

16.14 REPORT 9: DEPUTIES ECUMENICITY ABROAD – ECUMENICAL BODIES DESK (Art 55)

- A. Rev HS Coetzee tables the Report.
- B. The Report will be concluded during the Synod session.

C. REPORT

Deputies responsible for this desk: Dr DG Breed (s) and prof HG Stoker.

1. International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

Member

For notice

1.1 *Mandate*

1.1.1 The Synod is to acknowledge with thanks the work of the ICRC.

1.1.2 The GKSA is to remain a member of the ICRC.

Decision: Points 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 noted.

1.2 *Execution of the mandate*

1.2.1 The GKSA delegated dr DG Breed and rev HPM van Rhyn attended the four-yearly meeting of the ICRC from 29 August-4 September 2013 in Cardiff, Wales. Rev Rajesh Kumar of Rietvallei, currently ministering in India, attended the conference at his own cost.

1.2.2 The conference was also attended by delegates of the Canadian Reformed Churches – CanRC; Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland – CGKN; Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales – EPCEW; Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland – EPCI; Free Church of Scotland – FCS; Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) – FCSC; Free Reformed Churches of North America – FRCNA; Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke van Suid-Afrika – VGK; Heritage Reformed Congregation – HRC; Independent Reformed Church of Korea – IRCK; Orthodox Presbyterian Church – OPC; Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia – PCEA; Presbyterian Free Church of India – PFCI; Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) – PCKK; Reformed Churches of Brazil – RCB; Reformed Churches in Indonesia NTT – RCI; Gereformeerde Kerk Nederland – GKN; Reformed Churches in New Zealand – RCNZ; Reformed Churches in the United States – RCUS; Reformed Presbyterian Church of India – RPCInd; Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland – RPCI; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America – RPCNA; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India – RPCNEI; United Reformed Churches in North America – URNCNA.

1.2.3 New churches whose application to attend were approved were: the Africa Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Kenya) – AEPC and the Sudanese Reformed Churches (SRC). New churches whose applications to attend were turned down were: the Christian Reformed Church of Australia – CRCA and the Universal Reformed Christian Church (Nigeria) – NEST (URCC).

1.2.4 The theme of the conference was *Reformed preaching*. Various lectures were given and workshops were held.

1.2.5 An ICRC commission on which *inter alia* dr DG Breed served, were tasked with revising the Constitution of the ICRC. Quite a number of amendments to the constitution, as suggested by the commission, were accepted at the conference. These revisions are included in this Report, for approval by the General Synod 2014. Dr Breed has been appointed to chair the ICRC's commission for theological training. A commission was also created for the coordination of ICRC activities in Africa.

- 1.2.6 The GKSA delegates had the opportunity, during the conference, to arrange meetings with delegates of the following churches: Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland – CGKN; Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales – EPCEW; Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland – EPCI; Free Church of Scotland – FCS; Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) – FCSC; Orthodox Presbyterian Church – OPC; Presbyterian Free Church of India; Reformed Churches in New Zealand – RCNZ; Reformed Churches in the United States – RCUS; Reformed Presbyterian Church of India – RPCInd; Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland – RPCI; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America – RPCNA; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India – RPCNEI; and United Reformed Churches in North America – URCNA.

1.2.7 The next conference will probably be held in Canada in 2017.

Decision: Points 1.2.1 to 1.2.7 noted.

For decision making

1.3 *Recommendations*

1.3.1 The Synod is to acknowledge with thanks the work of the ICRC.

1.3.2 The GKSA is to remain a member of the ICRC and the General Synod is to budget for ICRC dues and sending delegates to the next ICRC in 2017.

1.3.3 The amendments to the ICRC's constitution, as set out in the Report, is to be reviewed.

Decision: Points 1.3.1 to 1.3.3 approved.

PROPOSED CONSTITUTION of the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

(Reflecting amendments in context)

CONSTITUTION

I. NAME

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

II. Basis

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

III. Purpose

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the ~~M~~member ~~C~~churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the ~~M~~member ~~C~~churches;
3. to ~~facilitate and promote encourage~~ cooperation among the ~~M~~member ~~C~~churches in such areas as missions, theological education, and ministries of mercy ~~in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;~~
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the ~~M~~member ~~C~~churches ~~and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;~~
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

IV. Membership

1. The Conference was duly constituted on October 26, 1982, by delegates from the eight founding churches, having been previously authorized to do so by their major assemblies. A list of past and present members of the Conference shall be maintained among the Conference's documents.

4.2. Those ~~C~~churches eligible for membership are those ~~shall be admitted as members~~ which:

- a. faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith;
- b. have complied with the applicable Regulations regarding applications for membership~~been sponsored by at least two member Churches;~~
- ~~e. furnish~~
- ~~d. their confessional standards;~~
- ~~e. their declaratory acts (if applicable);~~
- ~~f. their form of subscription;~~
- ~~g. their form of government;~~
- ~~h. c.~~ are not members of ~~the World Council of Churches or~~ any other organization ~~(such as the World Council of Churches or the World Communion of Reformed Churches)~~ whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis;
 - ~~2. are accepted by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, every member Church having one vote.~~
 3. Admission to membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote.
 4. Suspension or Termination of membership in the Conference shall be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, whenever the Conference concludes of the opinion that the Member Church, in its doctrine and/or practice (which includes the ordination of persons to the offices of minister or ruling elder contrary to the rule prescribed in Scripture, cf., Belgic Confession, Article 30 Timothy), is no longer in agreement with the Basis; removal of suspension shall also be by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the Member Churches, each Member Church having one vote. A proposal to suspend, terminate, or remove the suspension of the membership of a Member Church may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church. A suspended Member Church may send Delegates to meetings of the Council Conference but shall not vote.
 - 3-5. When a Member Church fails to send at least one Delegate to three consecutive meetings of the Conference, its membership shall be automatically terminated as of close of the third such meeting, unless during that meeting the Conference determines by a two-thirds majority vote of the delegations of the member Churches, each Member Church having one vote, that there are good and sufficient grounds for such failure.

V. NATURE AND EXTENT OF Authority

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

VI. Amendments to the Constitution

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

A proposal to amend the Constitution may be initiated only by the major assembly of a Member Church eligible to vote, or by a Committee of the Conference, and The proposed amendment(s) shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary not later than two years before the meeting of the Conference. ~~He shall send it to the member churches immediately.~~

2. World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC – previously REC/WARC) (observer status)

For notice

2.1 *Mandate*

The Deputies are to send observers to the next World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) and make recommendations about the GKSA's participation at the WCRC, during the next General Synod.

Decision: Noted.

2.2 *Execution of the mandate*

2.2.1 The WCRC's General Assembly only meet every seven years and the next assembly will DV take place in 2017 in Erfurt, Germany.

2.2.2 The WCRC did, however, meet 4-7 February 2014, in Grand Rapids, which was described as: "The second consultation on communion".

2.2.3 Since prof A le R du Plooy and dr DG Breed were already in Grand Rapids for a CRCNA event at the time, they were also able to attend this event of the WCRC (as observers).

2.2.4 The following churches sent delegates to this event of the WCRC: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Ghana; Reformed Church of East Africa; Presbyterian Church of Nigeria; Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa; Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa; Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa; Uniting Church of Australia; Church of South India; Evangelical Reformed Church (Germany); Reformed Church in Hungary; Protestant Church in the Netherlands; National Presbyterian Church of Mexico; Presbyterian Church in Canada; United Church of Canada; Christian Reformed Church in North America; Evangelical Presbyterian Church; Reformed Church in America; Presbyterian Church (USA); and United Church of Christ.

2.2.5 Some of the issues addressed during this event were the following: Communion as a gift and calling; The ethos of the Reformed Communion; No Communion without Justice, no Justice without Communion; Communion and Unity: "Conflicting Interests?"; How do we live out our calling as a communion in our different contexts?; and What are some of the current challenges to communion? The following topic was also discussed in groups: The Strategy and the Vision of the Communion.

2.2.6 The proceedings can be summarised as follows:

2.2.6.1 It is clear that the WCRC – a merger of the WARC and the REC in 2010 into the WCRC – is now at the stage where a concerted effort is being made to practically grow and develop into an ecumenical community (communion) of churches.

2.2.6.2 Delegates had wide ranging stances on the confessions, for example in terms of its importance, authority and function. The member churches of the WCRC did, however, seem to agree on the ethos of the body.

2.2.6.3 The goal and scope of the Agenda was the endeavour to build unity and community, to improve participation and support of churches that are part of the WCRC. Differences did, however, not receive adequate attention and debatable stances were not satisfactorily resolved.

Yet, there was ample opportunity for in-depth discussions in smaller groups. As observers at the event, the GKSA delegates were able to contribute, from a Reformed perspective, in these smaller groups.

Decision: Points 2.2.1 to 2.2.6.3 noted.

For decision making

2.3 Recommendation

The Deputies are to send observers to the WCRC in 2017 and make recommendations during the next General Synod about the GKSA's participation in the WCRC.

Decision: Approved.

3. World Reformed Fellowship (WRF) (application for membership submitted in 2006)

Dr PJ Buys (s) and prof IW Ferreira.

For notice

3.1 Instructions

- 3.1.1 The GKSA is to remain a member of the WRF and send, at own cost, at least two delegates to the next international meeting in 2015 that will be held in São Paulo and hosted by the IPB and Mackenzie University.
- 3.1.2 The GKSA is to create a link to the WRF website on the GKSA website.
- 3.1.3 The Deputies are to keep the GKSA abreast of WRF activities.
- 3.1.4 The Deputies are to explore the possibility of establishing ecumenical ties with various Reformed and Reformed Presbyterian member churches of the WRF.
- 3.1.5 In regard to the proposed "Statement of Faith" of the WRF, the Synod have decided as follows:
 - 3.1.5.1 This "Statement of Faith" of the WRF is duly noted.
 - 3.1.5.2 Note is to be taken of the intention of the document, as formulated by its authors: "There are two important points to be made as we offer this Statement of Faith to the Church. First, the Statement of Faith is not intended to replace the confessional statements of the denominations which are in membership of the WRF. This is an additional Statement, which may be of use to individuals and churches as they reflect on the nature of Reformed Theology and its application to the theological and moral issues which confront the church in the 21st century. Second, affirmation of the Statement is not intended as a requirement for membership in the WRF. The next General Assembly of the WRF may decide to add it to the current list of confessional statements, one of which intending members must affirm but that is a matter for the General Assembly".
 - 3.1.5.3 Note is to be taken that there is still opportunity for input, as indicated dr PJ Buys (one of the compilers of the Statement of Faith), since the document will only be finalised at the next General Assembly of the WRF in 2015.
 - 3.1.5.4 In light of 2.3 above, a yet to be nominated Deputy is to be instructed to draw up an in-depth commentary for submission at the WRF's general assembly in 2015.
 - 3.1.5.5 The above Deputy is to be instructed to make exploratory enquiries with churches with which the GKSA has ecumenical unity about the need for a contemporary confession.

- (Motivation re 3.3.5.5: In the Statement of Faith the need is expressed for “a confessional statement to address the issues the church is facing today”. Similar calls for and interest in a contemporary confession have come from other discussions (like the Inter Church Council). These exploratory enquiries would serve to provide greater clarity on the matter, from churches with which the GKSA has established ties.)

Decision: Points 3.1.1 to 3.1.5.5 noted.

3.2 *Execution of the mandate*

- 3.2.1 The Deputies, led by prof SP van der Walt, studied the confession statement and suggested one or two amendments.
- 3.2.2 The Deputies requested the Administrative Bureau to create a link to the World Reformed Fellowship website (www.wrfnet.org) that will regularly feature reports and articles of import to the international Reformed community.
- 3.2.3 The Administrative Bureau was also requested to donate an amount of R10 000 (Ten Thousand Rand) to the WRF, as decided by the Synod.
- 3.2.4 WRF activities were introduced by means of adverts on RSG and Radio Pretoria; in *Die Kerkblad* and other Christian journals; and via e-mail adverts about a major missionary and practical theological conference. The conference—presented in cooperation with the Faculty of Theology of the NWU in Potchefstroom – drew approximately 200 people. The WRF also presented two major consultations on theological training and a consultation on missionary work in Muslim areas, to professors of the NWU. As a result of the conference, channels of cooperation between Reformed theological schools in the USA and Germany and the Faculty of Theology of the NWU were established for collective study of the different facets of Islam. NWU obtained the services of dr Rick Oaks, a post-doctoral research fellow, to provide input on this initiative.

Decision: Points 3.2.1 to 3.2.4 noted.

For decision making

3.3 *Recommendations*

- 3.3.1 The GKSA is to remain a member of the WRF and send delegates to the next international meeting in 2015, to be held in Sao Paulo and hosted by the IPB and Mackenzie University.
- 3.3.2 The Deputies are to introduce the activities of the WRF to the members of the GKSA.
- 3.3.3 The GKSA is to make a R15 000 (Fifteen Thousand Rand) donation to the WRF.

Decision: Points 3.3.1 to 3.3.3 approved.

4. African Evangelical Alliance (AEA) and The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA) (observers)

Dr PJ Buys (s), prof IW Ferreira and rev ASA de Bruyn.

For notice

4.1 *Mandate*

The Deputies are to stay in contact with these bodies.

Decision: Noted.

4.2 *Execution of the mandate*

A World Evangelisation Network of South Africa (WENSA) meeting was attended and note taken of the great social need and poverty in South Africa.

Decision: Noted.

For decision making

4.3 *Recommendation*

The Deputies are to stay in contact with these bodies.

Decision: Approved.

5. Theological Education in Africa (TEA)

Dr PJ Buys (s), prof IW Ferreira, rev CB Swanepoel.

For notice

5.1 *Mandate*

5.1.1 The Deputies are to follow up on contacts made at the conference.

5.1.2 Special attention is to be given to how missionary cooperation with churches in Africa (and the rest of the world) might be practically structured.

Decision: Points 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 noted.

5.2 *Execution of the mandate*

5.2.1 Four NWU professors and lecturers presented lectures, on various aspects of God-centred services and the threat of prosperity religion, at the conference on theological education in Africa in Uganda. Approximately 350 people from Malawi, Ruanda, Tanzania, the DRC, Ethiopia, Burundi, South Sudan, South Africa and even from Egypt and Israel attended the conference.

As a result of the conference, a number of ministers from Kenya, Malawi, Uganda and Burundi registered at the NWU for masters and doctoral studies and the NWU is still receiving applications from potential post-graduate students.

5.2.2 The next conference will be held in 2015.

5.2.3 Contact was also made with Reformed Churches in the Great Lakes District and continued ecumenical contact is under discussion. Rev HPM van Rhyn and drs G van Wyk and PJ Buys also attended a Synod assembly of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Mbale, Uganda.

Decision: Points 5.2.1 to 5.2.3 noted.

For decision making

5.3 *Recommendation*

The Deputies are to send delegates to the TEA conference in Uganda in 2015.

Decision: Approved.