

Addendum Report

Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad

6 July 2024

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APPENDIX A: REPORT ON DECISIONS OF SYNOD DARLING DOWNS 2024 OF THE FRCA WHICH ARE RELEVANT TO THE FRCSA, WITH SUB-APPENDICES A.1 TO A.4

1 General

Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA) have submitted their main report to Synod Mamelodi during March 2024. Since then, further developments took place within a number of reformed churches in the Netherlands which are relevant to our formal and informal relationship with these churches and groupings. In addition, further thinking and reflection has taken place within the DRCA concerning recommendations to Synod Mamelodi on formal contact with reformed churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere. For a sound decision by Synod on this matter, the most recent information should be available. This is contained in the present Addendum Report in Section 2.

Synod Darling Downs of our sister-churches in Australia, the FRCA, was held from 17 to 26 June 2024. Our churches were represented at this Synod by Br G Hagg. He has compiled a report on the decisions of this Synod, of which several are relevant to our churches. His report is summarized in Section 3 of this Addendum Report and the full report is attached as Appendix A, with four sub-appendices. This provides an overview of the latest developments within our Australian sister-churches.

The organization of the Africa Regional Conference of the ICRC, to be hosted by the FRC Cape Town during October 2024, is in full swing. Progress with this conference is reported in Section 4 below.

The proposed comprehensive decisions to be taken by Synod concerning the work of the DRCA, together with their grounds, are formulated in Section 5.

This Addendum Report covers the period April to June 2024. If further significant developments take place in the Netherlands (which is unlikely due to their summer holiday period), these will be reported verbally by deputies at Synod.

2 Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

2.1 DGK and GKN

The DGK (“De Gereformeerde Kerken”) and the GKN (“Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland”) are two church federations who have separated from the RCNL, mainly over their “new hermeneutics”, as applied to “women in office”, modernizations in Church Order and liturgy and the re-unification of the RCNL and the NGK to form the Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken (NeGK).

After a number of years of functioning separately, the DGK and the GKN now have decided to unite. The synods of each of these churches have decided this already separately, while now a combined “extraordinary synod” is scheduled to take place on 5 October 2024. This will be a historic moment for these two church federations. It is also expected that, after these churches have merged, it will be more attractive for other reformed people to join.

It may also be a stimulus for other orthodox reformed churches and groupings in the Netherlands to seek unity between each other.

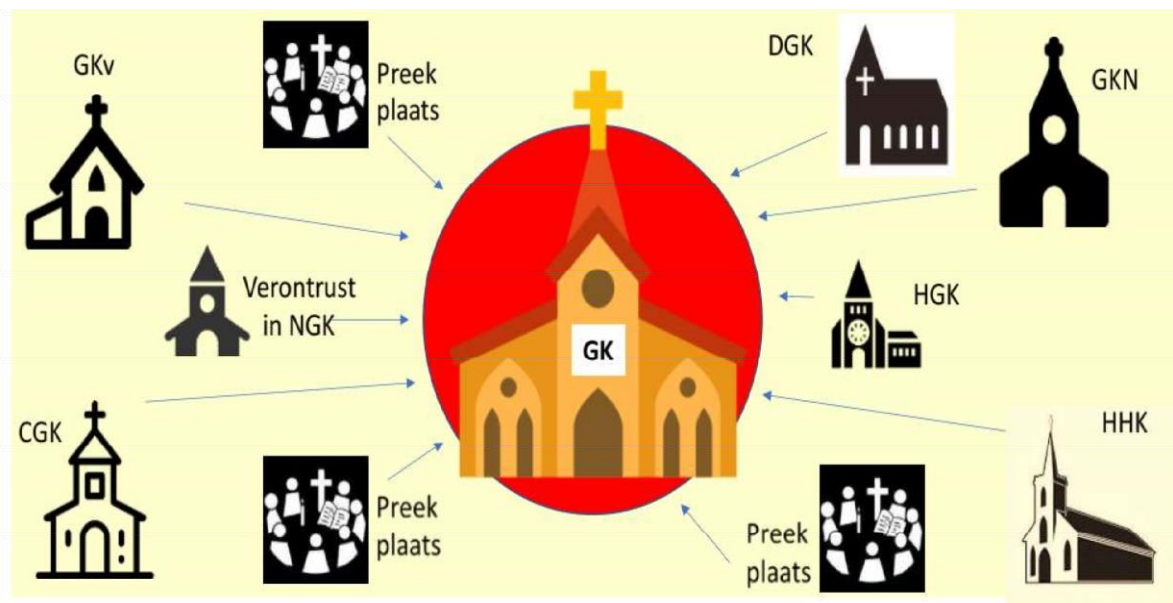
2.2 Independent RCNL churches

A correction to the DRCA main report is needed concerning the number of independent RCNL churches. A fourth church stayed independent after the unification of the RCNL with the NGK, namely the Hersteld Gereformeerde Kerk (HGK) of Bunschoten-Spakenburg. This church was established as an independent church in March 2020 with Rev. H.Sj. Wiersema as minister. The HGK Bunschoten-Spakenburg had indicated their wish to join the DGK/GKN after their unification. Now that the decision for unification has been made, the HGK Bunschoten-Spakenburg has joined the federation of DGK on 14 June 2024.

2.3 The “Core Group” and Regrouping

The “Kerngroep Bezinning” (Core Group) held another Information Meeting on 25 May 2024 in Urk. Dr M Klaassen of the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (HHK) discussed the report to the synod of the NeGK on homosexuality ‘Ruimte en richting’. This report advocates the acceptance of homosexual couples at the Lord’s Supper, as well as in the official church offices. This report is to be discussed at the upcoming NeGK synod in November 2024.

The second half of the meeting in Urk was devoted to the pursuit of Reformed Ecumenism on the basis of the Bible and Confession. The picture below, taken from the GKN journal *Weerklank* of Junie 2024, indicates what the Core Group has in mind, with various churches and groups joining into one united Reformed Church (GK), with wholehearted adherence to the authority of Scripture and the Reformed confessions. This idea was earlier advocated by Prof HJ Selderhuis of the CGK (“Meegaan of weerstaan? De Schrift, de tijd en het kerkverband”, 23 Sept. 2023).



The last sister-church of the former RCNL in Europe has ended its relationship with the NeGK. The “Evangelisch Reformierte Kirche Westminster Bekenntnisse” (ERKWB, in translation: Evangelical Reformed Church with the Westminster Confession) is a small federation of seven churches in the Alps Region of Europe. They have now ended their sister-church relationship with the NeGK on the grounds that the opening of the offices to women is against the teachings of Scripture. It is noteworthy that two of their ministers are coming from the NeGK, namely Rev P Drost (in Gratz) and Rev JB Wilmink (in Neuhofen). The NeGK has now no more of their earlier sister-churches in Europe left.

2.4 Christian Reformed Churches

The Christian Reformed Churches (CGK) in the Netherlands have held a Convent of churches in April 2024 and subsequently a Synod starting in June 2024 and probably lasting until April 2025. The outcome of the Convent was that a two third majority of the CGK churches opted for more freedom for local churches to decide independently on issues, if that would hold the church federation together.

One third of the churches is upset about this outcome, because it would mean that majority decisions of a synod could be invalidated and that a new way of reading the Bible would be officially condoned in their churches. This group of concerned churches in the CGK have indicated that they cannot stay in the federation if that would be confirmed by the present CGK synod. If this would happen, the pattern of Reformed churches in the Netherlands may change drastically.

2.5 Conclusions

There is presently a wide spectrum of orthodox reformed churches and groupings in the Netherlands (see the picture in Section 2.3). The situation concerning these churches and groupings is very fluid, as separations and mergers are happening regularly. We hope that this will not lead to further fragmentation, but rather, in line with the “Core Group”, will lead to a unification of all truly reformed believers in one church federation in the Netherlands.

Having been approached by a number of churches for closer ecclesiastical contact, e.g. the Kosin Presbyterian Church in Korea (KPCCK) and the GKN, and considering the workload of the DRCA and the limited resources of our small church federation, we concluded that a sister-church relationship according to our present rules would be quite demanding on time and manpower. Therefore, the DRCA initially considered proposing to synod a separate and less intense form of ecclesiastical relationship (in line with what the FRCA now has decided at their Synod Darling Downs 2024 – see Section 3 below and Appendices A and A.1).

However, DRCA decided that this additional, less intensive form of ecclesiastical contact is not needed if we intensify our contacts with co-member churches of the ICRC. Both the KPCCK and the GKN are ICRC member churches. It would, therefore, be better for us to intensify our relationship with both of these churches and may be other churches in Africa

than to enter into time and manpower consuming sister-church relationships. If synod agrees with this approach, DRCA will formulate a proposal for the next synod to substantiate this and to formulate the relevant rules.

3 Synod Darling Downs 2024 of the FRCA

Br Gerard Hagg was the delegate of the FRCSA to Synod Darling Downs of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA), which took place from 23 to 26 June 2024. The DRCA was not able to send one of their own deputies due to various reasons and although Br Hagg is not a member of the DRCA, he has a fair knowledge of the FRCA and was briefed before his departure on issues relevant to the FRCSA. Synod Darling Downs had to take an important decision on their relationship with the ICRC, of which most of their sister-churches are a member. In 1996, the FRCA had withdrawn their membership of the ICRC, due to a number of internal difficulties and considerations. During the past 28 years, the FRCA has been debating membership with more or less intensity, but now they have decided to send observers to the next two ICRC General Meetings (the first one in 2026 in Korea, organised by their sister-church, the KPCK). We welcome this decision and look forward to working together with our sister-church in Australia within the ICRC structures.

The full report of Br Hagg is attached as Appendix A. More detail on criteria for inter-church relations, pastoral training for theological students and guidelines for a vicariate of ministers can be found in sub-appendices A.1, A.2 and A.3. Br Hagg's greetings message to Synod, on behalf of our churches, is attached as Appendix A.4.

4 The Africa Regional Conference of the ICRC

The organisation of the Africa Regional Conference of the ICRC, to be held in Bellville from 23 to 27 October 2024, is making good progress, with a competent local organizing committee. The FRC in Bellville will be the host church and will offer accommodation, meals and local transport. It is expected that, besides members of the FRCSA, about 35 persons will attend the Conference. These delegates come from Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Central Africa, South Africa and North America. The latter are churches that undertake mission work in Africa. Funding from a number of sources is made available for international travel.

A programme is being drawn up, with ample time for the delegates to get to know each other and discuss matters of common interest. Each church that is represented will have the opportunity to provide an overview of their church federation and activities. A number of speakers have been invited to address common issues, while the Working Groups of the ICRC will also report on progress with their work. The Africa Regional Conference of the ICRC is an excellent opportunity to strengthen our bond and build relationships with the ICRC member churches on the African Continent.

5 Mandate and Instructions for the DRCA

The DRCA recommends to Synod the following.

5.1 GENERAL

Synod decides:

1. To discharge the present Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad (DRCA) and to appoint a new DRCA committee for the period until the next Synod.
2. To appoint the following brothers and sister as DRCA committee for the 2024 – 2027 period: Rev J Bruintjes, Sr D van den Linden, Br JF Raimond and Br G Klapwijk (as convener), as well as Rev P Kgatle and Rev PG Boon (both for the ICRC), all as continuing members of the previous deputies, except for Br Klapwijk and Sr van der Linden.
3. To instruct the DRCA to submit an interim progress report for information and discussion during an Indaba to be held more or less halfway between Synod 2024 and the next Synod.
4. To instruct the DRCA to report to the next Synod and formulate recommendations according to Art 10 and Art 11 of the Synod Rules.

Grounds:

1. Continuity within the DRCA is important to maintain active sister-church relationships and to stay aware of each other's ecclesiastical developments.
2. The DRCA activities require a profound interest in church matters and good communication and reporting skills.
3. The activities of the ICRC become increasingly prominent in our international ecclesiastical relationships. Many of its activities are related to mission work. Therefore, the task to stay actively involved in the ICRC requires a strong missionary representation in the DRCA.

5.2 LIAISON

Synod decides:

To instruct the DRCA:

1. To provide the church councils with appropriate information regarding churches abroad.
2. To facilitate contacts of other FRCSA deputies with sister churches when needed.
3. To coordinate contacts and requests of the FRCSA churches with churches abroad.

Grounds:

1. The work of the DRCA is only useful for the churches (who carry the costs) if regular information and feedback is given to the churches. There is an ongoing need for liaising and sharing of information, while the DRCA continuously gather information regarding churches abroad.
2. Other deputies and churches should keep the deputies informed where they receive support from and have formal agreements with foreign churches. Information on this matter should also be shared at Indabas.
3. Coordination of the various contacts with our sister churches is beneficial to all.

5.3 AUSTRALIA

Synod decides:

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 at Mundijong, WA, in 2027 and to instruct the delegate to convey our greetings, to give a presentation on the FRCSA if requested, and to promote co-operation.
3. To instruct the DRCA to stimulate and support the FRCA in forging closer contact with the ICRC.
4. To instruct DRCA to provide regular feedback to the churches on developments within the FRCA.

Grounds

1. The FRCA give evidence of continued faithfulness to the Word of God, the Reformed Confessions and the Church Order.
2. Personal contacts are an effective means of developing, maintaining and expanding good sister church relations.
3. Both the FRCA and the FRCSA are small church federations with a similar background and sharing similar challenges. By praying for each other, maintaining good contacts and learning from each other, both federations will be better equipped to fulfil their God-given task to remain faithful churches of Christ in a secular world.
4. Synod Darling Downs 2024 of the FRCA has decided to send observers to the next two General Meetings of the ICRC to get a better knowledge about the reformed character of the ICRC. Sister churches of the FRCA which are ICRC members, like the FRCSA, should support them when requested and where possible.

Synod decides:

To instruct the DRCA to remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in the Australasia - Asia region, mainly via the FRCA and the ICRC.

Ground:

According to the policy adopted by Synod Bethal 2000, the FRCSA should focus on our own region. It is better to leave more intensive contacts related to the Reformed churches in the Australasia and Asia region to the FRCA, while the activities of the ICRC offer opportunities for direct contacts.

5.4 CANADA

Synod decides:

1. To continue the sister-church relationship with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC), according to the adopted rules.
2. To authorise deputies to send a delegate to Synod Aldergrove in 2025 and to instruct the delegate to convey our greetings, to give a presentation on the FRCSA if requested, and to promote co-operation.
3. To instruct DRCA to provide regular feedback to the churches on developments within 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, maintaining and expanding good sister-church relations.
3. Both the CanRC and the FRCSA are church federations with a similar background and share similar challenges. By maintaining good contacts and 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 benefited greatly from CRTS as a centre for theological training.

Synod decides:

To instruct the DRCA to remain informed about ecclesiastical developments in North America, mainly via the CanRC and the ICRC.

Ground:

According to the policy adopted by Synod Bethal 2000, the FRCSA should focus on our own region. It is better to leave more intensive contacts related to Reformed churches in North America to the CanRC, while the activities of the ICRC offer opportunities for direct contacts.

5.5 THE NETHERLANDS**Synod decides:**

To instruct the DRCA:

1. To maintain contact with De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) and specifically to monitor their progress with unification, but not to progress towards a sister-church relationship with these (still separate) church federations.
2. To advise consistories, in cases where members from these federations come to South Africa, to allow them as members or guests at the Lord's Supper, should they make such a request.
3. To inform DGK and the GKN in writing regarding these decisions concerning them.
4. To maintain contact with the "Kerngroep Bezinning" and specifically to stimulate them with progress towards unification with other reformed believers in the Netherlands.
5. To monitor developments in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands, especially related to church unity.
6. To coordinate with deputies from the CanRC and the FRCA regarding developments within and between the DGK, the GKN, the CGK and other reformed groups in the Netherlands.

Grounds:

1. Members of DGK and the GKN were in a sister-church relation with us before and did leave the RCNL because they wished to remain Reformed. This urges us to pursue strong ecclesiastical contact.

2. The GKN and the DGK have scheduled a “unification synod” on 5 October 2024. This is a positive development, since a unified federation would make them more attractive to other reformed believers and churches.
3. The efforts of the “Kerngroep Bezining” and independent reformed churches, in bringing together those who hold to the same reformed confessional basis, with the purpose of ecclesiastical unity, is worthy of the support of our churches.
4. Our sister churches (the CanRC and the FRCA) are in a similar position with regard to developments in the Netherlands and therefore we should aim for a joined approach.

5.6 ICRC

Synod decides:

To instruct the DRCA:

1. To continue active membership of the ICRC and participate in their Working Groups, where relevant to our churches.
2. To use the upcoming Africa Regional Conference of the ICRC in Bellville, from 23 to 27 October 2024, to become more familiar with Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Africa and to stimulate future contacts.
3. To arrange for the travel costs of two delegates from Gauteng to attend the Regional Conference in Bellville.
4. To maintain contact 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.
5. To remain in contact with the ICRC member churches concerning future African regional conferences.
6. To coordinate the efforts of the FRCSA and RCSA concerning regional ICRC activities.
7. To raise the ICRC profile within the FRCSA by providing regular feedback to the churches on ICRC activities and articles published in *Lux Mundi*, e.g. through a *DRCA Newsletter* or through *Kompas*.
8. To send two delegates to the next international ICRC General Meeting, scheduled for 2026 in South Korea, yet only budget for one.

Grounds:

1. The ICRC is an organization which adheres to and promotes Reformed principles.
2. The FRCSA have a responsibility to promote the proclamation of the Gospel wherever reasonably possible.
3. The ICRC provides a platform to maintain contacts with Reformed churches all over the world and to stimulate Reformed theological thinking and practice.
4. Contacts with churches in Africa should mainly be made through the ICRC or sister churches. This is in line with the policy adopted by Synod Bethal 2000, for the FRCSA to focus on our own region.
5. The ICRC provides an opportunities to advance our mission activities in promoting the proclamation of the Gospel on our African continent, e.g. through participation in working groups and conferences. Missionaries can benefit significantly from attending the ICRC regional conferences.

6. African member churches of the ICRC expressed a need for help to remain Reformed and to proclaim the Gospel in their home countries, as well as a need for leadership training in newly formed congregations.
7. The FRCSA should support regional ICRC conferences as a means of mutual encouragement and towards the strengthening of ICRC member churches.
8. The FRCSA and the RCSA, as African church federations, are in a better position to provide certain forms of support to those churches than churches from other continents.
9. The upcoming ICRC conference in South Korea offers an opportunity for the FRCSA for contact with other member churches. Such ecclesiastical contacts form a less intensive relationship than a sister-church relationship and will, therefore, be less demanding on the DRCA.

Compiled with inputs from the DRCA members and Br G Hagg and on their behalf by J Moes, convener / secretary.

APPENDIX A

**REPORT ON DECISIONS OF SYNOD DARLING DOWNS 2024 OF THE FRCA
WHICH ARE RELEVANT TO THE FRCSA**

COMPILED BY BR GERARD HAGG

June 2024

Introduction

Synod Darling Downs 2024 of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) took place from 17 to 26 July 2024. Extensive Deputies Reports and the Acts of the Synod are available on <https://frca.org.au/government/synod/2024synod/>.

Synod was attended by delegates from their sister churches: the Canadian Reformed Churches, First Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore, Free Reformed Churches of South Africa, Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea, and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. In addition, representatives from two churches with whom the FRCA have official contact, the GGRC (Indonesia) and United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA), attended.

Synod Procedures

The synod was characterized by brotherly love and patience among delegates and during in-depth discussions of each deputy report. The reports, which had been distributed a few months before synod, had been well-studied by all delegates, which led to thorough discussions. After a deputy report was tabled in plenary session, the recommendations and grounds were discussed, after which the synod committee that was appointed for that task, integrated the results of the discussions into a report with draft synod decisions together with grounds. This report was then discussed again in plenary, and the comments, views and arguments taken back to the committee for amending their report. Ultimately the committee report consisting of decisions and mandates for the new deputies (with grounds) was voted on per item, amended where necessary and finally adopted after voting.

Matters discussed and decisions taken

This report will deal only with matters that impact directly or indirectly on the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa. Readers are encouraged to consult the press release and acts of synod on the FRCA website.

1. *Interchurch Relations and contact with churches*
 - a. Synod provisionally adopted Criteria for Church Relations that refer to the following criteria: *faithfulness* of the other church, *meaningfulness* of the relationship and *manageability* of the relationship. Criteria are attached as Addendum A.1 to this report. Deputies will apply and test these Criteria over the next three years and final Criteria will be submitted to Synod Mundijong 2027.
 - b. Synod adopted the concept of *Ecclesiastical Relations*, in addition to *Sister Church Relations*, for churches that were deemed true and faithful, but with whom the FRCA could not enter into a sister-church relation (in this case, the relationship would be meaningful but not manageable).

- c. Synod also adopted a proposal of deputies that relationships could be established with churches in the same geographical region as that of churches with which FRCA already had ecclesiastical relations, unless the new church is unwilling or shows no evidence of seeking unity with the other church.
- d. With regard to De Gereformeerde Kerken (DGK) and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN), synod decided to continue contact with the two federations and was looking forward to their planned unification DV during October 2024. FRCA are looking forward to conclude sister-church relations with the new federation in the near future.
- e. Synod decided to maintain contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and mandated deputies to advise synod 2027 on a subsequent relationship.
- f. The URNCA has decided to enter into Phase 1 of Interchurch relations with the FRCA. Phase 1 focuses on studying matters of mutual concern and exchange of information. FRCA deputies were mandated to use a similar approach towards the URCNA.
- g. Synod decided to maintain sister church relations with the **FRCSA**. Synod also acknowledged the request of the FRCSA to be more flexible in the use of the financial support given by the FRCA, to enable them to direct this to the support of mission and not only for theological training.

Synod mandated deputies to:

- i. coordinate responses to requests for support from FRCSA deputies regarding needs in areas such as mission, theological training or needy churches; the task of the deputies is not to get involved in this work but only to inform the FRCA of the request and coordinate the response of the churches to this request. This support is a voluntary contribution from the churches, not an assessment or a levy.
- ii. involve the local congregations of the FRCA;
- iii. keep the members of the FRCA informed regarding the FRCSA churches and their activities, both directly to consistories as well as to the broader membership via *Una Sancta*.

2. Membership of the ICRC.

- a. Although being a founding member of the ICRC, the FRCA ended its membership in 1996, based on the principle that the FRCA could only remain a member if it had ecclesiastical relations with all its members. This decision was based on the interpretation of Belgian Confession Art 29 that it did not allow church unity unless it was evident that both churches were true and faithful. The matter of rejoining is highly sensitive in the FRCA congregations, particularly around the Reformed Church of Australia, which is a member of the ICRC. However, FRCA could not establish sister-church relations with the RCA as the latter had female deacons.
- b. After intensive discussions, synod decided to mandate deputies to:

- i. select two deputies, preferably one elder and one minister, to attend the next two ICRC plenary conferences as observers in 2026 and 2030;
- ii. investigate with member churches of the ICRC what is meant by expressing and promoting “the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ” (ICRC Constitution, Purpose 1);
- iii. evaluate whether the ICRC member churches’ understanding of the phrase “unity of faith” conflicts with Scripture, and can rightly be applied to all ICRC member churches, giving particular attention to those in our geographic area;
- iv. provide examples, if possible, of influence and direction given by the ICRC for reformed churches worldwide;
- v. investigate the financial and workload requirements of ICRC membership and recommend whether membership is good stewardship of resources; and
- vi. make a recommendation to the relevant FRCA synod about membership after the next two ICRC plenary conferences.

3. *Training for the ministry*

- a. FRCA has been richly blessed by the provision of theological training at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminar (CRTS) of our Canadian sister churches. The churches are looking forward towards having its own Australian Reformed Theological Seminary (ARTS), if feasible.
- b. Deputies were mandated to develop an ARTS as a long-term strategic plan (2040). The ARTS could offer training opportunities to churches in the Asia-Pacific region, with which FRCA has ecclesiastical relations.
- c. The ARTS could be an affiliate of the CRTS, or accredited under the Australian College of Theology, or an independently accredited seminary. It was acknowledged that such a seminary would most likely become feasible as soon as CRTS had 50+ students and at least 8 (potential) professors.
- d. Synod modified its rules around the funding of the CRTS Pastoral Training Programme and adopted new Guidelines for the proposed vicariate (a one-year internship for students who have completed their CRTS studies). A summary of the rules and guidelines is provided in Addendum A.2 and A.3 to this report.

Addendum A.1

Criteria for Interchurch Relations

Decision of Synod Darling Downs 2024

In our contact with another church, each of the three following criteria must be met to determine whether or not to proceed to a sister church relationship:

- a) **Faithful.** The church must be a true church faithful to Scriptures and bearing the marks of the church (BC Art 29):

“The true church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practises the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head.”

This criterion is mandatory for all church relationships.

- b) **Meaningful.** A church relationship must have a purpose and substance to it. The following identifies such purposes:
- i. **Catholic.** The first purpose is, of course, to maintain the unity of faith and recognise the catholicity of the church. It is an expression of putting into practice Christ’s high priestly prayer of John 17, Eph 4:4 and Art 27 BC.
 - ii. **Historical.** Historical church relations involve those that we have recognised from across the world with whom we share a common history or with whom we have had relations over a considerably long period of time. We have come to know these brothers and sisters and share in the struggle of faith to live before the Lord, show thankfulness for the grace and unity in Christ, and together fight the secularity in the world around us. As we have grown over many years and decades in getting to know and interact with our historic sister churches, we build up a responsibility and obligation to these brothers and sisters in mutual assistance in the struggle of faith. These are not contacts that are broken off lightly or easily.
 - iii. **Need for mutual assistance.** There may be requests for assistance from other churches or we may require assistance from other churches. These are opportunities that need to be examined to decide if a church relationship provides an appropriate foundation to respond to and assist in such requests. Kamphuis (p. 204) comments that churches need to bear each other’s burdens and assist each other, not just when asked to help.
 - iv. **Ability to communicate.** Being able to communicate, and that on a regular basis, is important to be engage with each other and be mutually active in

maintaining the rules for relations. Such interaction should preferably be face to face and include visits, meetings, sharing information with each other and informing our own churches. Are we able to maintain a reasonable level of communication? If there are differences in language and culture, is it possible to translate written material and have effective communication in meetings to engage and understand each other?

- v. Level of interaction. What is the current level of interaction of our churches and members with these churches? Is there regular contact between individual churches in either bond? Are there activities happening between the churches at the local level? Are there interactions among individual members including visiting, attending worship services, and sharing in common struggles and challenges of faith? Even if only one or a few local churches or a few individuals are engaged, this small level of interaction may be a reason to have a church relationship that is maintained by the FRCA bond.
 - vi. Cooperation in mission. There may be churches with whom we may come into contact via mission work, conduct mission work in regions near our own mission fields, or are the result of mission work that we have been involved with in the past. Church relations with them may be beneficial in order to work together with them on the mission fields and/or help each other for mutual encouragement and exhortation.
 - vii. Church polity. Although different churches have different histories that have led to differences in church polity and practice, the need to mutually struggle to maintain our reformed heritage and build on how the Lord has guided and led His church through church history is important. We need to stand on Scripture and what our church fathers have fought for to maintain a true and faithful church of Christ. Differences in church policy such as reformed and Presbyterian, as long as they are based on the foundation of Scripture and reformed confessions, need not be an obstacle to unity. There may need to be patience and encouragement to acknowledge that there are differences in history and practice, and we need to learn from each other and grow. With churches of similar polity and worship to our own, our relationship with them may be deeper and more meaningful as a result.
 - viii. Worldwide. It is worthwhile to have sister churches in various regions e.g. Europe, Asia, Africa, North and South America, to better understand the needs of each part of the world, support missions and have a faithful church through whom aid can be sent in the event of a crisis. This criterion would be particularly used for churches in regions where we have no existing church relationships.
- c) **Manageable**. When moving forward in a church relation, we must be able to manage the relationship and do justice to the rules for maintaining the relationship. This may involve the following aspects:

- i. Geographical proximity. It is important to maintain a good and appropriate level of contact in a church relationship and this involves interaction and visits on a regular basis. Although there are very good virtual and online means for communicating, there is no substitute or better interaction than through direct face to face communication. Churches closer together geographically or in the same country are better able to manage contacts and communications than churches more distant or dispersed geographically. For example, note that our FRCA bond of churches is geographically located in one country, Australia, albeit some 1000s of kilometres apart from west to east. As another example, note how the contact of FRCA with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Tasmania lies essentially with the churches in Tasmania and not via the other churches located elsewhere in Australia. Our focus should start locally in our own country, before going further abroad in the Asia/Pacific region, and then in the rest of the world.
- ii. Language and culture. Where there are differences in language and/or culture, there may be much work required in translating materials and speeches or researching history and culture to understand, be informed and build a better appreciation and awareness of each other within a church relationship. Are we able to put in sufficient time and effort with appropriate tools and persons to manage this relation?
- iii. Ability to resource. Are we able, as a relatively small bond of churches, able to resource the time and effort needed to maintain our church relationships and even increase the number of church relations? We must be mindful that our ministers and elders need to, in the first place, spend sufficient time and energy in their own congregations and in our own bond of churches. Many relations mean many trips, visits, meetings, readings and writings for which we must ensure we have sufficient attention, time and energy in order to do justice to our relationship according to the rules.

Grounds

1. Well-developed and articulated criteria are important for the process of seeking and establishing a sister church relationship.
2. The three categories encapsulate all of the various criteria identified by the churches or used in past synods.
3. Maintaining the terminology “sister church” rather than “ecclesiastical fellowship” is consistent with our church order (CO Art 46).
4. When BC Art 29 confesses that a true church governs itself according to the pure Word of God, this includes the doctrines confessed in BC Art 27-32.

Addendum A.2

Updated rules for CRTS Pastoral Training Programme for FRCA students

Guidelines for Pastoral Training of Theological Student of the FRCA

1. Compensation for students in the Pastoral Training Program
 - a) Deputies Training for the Ministry (Deputies) will liaise with the Canadian Pastoral Training Program (PTP) Funding Committee in Guelph (appointed to oversee payment of students in Canada in the PTP) to determine the rate of pay for students undertaking the PTP. The students taking the PTP in Australia will be reimbursed at a level to match the Canadian churches' level of support. Their Canadian Committee decided to pay the student interns the rate of pay that the Government of Canada would pay a student employed in a Masters level program the previous year. The Deputies will pay each of the Churches employing a student the equivalent amount (taking into account the foreign exchange rate) in a manner ensuring that the student can be paid on time. The deputies will assess the churches and pay the funds out of the Needy Student Fund and give an accounting of this work to synod.
 - b) To encourage participation of the Churches in Australia in the Pastoral Training Program, the travel expenses to and from Australia will be paid by the Australian Churches. This amount would also be sent to the local hosting church.
 - c) Deputies Training for the Ministry will pay for the travel costs for the student and his family. In exceptional circumstances the Deputies will also consider assisting a church employing a student to pay for a student's housing and vehicle costs.
 - d) In the situation where a student participates in a PTP internship with an experienced minister, the Deputies will fund the PTP for only a ten week period. Students should be able to complete the requirements of the mandatory 10-week Pastoral Training Program during that period of time. The Church employing the student may, at its discretion, enter into an agreement with the student to employ him for a period longer than 10 weeks but would then itself face payment of the additional costs. In cases where a student participates in a four week mission internship Deputies will only pay the travel costs for a student and his family who are participating in a four week mission internship to one of our mission fields.
2. Assessment

Deputies Training for the Ministry will consider requests and provide funding for churches participating in the PTP in a timely manner.
3. Foreign Students

It remains the responsibility of the student to apply for the necessary work permit where applicable.

4. Employment and taxes

Churches employing students will be responsible to determine the issues regarding employment of students and payroll deductions for taxes, unemployment insurance, etc.

Addendum A.3

FRCA Guidelines for vicariate

The vicariate is considered a useful (albeit voluntary) part of our theological training. At this time, our students study at the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). Upon completion of the Master of Divinity program at CRTS, students originating from the FRCA will be offered the opportunity to further their training with a vicariate. All correspondence concerning the vicariate shall in the first place be addressed to the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the FRCA (DTM).

Definitions

Vicar – a man who has completed his seminary training, is not yet ordained, and who is taken on by a church for a period of further practical ministry training and development.

Vicariate – a supervised program of practical ministry training and development.

A. Form of Subscription

Vicars are required to sign the Form of Subscription prior to the commencement of their duties. This shall be done at the consistory of the church providing the vicariate training.

B. Duration of Vicariate

The vicariate training shall take place over a period of up to twelve months.

C. Deputies

The DTM shall have the right to approach a church which they believe could provide suitable vicariate training.

D. Guidelines for Vicariate Training

1. Principles Regarding Vicariates
 - a. Each year, the DTM shall offer fourth year students originating from the FRCA the opportunity to return to Australia to receive the vicariate training. All the churches shall then be informed of potential candidates for vicariates. The churches shall be invited to submit applications.
 - b. The purpose of a vicariate is to provide training for a vicar. Except in exceptional circumstances vicars should not be placed in vacant congregations or in isolated settings where they cannot be properly supervised and trained.

- c. A vicariate can be an important part of preparation for the ministry. A local church may benefit greatly from a vicar's work, but this should be seen as a 'fringe benefit' to the vicariate; the main purpose is to train the vicar.
- d. This training ought to be provided by experienced and able ministers. Some ministers have more experience and/or ability to train a vicar than others. The DTM ought to consider the suitability of the supervising minister in the placement of vicars and the DTM may approach churches and ministers with a request to take a vicar. Supervising ministers ought to be aware that training a vicar will take a significant amount of time; time saved in a reduced preaching load will need to be spent in evaluating the vicar's sermons and supervising other areas of his ministry.
- e. A vicar will need adequate time to prepare for his candidacy (preparatory) exam.

Consistories should discuss this with the vicar so that he has time during his vicariate and as his exam approaches. The exam should ordinarily take place towards the end of the vicariate period.

- f. The Supervising Minister
 - 1) The minister may expect to spend between two to four hours per week with the vicar, excluding consistory meetings, joint visits, etc. This time would be spent in sermon evaluation, planning and reporting on pastoral visitation, advice and guidance on the work of the ministry, e.g., devotions and prayer, church polity and the functioning of the consistory and classis, time management, general organisation, the spiritual growth and development of the vicar, etc.
 - 2) Vicars need to be encouraged in a regular program of reading and study. The supervising minister and vicar should agree on a program, perhaps in an area of interest or weakness.
 - 3) The vicar's work should be closely supervised, especially in the early part of the vicariate. As time goes on, he should be given increasing freedom to work on his own and be given more responsibility in certain areas.
- g. The Supervising Consistory
 - 1) It may be helpful to have the vicar meet regularly (perhaps once a month) with an experienced and able elder who can give him some advice and input.

- 2) The consistory should also evaluate the vicar's sermons and development in the ministry. Both the minister and the consistory should make a careful evaluation of the vicar's progress. Honest advice, encouragement, and criticism ought to be given in a sensitive manner. Time should be set aside for this at a consistory meeting not less than once every three months.
- 3) The consistory should take account of helpful feedback from the congregation and may seek this using sermon evaluation forms.

2. Elements of Vicariate Training

- a. Preaching. This is obviously a crucial area of his training and much time needs to be spent here. A vicar will be expected to preach once per Sunday through his vicariate and twice per Sunday towards the end of it. The supervising minister should ensure that he has experience in preaching Catechism sermons, as well as sermons based on a single Bible text. Vicars may find it helpful to follow the discipline of preaching through a book of the Bible. It would be good experience for the vicar to preach in some of the other churches of the classical region and to have experience at preaching on special occasions where possible, e.g. a funeral, wedding, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Sermons and their supporting exegesis are to be closely evaluated primarily by the minister, but also by the consistory, with input from members of the congregation via evaluation forms. Vicars may find it helpful to have a sermon workshop with other ministers (and vicars) of the classical region.

Sermon content is to be evaluated on the basis of the following:

- Is the exegesis accurate?
- Is the sermon well-structured and easy to follow for listeners?
- Is the theme drawn from the text and developed in a coherent and logical manner?
- Is the context (including the place of the passage in redemptive history) taken into account?
- Does the sermon preach Jesus Christ and the good news of salvation in him?
- Is the sermon doctrinally sound?
- Is the application in the sermon drawn from the text?

The delivery of the sermon is to be evaluated for evidence of gifts of communication and contribution to edifying worship.

b. Pastoral Work

- 1) Visitation with the minister: In the early part of the vicariate a vicar will find it helpful to visit members of the congregation with the minister. As time goes on, however, the vicar will be able to visit on his own.
- 2) Visitation with elders: A vicar will gain much experience by participating in home visits with the elders, especially if he can visit with a number of elders and be exposed to various styles and approaches.
- 3) Counselling: Training and practice at counselling will be valuable for a vicar. Much can be learned from watching and listening to an experienced minister helping people through their problems and struggles (if a congregational member is agreeable to the vicar listening in). Depending on their experience and maturity, vicars may be asked to counsel members on their own.

c. Consistory and Classis

Vicars are expected to attend all consistory and classis meetings. They should be prepared to take assigned responsibilities as deemed helpful (chairman, clerk, etc.). It would also be profitable for vicars to attend deacons meetings.

3. Wife and Family

Where a vicar is married it would be helpful for the vicar and his wife to meet with the supervising minister and his wife on a regular basis for encouragement, fellowship, and advice. It would also be helpful for the vicar's wife to meet with the wives of elders (Titus 2:3-5). She should be encouraged to take an active part in the life of the congregation, as family responsibilities permit.

4. Other Activities

- a. Catechism: Part of the training will involve teaching at least one weekly catechism class; this is to be evaluated by the minister or the elder supervising the catechism classes.
- b. Bible studies: Bible study groups are an important part of congregational life and the vicar ought to attend these groups on a regular basis and take a turn at leading them.
- c. Evangelism: The vicar will find it helpful to learn from the insights of the supervising minister regarding the work of evangelism and to participate in

such work as he has opportunity. He may be able to train a group in evangelism.

- d. Youth work: The minister and consistory may want to encourage the vicar to attend or be involved in the youth work of the congregation as part of his training.
- e. Other activities outside of the church may include a ministerial and useful conferences.

E. The Financial Support of Vicars

1. Support

A vicar is to receive not less than half of the stipend of the supervising minister. In addition, all allowances and benefits due the supervising minister will be provided to the vicar. The specific needs of each family and current government regulations shall also be taken into consideration.

2. Travel and Accommodation

Travelling expenses and accommodation are the responsibility of the church concerned.

3. Federation Support

- a. The DTM will utilise the Needy Student fund to provide financial support to churches who have a vicar.
- b. Churches may apply to the for up to two-thirds of the costs of the vicariates (i.e. travel, accommodation, vehicle, phone and stipend). Applications are to include a financial budget for that vicariate for that period, a date when funds are required by, and an indication of the minimum level of support required for the vicariate (the latter may be helpful to the deputies in the event of other vicariate applications).
- c. Should a vicariate be initiated directly by a local church, it will not be eligible for assistance.

4. Relocation

If a vicar wishes to relocate to where he came from, the DTM will provide him with sufficient funds to do so after the completion of his vicariate.

Addendum A.4

Greetings Message of the FRCSA to Synod Darling Downs

Esteemed brothers delegates of Synod, assembled guests, brothers and sisters in the Lord.

On behalf of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa I bring you heartfelt greetings in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. While geographically thousands of kilometers apart, in Christ we are one, and nearby. What a comfort to know that He unifies us through His Holy Spirit. We praise Him for such grace.

This unity has grown much deeper over the last number of years and we are most thankful that we can learn so much from your experiences and initiatives, through deputies as well as *Una Sancta*, and especially through our presence at your synod. Thank you for the thorough deliberations in your synod reports on issues that we share with you, such as theological training, mission work and ecumenical relationships.

Theological Training

To begin with, a matter close to our hearts that we have been thinking and praying about much in the last few years, theological training. As a small bond of churches we have always looked for the best ways to equip our students for the ministry, while we do not have the capacity to offer such training ourselves.

Over the last decade we have worked increasingly with CRTS, which has become the required institution for MDiv studies, similar to yours. Before such a study, we require our aspiring brothers to complete a BA degree with ancient languages, which can be done locally. We are most thankful to the Lord that He has given us two brothers who recently completed their MDiv studies at CRTS, and seven who are at various stages of the study trajectory. In addition, the Lord gave us two brothers from outside the federation, one of whom has passed his classis examination and the other following a supplementary study package towards the ministry. These developments in the FRCSA would not be possible without your prayers for us and your funding support of our theological training. Thank you for your abundant love in Christ, and the trust you show to us with your substantial financial support. We trust that our report back shows our commitment to a sound management of your donations.

Mission Work

The work of training 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 in a society that, in general, has turned its back on God. In our country with its extremely high unemployment rate (more than 30%), and rampant poverty, people are broken and poor and in need of the hope of the gospel. We thank the Lord for the number of missionaries and the many brothers and sisters involved in mission work. We are most grateful for the recent institutionalisation of two mission congregations: Soshanguve WW and Soshanguve F4 in Classis-North. In Cape Town, in the South, last month candidate Jaco de Beer accepted a call from Wesbank congregation, where a significant amount of church up-building still has to take place.

Together with these blessings, the Lord tests our faith and wisdom through various challenges such as the need for mission churches to grow in the Lord, and the decrease in funding. As was reported at your previous synod, the Dutch churches, who previously covered up to 95% of the finances of our mission work, have decided to cut their funding in half by 2024. This has posed a significant challenge to the churches, while we look for support elsewhere. However, 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 outside the traditional funding model. We ask you to pray for us that the Lord gives us wisdom and persistence to sow the seed of the Word.

Use of your funding support in the FRCSA

At Synod Belhar 2021, our Mission Deputies requested to investigate the possibility of an increase in funding of theological training by our Canadian sister churches, which would allow the use of Australian funding for the mission work in South Africa. This so-called 'swop' was discussed with the CRTS, but an increase from their side could not be realised. However, we would like to ask your approval for a more flexible allocation of your funding, in that we would like to be allowed to share your funds for theological training with both our Mission Deputies and Deputies Needy Churches, when and where the need may be highest. Theological training, mission work and needy churches are strongly integrated and interdependent in South Africa and a balanced approach appears to be required. Such integrated funding allocations would be done through proper consultation between deputies and be reflected in annual budgets. Sound financial management would be a core element in the planning.

Relations with Churches Abroad

We share a common heritage with the Netherlands. How sad it was that the Reformed Churches Liberated (RCNL) ignored the many calls for reformation by its sister-churches and last year united with the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken under a new name Nederlandse Gereformeerde Kerken. This ecclesiastical development ended our sister-church relationship in 2023. This new federation shows increasing deformational

developments. We thank the Lord that we could support each other to send a united message to the RCNL. Although our joint admonishments were not accepted, the process strengthened your and our will to remain steadfast in obedience to the Lord. As decided at our Synod Belhar 2021, we are sustaining support to the concerned churches and members in the RCNL through prayer and communications. Let us keep praying for the brothers and sisters in the Netherlands who want to remain steadfast in their faith, so that they can be re-united in a new bond of churches that will DV result from the planned unification of De Gereformeerde Kerken and the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland later this year.

Because of the small size of our bond of churches, and the manpower available to us, we have decided to focus much of our efforts on strengthening existing bonds with our remaining sister churches, i.e. the FRCA and the CanRC. Through you we can remain informed about church developments in the Asia-Pacific region, where the Lord uses you to spread the Word and strengthen existing reformed church federations.

Membership of the ICRC

The FRCSA is a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). We have experienced that this membership provides us with an opportunity to see how the Lord calls his children in many countries world-wide. It also enables us to encourage the other churches to keep steadfast in the true faith, and to learn from their experiences in an increasingly secularised world. This was shown in the ICRC's unanimous decision to terminate the RCNL's membership in 2022. The ICRC enables us to remain in contact with reformed churches across Africa, one of the fastest growing continents when it comes to Christianity. In October of this year our churches will DV host a Regional Conference of African ICRC member churches in Cape Town, which will, amongst others, deal with mission and diaconal work in Africa.

We appreciate the in-depth deliberations within the FRCA on ecclesiastical relationships with other church federations and the ICRC. The report of your DRCA on ecumenical contacts is of much value for our own reflection on this matter. Our mutual sister churches in Canada are similarly studying this matter and we should put in some effort to harmonize our approach and terminology on these matters. We also appreciate your careful considerations around membership of an ecumenical organisation like the ICRC, with different responsibilities and obligations. But we want to stress our experience that our ICRC membership is allowing us to get better knowledge of other reformed churches in the world, in line with the calling of Joh. 17: 20-26 and Eph. 4: 1-16. We pray for wisdom for your Synod to carefully consider and evaluate the options for a possible relationship with the ICRC. We would very much appreciate your support and inputs into the deliberations at the ICRC General Conferences and in the various Working Groups. This will surely strengthen the reformed course of the organization, as well as our mutual intensity of cooperation as sister churches.

Contacts with Reformed Churches in South Africa

Within South Africa, the FRCSA has increased its contacts the Reformed Churches of South Africa (the RCSA, who are also member of the ICRC). We are thankful that on a local basis there have been pulpit exchanges and mutual acknowledgement of attestations. Contact at a national level is still more strenuous. The RCSA are wrestling with a call for “women in office”. They have cut their ties with the public North West University, where their theological training was located, and have established a new “Gereformeerde Teologiese Akademie” (GTA). However, the new seminary experiences significant challenges from inside the RCSA. We pray that the Lord will guide the seminary’s future development. We look forward to continuing our discussions with the RCSA, both with local congregations and at federal level.

Closing

I would like to end with the words from the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4: “ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”. May the Lord give your 2024 Synod the wisdom and faith to remain and strengthen in this unity. To him be all the glory for ever and ever.

Thank you.

Gerard Hagg

On behalf of Deputies for Relations with Churches Abroad of the FRCSA