of the FRCSA

Appendix B

Message of greetings to Synod Albany 2021 of the FRCA

Brothers, delegates of Synod, assembled guests

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa I bring you heartfelt greetings in the exalted name of our Lord Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is name, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things for the church, which is his body the fullness of him who fill all in all (Ephesians 1:21-23).”

What a promise, and what a comfort! Particularly in these times where the world is in turmoil, economies are shut and opened again, a pandemic confronts us all with the reality of death, and church services are restricted, we may know that He reigns in perfect peace over all things for the Church, which is his body. Indeed, we may believe all this is for the strengthening of his church which continues to assault the very gates of hell!

In terms of physical space, we, the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA) share the same hemisphere even though we are an ocean apart. But in terms of faith, we are family. Sharing one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. And from the beginning there has been a blessed familial unity between our churches. We praise the Lord for that!

This unity has only grown much deeper over the last number of years as we have stood together for the authority of God’s word against a rise in a cultural hermeneutic of Scripture in the Dutch churches. The more we learn about each other the more we have come to appreciate the spiritual bond of faith which we share. There are also direct family ties as many members have moved there due to the unrest and uncertainty in South Africa.

And although we are unable to make it in person, we are grateful that we have been invited to address you in this way. There are many ways in which our unity in faith has borne fruit in working together on several fronts.

Theological Education

To begin with, a matter close to our hearts that we have been thinking and praying about much in the last few years, theological education. The harvest is ready, but the workers are few! As a small federation we have always struggled with finding out what the best way is to equip our students for the ministry. Over the last few years we have worked more and more closely with CRTS. This focus on theological education has also motivated more to consider the ministry (7 young men no less). We continue to also observe the developments there closely in pursuing your own theological training.

Mission Work

The work of training up ministers is so vital because the African continent and South Africa is ripe for the Gospel. More and more people are looking for the pure preaching of the gospel, and we as churches are also growing more and more in living out the gospel of our king in a society that has in general turned its back on God. In a country with an extremely high employment rate, and rampant poverty people are broken and poor, and in need of the hope of the gospel.

As we embark on this mission to reach South Africa, one of the challenges that we are currently experiencing is that as the mission work continues to expand the funding continues to decrease. The Dutch churches, who previously supported upwards of 95% of the mission work, have decided to cut

their funding in half by 2024. This has posed a significant challenge to the churches as we look for support elsewhere.

This has also come as a blessing, as the churches locally have taken greater responsibility for the mission work, and we have had to deepen our reliance on our Heavenly Father, trusting that he will provide. It has also been a blessing in that it has forced us to think about how we can do sustainable missions in south Africa. We hope this will also open new doors to new partnership with sister churches around the world. Please keep this also in your prayers.

Relations with Churches Abroad

We also share a common heritage with the Netherlands. The FRCSA is involved International conference of reformed Churches (ICRC). In July of 2017 year this conference was held in Jordan, Ontario. The sad note of the conference was sounded when the membership of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was suspended because of the decision by their General Synod to admit women to the office of deacon, elder and pastor, contrary to the clear teachings of Holy Scripture, putting it at odds with the ICRC constitution.

Attending this conference provides us with an opportunity to meet with delegates of those churches with whom we have sister church relationship. Because of the size of our federation, and the manpower available to us, we have decided to focus much of our efforts to strengthen the bonds which we already have, particularly with the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, The Canadian Reformed Churches.

Our relationship with the Reformed churches in the Netherlands has been under severe strain over the last decade, and as you will see in the acts of synod, it has come to near breaking point. Indeed it seems as if a split- a breaking point is inevitable. The heart of the problem as we see it is not first the fact that they have opened all offices to women, but that they have opened the Word of God up to all kinds of subjective interpretations.

This is a matter of deep sadness for the FRSCA because for so many years we called ministers from TU Kampen, and so many our members have family living in Holland. Unlike our brothers and sisters in Australia and North America, we share a similar language and heritage with the Dutch. We encourage you to read the deliberations, the decisions and the grounds in this decision.

On the other hand, we continue to be deeply grateful for their support, and they have expressed that our differences will not affect the support. We have also made it clear that when it comes to the truth of Gods word, we will not let their level of support in any way influence our decision on whether to break or continue our relationship.

Relations with Churches in Africa

We are also excited to be a part of ICRC Africa, where we wish to work more with churches and federations that are closer to home. The African churches have much to contribute to the community of faith globally, and by the grace of God, are one of the fastest growing continents when it comes to Christianity.

Locally there has also been an effort to work more with the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA), who are also members of the ICRC. We are thankful that on a local basis there have been pulpit

exchanges, although nationally not much has taken place. We look forward to continuing our discussions with them both locally and nationally.

Closing

I would like to end with the words from the author of Hebrews: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works!” Indeed, He who promised is faithful! May God himself, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, grant you the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of truth and love to guide you in all your deliberations, so that each decision you make may be blessed, and serve in furthering the kingdom of Jesus Christ, until he comes again!

Again, we value your relationship deeply, and rejoice in God that we share this common faith and love with you. To him be all the glory for ever and ever. Thank you.

Rev J Bruintjes, FRCSA, Cape Town

Appendix C.1

Message of greetings to Synod Guelph- Emmanuel 2022 of the CanRC

Address to Synod Guelph on behalf of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

Dear brothers,

On behalf of your sister on the southern shores of Africa, I may greet you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns from north to south, from east to west. What a privilege it is for me to be here with you, and although we live our everyday lives on very different continents, to enjoy the unity in faith.

I am here not only for the sake of representing the FRCSA, but also to learn from you. Many matters on the agenda are as relevant and debated in SA as they are in Canada. May we edify one another in seeking what is most pleasing in these matters to our eternal God and Saviour.

The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa have a history very similar to yours. The first church was instituted in the same year as yours, 1950. In 2020 we celebrated our 70th anniversary with thanksgiving to the LORD. For many decades we knew about one another, although mutual contacts were limited. However, the last years things have changed to the better. The last decade the Free Reformed Churches have been looking for new opportunities to train their students. For many years we had a close relationship with the Theological University in Kampen, Netherlands. As churches we owe so much to Kampen, and we thank God for that. However, as you know, things have changed. Because of liberal tendencies we had no choice than to find new training opportunities. We experienced Gods providential guidance in the fact that a Memorandum of Cooperation could be signed with CRTS in 2016. Since then, the contacts have intensified year after year. Currently one of our students is studying at CRTS, although online due to visa issues. Beginning of this year another student returned to South Africa, after having followed a dedicated program for half a year in Hamilton. And God willing in September this year 3 more students will start in Hamilton. May the Lord make CRTS a blessing for our churches and for South Africa in the future. Of course, these developments also pose challenges, as you can read in the supplement report sent by the CRTS Board of Governors. We pray that the Lord will also guide us to a solution in this regard.

Since your previous synod in 2019 the Lord has been gracious to our churches. Just to clarify, we are used to speak about 'our' churches, but I hope that you do not misunderstand me. It is an easy way to speak, but let it be clear that these churches belong only to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, who is the sole One gathering his flock also in South Africa. But what I wanted to say, the churches in South Africa have been blessed indeed. Since your previous synod a mission church was instituted, the now self governing church of Wesbank near Cape Town. And at this moment two other mission churches have come close to institution, two churches in the city of Soshanguve near Pretoria. One of them has already requested classis for a special visitation in view of installing the offices.

Indeed, South Africa remains a mission field. The fields are ready to be harvested. In this respect the African continent is perhaps different compared to Western countries, where so many are not interested in the Gospel anymore, although they continue to enjoy the fruits of the Gospel still lingering on in their culture. Africa is still finding its feet after ages and ages of paganism. I have been a missionary for many years, and perhaps the most important thing I learnt during those years is to be attentive to where the LORD opens doors. If a door remains closed, you can go on knocking endlessly. But when the LORD opens a door, we should not miss the opportunity. And I can tell you full of amazement, the Lord is still opening doors, yes many doors to the Gospel, in South Africa. Too many for us. And therefore, I want to plead with you to become involved in 'our' mission work, again

of course, not 'ours', but the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Free Reformed Churches have a long tradition of mission work. The last 7 decades we have cooperated intensively with our sister churches in the Netherlands. However, due to reasons not unknown to you, this cooperation is being scaled down. Brothers, we need new partners in the mission. We call on all local churches to seriously consider our request. We pray that the Lord will grant us new partners. We know there are obstacles, like secular governments making it more and more difficult to support religious activities abroad. However, let us ask God to remove them or find a way around those obstacles.

Our last Synod Belhar 2021 has decided to not yet terminate our sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches Liberated in the Netherlands. That decision will be tabled at our next Synod Soshanguve 2024. But this does not mean that we have sympathy with a more liberal or subjective view of the authority of God's Word. We decided to await any last possible appeals to their synod's fundamental decision on "women in office". But it appears that the course is already set. Our synod has also decided, would the planned amalgamation with the Netherlands Reformed Churches continue in 2023, that this will automatically end our sister church relationship with the RCNL.

As is the case here in North America, we are also involved in deliberations with other federations. Regarding the Reformed Churches in South Africa (the so-called Dopperchurches) there is rapprochement between local congregations, for which we are thankful. Unfortunately, a federation-wide cooperation seems unlikely, since a number of RCSA congregations have taken the liberal route. However, the cooperation with local churches staying faithful to God's Word alone, is very dear to us.

Since 2020 Covid has also wreaked havoc in South Africa. Our churches were not spared, although those who passed away because of the pandemic were rather few. Nevertheless, worship services and church life in general were affected. Also, in our churches there were debates about Covid-restrictions imposed by government. Yet by God's grace these discussions did not lead to lasting divisions. We thank the Lord for present-day technology. Internet applications like Zoom, WhatsApp and the like became part and parcel of church life, and they are there to stay. We have indeed entered a new normal, although what is so beautiful is to see that the basics of Reformed doctrine and worship will stay the same and continue to thrive also in this new normal. Christ is an eternal King who will never be without subjects (BC art. 27).

Everyday life in Africa is not always easy. We are called to be Christ's church in a society crippled by poverty, criminality, and corruption. These realities cause many South Africans to leave the country to build up a life elsewhere. Most probably everyone of you will know a South African who has settled down somewhere in Canada, as is the case in many other countries. We talk about a brain-drain, and this is also affecting our churches. What the future will bring for our country, we don't know. We do know that it is in God's hands. We also know, as Jesus said, not to be afraid of those who can kill the body – Matthew 10:28. And although we realize that other countries like Canada may offer a safer and wealthier life, nevertheless as you know so well, the spiritual battle is not less intense here. More and more the very foundations of Western civilization are about to be tested, in fact being shaken already. Our prayer is that you as churches may continue to hold unto the LORD and his Word as these secular storms rage all around you. May you as churches continue to focus on your Head and Husband, our exalted Lord, not being distracted to please the world, but to please him in everything.

May the LORD bless your synod and make it a blessing to the churches. To Him be the glory now and forevermore. Stay safe and joyful in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

PG Boon

May 2022

Appendix C.2

Report of Rev. Boon on attending Synod Guelph-Emmanuel 2022

2022 Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches at Guelph-Emmanuel

Impressions by the South African delegate

Recently I had the privilege of visiting the synod of our Canadian sister churches in the city of Guelph, about an hour southwest of Toronto. When you fly over the Canadian province Ontario, you will be stunned by the number of lakes, big and small. I have been told it is the biggest freshwater reservoir in the world, certainly a reason to be jealous when coming from a water-scarce country. However, after hearing about their eight-month long winter, my jealousy quickly evaporated.

In this article you will find an overview of my experiences, as well as a short summary of some of the more significant decisions synod took.

Synod started in a joyful way with a beautiful prayer service on May 9th, led by Rev. Douwe Agema (indeed family of the South African Agema's), preaching God's Word from Psalm 119:57-64: *The Spirit teaches us to handle rightly the Word of Truth.*

The next day all the delegates' credentials were received, and synod was constituted. In the Canadian Reformed Churches there are two regional synods (East and West), each delegating a total of twelve brothers. The following brothers were elected to the executive:

Chairman: Rev. John Ludwig

Vice-chairman: Rev. Eric Kampen

Clerk: Rev. Karlo Janssen

Second Clerk: Rev. Carl VanDam.

From Wednesday May 10th until a full ten working days later, Saturday 21st, these brothers worked mornings, afternoons, and evenings to complete the task the churches had put on their shoulders – indeed a formidable agenda. As is the custom at Canadian Reformed synods, the delegates were subdivided in a number of advisory committees with the task of preparing draft decisions for the plenary sessions.

What struck me was how many letters and overtures synod received from local churches and minor assemblies. This is something we can learn from our Canadian sister churches: the thorough way in which all prepare in advance and interact with synod. It also struck me how well the delegates were prepared.

Although every agenda point synod dealt with was important to the churches in Canada, not all topics are as relevant to us, hence I will limit myself to a few of them. Whoever wants to read more, I refer to the Press Release of Synod on the following link: <https://canrc.org/news/2094>

Hymn cap

Previous synods have decided to put a limit on the number of hymns in the Book of Praise: one hundred. Both regional synods requested to remove this cap, and so allowing for more hymns to be added. It was argued that a hymn cap is artificial, and that removing this cap need not jeopardize the priority of the use of the Psalms in worship. After lengthy deliberations, synod decided not to remove the hymn cap. Synod was not persuaded and decided to retain the hymn cap.

Pulpit exchange

Synod elaborately dealt with ecumenical or interchurch relationships. For many years, the relationships were dealt with by two committees, one maintaining contact with various churches in North America and another maintaining contact with churches throughout the world. Synod decided to merge these two committees, since a considerable overlap in their duties was experienced.

In regard to interchurch relationships, lengthy deliberations took place on pulpit exchange with ministers from churches that have not official ecclesiastical fellowship with the CanRC. Is this something that can be left for local consistories to decide, or classes, or should pulpit exchange always wait until a decision by general synod? Do ministers from fellow ICRC and NAPARC federations have a different status in this regard compared to those from other denominations? The foreign delegates were also asked to advise synod on this matter, explaining how this matter is dealt with in their federations. At the end synod decided not to accept appeals in this matter.

South African churches

Synod also dealt with its South African sister. We thank the Lord that the decision was taken unanimously to continue the sister church relationship, based on the following grounds:

- As far as can be determined, the FRCSA demonstrate that they remain faithful churches. They abide by the Word of God as the only rule for faith and life and adhere to adopted confessions and church order.
- Our ecclesiastical fellowship with the FRCSA dates back to the first CanRC synods. There continue to be many close ties ... between the FRCSA and CanRC.
- The CRCA has never had a mandate to financially support other church federations; however, in this situation it may be appropriate to mandate the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER) to facilitate assistance for the FRCSA, should further financial assistance be necessary. In collaboration with others involved, the CER could seek out appropriate churches or organizations to responsibly interact with requests for financial assistance.

Theological Training

As for the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, synod also appointed a new professor in the place of Dr. Arjan DeVisser, who is due to retire in 2023. In a closed session Dr. Reuben Bredenhof was appointed. Although Canadian himself, he is currently minister of the Free Reformed Church Mount Nasura in Australia. We pray that the Lord will richly bless his future ministry at the CRTS. May he prove to be a blessing also to our South African students!

As for the South African students, synod also dealt with a request from the FRCSA, together with CRTS, on how to fund their studies in Hamilton. In the past a *Memorandum of Understanding* was already reached between CRTS and the Curators of the FRCSA, specifying the financial responsibilities of each party:

To be paid by the FRCSA

- Travel costs
- Medical costs
- Tuition fees
- Textbooks

To be paid by CRTS' Foreign Student Bursary Fund

- Living costs in Canada

Synod endorsed this agreement. Since the Lord has heard our many prayers to provide new students in theology, God willing a number of 4 South African students will start in Hamilton in person as from September this year. This will have a financial implication for the Foreign Student Bursary Fund. In this regard synod decided: "That financial assistance for theological students of the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa (FRCSA) be provided by means of freewill giving to the Foreign Students' Bursary Fund (FSBF)." We are extremely grateful for the willingness of our Canadian brothers and sisters to donate for this cause. At the same time, we call on individual brothers and sisters in South Africa who have the means, to also donate to this fund.

A few more impressions

A very special morning was when the Local Reformed Primary School, Cornerstone, attended synod. Specifically for this occasion synod dealt with the following motion from one of its advisory committees:

That Grade 7 and 8 students should recite the Heidelberg Catechism during worship services.

Grounds:

- 1. This will be good for them.*
- 2. This will help them theologically.*
- 3. This will be fun for the consistory.*

The motion was accepted by synod with one addition: that the students will receive candy afterwards 😊.

Were there any shortcomings? My visit was primarily to represent the South African churches and to learn from them. Yet while attending, one unintentionally also tends to compare their way of doing things with ours. What struck me was their culture of mainly taking decisions by voting. This rarely happens during our synods. We strive, through deliberations, to work towards consensus, especially in the more important matters of church life and doctrine. I must say, in this regard I prefer 'our way' of doing things.

One more thing needs to be mentioned, and that was the hospitality of the calling church, the Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph. For two weeks they treated all delegates and observers with three meals a day. They stood ready to assist with whatever the delegates requested or needed. And added to this, most of the delegates lodged with members of the congregation. The hospitality was phenomenal. And small world indeed, the house where I stayed over, also has family in South Africa. Above all, it was our joint brotherhood in Christ that filled me with amazement. Although on very different continents, we serve the same God, and as churches we often face the same challenges.

All in all, my attendance of Synod Guelph 2022 made me realise again how much we ought to thank God for our Canadian sister churches! Because of present-day online communication, and because of the fact that international travel is getting easier and cheaper (with the exception of the Covid years), and added to this the cooperation in theological education, this sister is in a sense much closer to us than in the past. Both federations started after World War II in 1950 on different continents. For many years we knew about one another, but the contacts were limited due to the enormous ocean between us. Yet this has changed to the better.

May the Lord keep our sister church relationship and may we be of a mutual blessing to each other for still many years to come.

PG Boon

Photo's:



Synod Executive: Revs. Karlo Janssen, Eric Kampen, John Ludwig, Carl VanDam



Delegates of Synod Guelph 2022



Emmanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Guelph

Appendix D

Report of the DRCA to the FRCSA Indaba of 2023

Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA)

Interim Report to FRCSA Indaba 17-18 February 2023

30 January 2023

1 DRCA Members

The following members have been appointed as DRCA members by Synod Belhar 2021:

Rev. J Bruintjes, Br J F Raimond, Sr G van den Berg, Br J Moes (convener), Rev P G Boon and Rev. P Kgatle. The last two brothers have been specifically tasked to maintain our membership of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

This Interim Report has been compiled with inputs from the various deputies.

2 Meetings

The DRCA met five times during the past two years, i.e. on 4 November 2021, 17 February 2022, 23 June 2022, 8 September 2022 and 2 February 2023. These meetings were held in Cape Town, while the two Gauteng members participated through internet-video.

3 Mandate

As instructed by Synod, deputies have maintained contact with our foreign sister churches, i.e. the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (RCNL), the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC) and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA).

Furthermore, we actively participated as member-churches of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), mainly by membership of the Diaconal Working Group and by attending the 2022 Conference in Windhoek, Namibia. The details of these activities are summarised in the Appendix to this report.

4 Conclusions

Various conclusions, based on our interaction with churches and the ICRC, are formulated and motivated in the detailed report. Synod Belhar 2021 has decided that our sister-church relationship with the RCNL will be terminated upon their unification with the “Nederlands

Gereformeerde Kerken”, scheduled for 1 May 2023. Further substantiation of this synod decision is provided in the attached detailed Appendix.

5 Proposed discussion points

1. Our churches intend to maintain our ecumenical relations with foreign churches more and more through participation in the activities of the ICRC. How could these activities and results reach and benefit the individual churches and our church federation ? What do we lose by this more general (wider) approach to inter-church relationship (rather than just having sister-churches) ?
2. Should we as church federation stipulate the admission to the Lord’s Supper of foreign visitors who are not members of sister churches, but are members of another Reformed or Presbyterian church, or should such arrangements be the (exclusive ?) responsibility of each congregation ? What minimum and practical criteria should be used for such admission ?
3. Considering the difficulty of CanRC churches to provide financial support to projects of foreign churches, including mission work by churches in countries outside Canada, it has been proposed that we rely on the CanRC for financial support of our theological students and their training (who, after finishing their studies, will probably mostly serve the CanRC with its many ministerial vacancies). For the financial support of our mission work, we should then focus on the FRCA churches. Both the CanRC and the FRCA do not have federal mission deputies, so support would have to come from individual congregations. Is this indeed an effective policy and how should such a policy practically be implemented ?
4. Prof. Arjan de Visser from the CanRC may DV be available for theological and mission advice in SA after his retirement later this year. How could we make use of his talents ? His wife Inge has extensive experience in evangelization work (in the Netherlands). How could we benefit from her talents ?

Appendix to the Interim Report of the DRCA to the FRCSA Indaba 2023

1. Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) (RCNL) - Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt) (GKv)

- Unification of the RCNL with the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken* (NGK) is scheduled for 1 May 2023 – the name of the merged church federation will be: '*Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken*'.
 - o Salient points in the new Church Order for the merged church:
Deacons and elders are not bound to the confession anymore,
The Confession is no longer called “a reliable summary of Scripture”,
The new church federation has only authority to give *advice* to the local churches,
Local churches can decide on admitting children at the Lord’s Supper, homosexual relations, etc.
 - o Two RCNL churches have publicly declared they are not going along with unification:
Urk and Capelle aan den IJssel – Noord
 - o Members of some churches have already broken away and formed new churches,
such as Hersteld GK Bunschoten-Spakenburg, Hersteld GK Rijnsburg, whereas the
RCNL church Brouwershaven joined a local CGK church as a whole.
- Deterioration in the RCNL:
 - o Many churches already have female office bearers
 - o The second worship service has been abolished in many churches
 - o In the books of some prominent people in the RCNL the changed way of reading the Bible is apparent, such as “Verbonden voor het leven” about homosexuality, written by professor of ethics, Ad de Bruijne, as well as “Vuur dat nooit dooft”, about gender equality, written by the first female minister in the RCNL, Almatine Leene.
 - o The GKv federation has become a member of the liberal Dutch ‘Raad van Kerken’ (Council of Churches).

Conclusion: on the basis of the above, there is no reason whatsoever to reconsider the decision by our previous synods that our sister-church relationship will end at the moment that the RCNL will merge with the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*.

- Deputies DRCA have established contact with the “*Kerngroep Bezinning GKv*” (*Core Group Reflection RCNL*)
This is a group of concerned RCNL members creating contacts between people who are concerned with the subversion of the authority of the Word of God and worried about the ecclesiastical decay in the RCNL. At the moment of unification of the RCNL and the NGK

they want to jointly declare that they remain loyal, reliable and confessional reformed, and therefore cannot go along with the unification.

However, they do not wish to institute a new church federation alongside the existing ones (such as DGK and GKN), but are seeking unity and cooperation with all who are building on the same foundation of Scripture and confession (Three Forms of Unity).

The Core Group does not restrict its activities to members of the RCNL only, but to all who have the same respect for the authority of the Word of God. Some of the speakers at their meetings as well as two of the authors of “Het Woord in geding” are from outside the RCNL.

The Core Group has initiated the following activities:

- Website : bezinninggkv.nl
This website points out the cause of the issues and decay in the RCNL and provides information about the activities of the Core Group.
- Manifesto
on the website there is a manifesto which spells out what they want to hold on to.
- Regional meetings
During January and February 2023, the Core Group has organised Regional Meetings in nine different cities / towns.
- Publication of “Het Woord in geding” (The Word in dispute).

Conclusion: the *Kerngroep Bezinning GKV* does very good work in alerting people to the dangerous course of the RCNL and bringing together those who are concerned. This initiative is worthy of the support of our churches. They have expressed their gratitude for our support so far and for the day of prayer that was held in our churches.

De Gereformeerde Kerken / Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland - DGK/GKN

- Unification?

Although the synods of both federations (DGK and GKN) have accepted each other as true churches of Christ and declared that there is nothing to stop unification, no progress has been made since then. It seems that the hold-up is caused by the GKN who have not conceded to the request for a joint synod to decide on unification. There are signs that this hold up is caused by “wounds that are not yet healed” and the wish to not force the issue (see e.g. the (Dutch) report on the “Informatiebijeenkomst te Ommen” of 25 Nov. 2022). Many people have indicated that they are waiting for unification before they will join one of these church federations.

- GKN membership of the ICRC

The GKN has been unanimously accepted as member of the ICRC on 18 October 2022, during the same session where the membership of the RCNL was terminated. Apparently, the request for membership by the GKN was made with full agreement of the DGK.

Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken (CGK)

- The CGK synod of 2022 decided with a two-third majority on scriptural grounds to not allow women in ecclesiastical offices, nor to condone homosexual relations.
- However, one third is of a different opinion (directly opposed to the majority) and include two professors of the Theological University Apeldoorn
- Some CGK churches have appointed women in church offices in spite of the decision by their own synod
- If this church federation does not take a more firm stand against those who go against decisions of their own synod, or against the doctrine of the church, the agitation against the decisions of the synod will not stop.

Move towards a redistribution of church federations?

In these disturbing and fluid times in the history of reformed churches in the Netherlands, the wish to come to a reformed, confessional church federation where the Word of God has full authority, is often expressed. Let it be our prayer that the Lord of the Church will give opportunities and strength to those who are one in truth, to unite according to His command.

Possible recommendations of the DRCA to our next Synod Mamelodi 2024

- Uphold the decision of Belhar 2021 that our sister-church relationship with RCNL will have been terminated at the moment of their unification with the NGK, when the RCNL will become part of a new church federation (expected to happen on 1 May 2023).
- Not to enter into a sister-church relationship with another church in the Netherlands, but to expand our ecumenical relationships via the ICRC (the GKN have been accepted as member).
- Continue our moral support of the *Kerngroep Bezinning GKv*, even after the unification of the RCNL/NGK, and support their goal of uniting all (orthodox / confessional) reformed churches in the Netherlands.

2. Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

Synod Albany 2021

- Synod Albany was held in June 2021, a few weeks after our Synod Belhar. Due to Covid restriction we were not able to send a delegate to this synod, but Rev. Bruintjes compiled a video message.
- Synod decided to continue discussion with the CRTS (Hamilton, Canada) to explore the feasibility of an Australian CRTS affiliate for the training of FRCA ministers. For the time being, the FRCA will keep sending their students to the CRTS and continue participation in the "CRTS ad hoc Distance Education Committee".

- One of the FRCA churches requested synod to decide that the FRCA does not send observers to a next ICRC Conference, as this may lead to the FRCA becoming a member of the ICRC. In their opinion, membership of the ICRC promotes *denominationalism* and *pluriformity*, by promoting cooperation *before* becoming sister churches. Synod decided to instruct deputies to investigate what has been decided on the ICRC by past synods and await proposals from the churches.
- The next FRCA synod will be held in Darling Downs in 2024.

3. Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC)

Churches

- The churches have grown and a number of church plants and daughter churches have been instituted.
- There is still a large percentage of vacant churches and there is a need for more students.

Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS)

- Three of our students are presently attending lectures at the CRTS, with more to come in the coming years (see Deputies for Theological Training Report)
- Dr. Arjan de Visser is retiring with Dr. Ruben Bredenhof chosen to replace him. Dr. Arjan can help here in South Africa with his background in mission.
- The seminary has been consistently growing over the last few years.

Synod Guelph 2022

- Rev. Pieter Boon was our delegate to this synod.
- In connection with relations with other churches, Synod decided to re-structure the committees. Formerly one committee took care of relations with churches in North America and another handled churches abroad. It has now been decided to go back to one committee and call it the Committee on Ecumenical Relations (CER). It will be composed of twelve members.
- Synod Guelph decided to deny both overtures of regional synod West and East and keep a 100-hymn cap in the *book of Praise*. According to this decision, the churches will find 100 hymns in future songbooks and no more. At the same time, they approved 40 new hymns for testing while the churches already have 85 approved Hymns.

4. ICRC Conference in Windhoek, Namibia, October 13-18, 2022

Four persons were present on behalf of the FRCSA: Revv. Phineas Kgatle, Thabo Matlaela, George Mnisi and Pieter Boon.

The ICRC consists of 38 member church associations from every continent. Bible-faithful Reformed and Presbyterian Churches come together to discuss a relevant theme, network and support each other in various aspects of being a church, such as mission, training and diaconate. The conference usually takes place every fourth year, but due to Covid it has been five years since the previous one.

The conference topic was theological training and speakers from different parts of the world shared their experiences. An important point of discussion was the question to what extent a theological training should be *academic* and to what extent it should be a *spiritual formation* to become a servant of the Word. There was unanimity that these two do not exclude but rather complement each other, even though there was no unanimity on the question of whether theological training should also obtain accreditation from the government and / or government funding. The dangers of this have been pointed out in an increasingly secular and godless society. Church accreditation must be primary.

A topic that unleashed a lot of emotions was the sad fact that the ICRC decided that the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (RCNL) can no longer be members. This is the first time in the history of the ICRC that a member church had to be removed, and all the more tragic because the RCNL was one of the founding members of the ICRC. It was striking that it was decided unanimously (without a single dissent) that they could no longer be a part and this in light of the ICRC's constitution, which is obviously based on Scripture and confession (Three Forms of Unity and Westminster Confession). It has been established that the unequivocal authority of Scripture is no longer secure in the RCNL. A new hermeneutic approach to the Scriptures is tolerated, which gives possibilities to adapt the church and Christian life to the world, contrary to the clear intention of God's Word. Their synod decision to allow women in all church offices is just one example of that. Reference can also be made to the planned merger with the *Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken*, where a homosexual lifestyle is allowed and founded on the basis of Scripture, something that is also accepted by some RCNL office bearers.

The RCNL delegates still pleaded to give them more time and to dare walking the road with them and investigating together how it is indeed possible to arrive at a new exegesis of the relevant Scripture passages. The other ICRC churches were not impressed by this. It has been five years since the RCNL was suspended, at the previous conference in 2017. Furthermore, some ICRC churches used to have female office bearers in the past, but - on the basis of the Scriptures - came back from it. The attitude of the RCNL as if they are the first to come to new insights and in this respect play a leading role for others, was not appreciated. Before them, many other churches had already wrestled with these subjects, conducted in-depth studies, and, where necessary, obediently returned to God's Word. In prayer the RCNL was urgently and lovingly dedicated to the Lord, imploring Him to move them back from the wrong path that this federation has entered.

Fortunately, there was also much joy when five new church federations were admitted as member churches. These are:

1. Anugraha Reformed Presbyterian Church of Bangalore, India (ARPCBI).
2. Evangelical Reformed Church in India (ERCI).
3. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Africa in Uganda (RPCA).
4. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE in Hungary, Ukraine and Romania).
5. Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) (Reformed Churches Netherlands - RCN)

The latter federation separated from the RCNL in the recent past. They are currently on a path towards union with the DGK, which had separated from the RCNL earlier. Their application to become a member of ICRC was known to and was supported by the DGK.

The ICRC is a gathering of many believers from all peoples, nations and languages of the world. The fulfilment of Jesus' Pentecost promise is clearly visible in this. Christ is very active in gathering His church, also in our times. What is also surprising, is that basically the same spiritual battle is being fought everywhere.

The ICRC has a (digital) magazine, *Lux Mundi*. (<https://www.icrconline.com/lux-mundi>). It gives good insight into the ups and downs of all the member churches, definitely worth reading.

Furthermore, there is the ICRC website (<https://www.icrconline.com/>).

The ICRC also has three standing auxiliary committees:

- Missions Committee
- Diaconal Committee
- Theological Education Committee.

These committees provide valuable advice to member churches. They also prepare brochures about what is happening in the member churches. For example, there is a brochure on where in the world mission work is carried out by member churches.

To conclude, the ICRC is a very tangible experience of Christ's worldwide church.

Appendix E.1

Letter of invitation to attend Synod Kampen 2023 of the GKN

Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)

Deputaten Buitenlandse Kerken

secretaris: J.P.C. Vreugdenhil

Het Schip 206

7325 NL Apeldoorn – The Netherlands

Tel (+31)-557851701, e-mail secr-bk@gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl

To Free Reformed Churches in South Africa deputies

Address rev. dr. P.G. Boon

Email: fampgboon@gmail.com

Re: Synod 2023 of GKN

Apeldoorn, September 25, 2023

Dear brothers,

This letter is to inform you about the Synod of GKN 2023. This synod is convened on Saturday November 4, at 10 AM, Deo Volente. It is expected that the agenda will not be finished that day, and that synod will decide on how and when to continue. The convening church informed us that they made tentative reservations for meetings on several Saturdays: November 18, December 2 and 16, January 13. Later on Friday December 1 was added as well.

We understand that the FRCSA intend to send one or more delegates to our synod. It is also clear to us that our preliminary schedule causes difficulties for visitors from abroad. We as *Deputaten Buitenlandse Kerken* contacted the convening church in Kampen. However, their instruction is only to invite denominations that are recognized as sisterchurches, and formally no sisterchurch relation exists yet between you and us. We as *deputaten* regret this situation. Yet, because previous synods of GKN asked for a sisterchurch relation, deputaten expect no problems when your delegates visit synod and participate in some discussions, even without a formal invitation.

Furthermore, we have sent a letter to synod about it. Our proposal to synod is to arrange a more extended meeting on December 2, preferable already beginning on Friday December 1. On the agenda of that meeting, we propose, should be not only foreign contacts, but also the relation between GKN and DGK. We also suggested to arrange, in the days before and after that meeting, on Thursday and Monday, some informal meetings between foreign visitors and several contacts in The Netherlands.

These plans are only proposals, and we have no certainty that they will be accepted. But if they will be accepted by synod – which will not be clear before November 4 - we intend to inform you as soon as possible.

We very much regret this situation. We can only explain it, and apologize that we are a young and inexperienced federation. In our proposals to synod 2023 we have already included a few paragraphs to improve the situation for future synods.

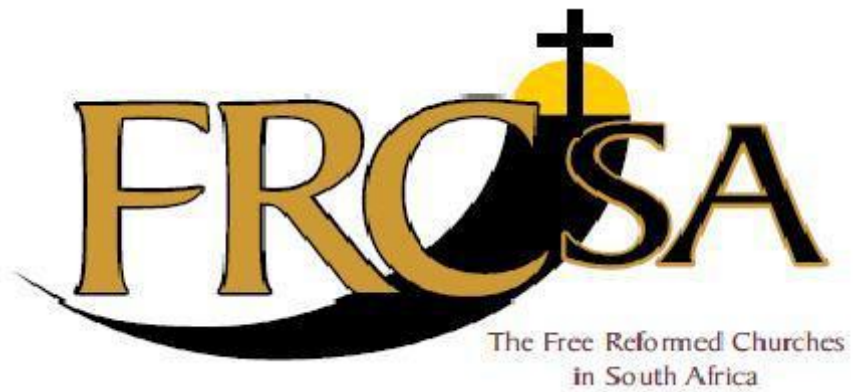
In spite of these difficulties, we hope and pray to meet your delegate(s) end of this year, the Lord willing, and to enjoy a time of fraternal fellowship.

With brotherly love,

Jaap Vreugdenhil, secretary

Appendix E.2

Response to the invitation to attend Synod Kampen 2023 of the GKN



Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad

***Deputate Betrekkinge Buitenlandse Kerke - DRCA
p.a. mevr. G.W.C. van den Berg-Kroeze
Bloukeurstraat 17, Blommendal
BELLVILLE 7530
Suid-Afrika***

5 October 2023

Deputaten Buitenlandse Kerken
Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland
p/a secretaris: J.P.C. Vreugdenhil

Dear brothers

Thank you very much for your letter concerning the upcoming synod of GKN 2023 at the end of this year.

This is, as far as we could establish, the first official letter that we as deputies have ever received from you as Deputaten Buitenlandse Kerken. If any of your previous letters have gone astray, we would be grateful to receive them still. For future correspondence, please take note of our official address in the heading. Correspondence can be emailed to the email address of the undersigned, whose special field of focus is the reformed churches in the Netherlands.

Thank you also for informing us of the proposed schedule of meetings, and your wish to have been able to officially invite us to send delegates to your synod. However, as ds Pieter Boon explained in his personal email, there must have been a misunderstanding of our intention to send one or more delegates to your synod.

However, this does not mean that we are not interested in your synod, nor in you as churches, who originated from the GkV because of your wish to stay reformed. On the contrary, we would very much like to be informed of the discussions during the meetings of your synod, and you could perhaps send us the 'dag-rapporten'.

We are thankful to note that the relation of your churches with the DGK is a special item on the agenda, as it is our prayer that the truly reformed people in the Netherlands will find unity in truth according to the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ in John 17.

This is also the reason that we as deputies support the activities of the 'Kerngroep Bezinning GKv' and the pursuit of 'Gereformeerde eucumene' by the churches of Urk, Capelle aan den IJssel-Noord and Vroomshoop.

It is our prayer that the Lord will bless your synod and grant wisdom to the delegates so that its decisions will be according to His will and to the promotion of His Kingdom.

With brotherly greetings,

Frits Raimond, deputy DRCA

Appendix E.3

Invitation to attend the Convocation of foreign churches of the GKN

Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN)

deputaat-scriba: J.F. de Leeuw

Prinsesselaan 11, 3851 XM Ermelo

Tel. 06-53672343, E-mail: j.f.deleeuw@online.nl

To

the Canadian Reformed Churches

p/a Karlo Janssen rcjanssen@shaw.ca

the Vrije Gereformeerde Kerken Suid-Africa

p/a Frits Raimond jfraimond@gmail.com

the Free Reformed Churches Australia

p/a Pete Witten pete.witten@outlook.com

the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA)

p/a Mark Bube mark.bube@opc.org, Committee of Ecclesiastical and Interchurch Relations

An

c.c. johnhterpstra@gmail.com

c.c. de Selbständige Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche in Deutschland

p/a Raphael Schuster r.schuster@serk-hannover.de

Subject: **Convocation**

Ermelo, November 11, 2023

Dear brothers,

As you know on November 4th. the General Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands, Kampen 2023, had its opening session.

In its first session, the synod decided to discuss the report and proposals from deputies of Foreign Churches on December 1, 2023. The synod cordially invites you to attend as an observer. The synod would like to give you the opportunity to present yourself for further introduction.

The synod meets in the Bethel Church, De Wittehaven 28, 3843 GJ Harderwijk. The sittings start at 9:30 am.

We would like to know whether you, and if so who, hope to be present on December 1. Fraternal delegates and official representatives will be our honored guests. Please contact Jaap Vreugdenhil, secr-bk@gereformeerdekerkennederland.nl or Andreas Jongeneel, ajongeneel@gkzwijndrecht-eo.nl to make arrangements.

With brotherly greetings, on behalf of the moderamen of the GS Kampen 2023,

J.F. de Leeuw, deputy secretary

Attachment:

- Rapport van Deputaten Buitenlandse Kerken, aan Synode GKN – Kampen 2023