

Report

of the Committee on

Relations with Churches Abroad (BBK)



General Synod of the Reformed Churches Harderwijk 2011

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2 Committee activities

2.1 Subcommittee 1 (Policy and ICRC)

Co-operation

The Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad (also: Deputies BBK) is not the only player in the field of foreign ecclesiastical contacts. There are also others, such as Deputies for Mission, Assistance and Training (abbreviated as ZHT). We also meet the Foreign Relations Committee of the CGKN, who partly have the same target group and a similar aim. This requires aligning policies on a regular basis.

That is why deputies are pleased to have a biannual meeting with Deputies ZHT, in which information is exchanged and policies are aligned. Deputies are preparing a day of consideration, to reflect on the mutual influencing of ecclesiastical relations and partnership relations. Also, agreements will be made on mutually informing one another when deputies from churches abroad visit our country. Thus, we create the opportunity to meet each other with a maximum result.

For the same reason, Deputies BBK are pleased with the contacts they have with the Foreign Relations Committee of the CGKN, with which we have a meeting every year. Travel plans are exchanged and matters that affect both committees are discussed.

Contacts

We have consulted with the Reformed College of Higher Vocational Training (Gereformeerde Hogeschool, abbreviated as GH) in Zwolle on contacts abroad that might be relevant to the GH, especially as regards issues on training and education. We will keep each other informed about these matters.

A number of times we have also consulted with the Theological University (TU) in Kampen. Deputies attend the biannual conference of the TU to provide it with input from our experience with contacts abroad and thus promote the development of the TU in the area of internationalization.

In order to promote a truthful image of the TU abroad, a one-day conference in Kampen has been planned during the 'foreigners week' of the General Synod of Harderwijk. The TU will inform the foreign delegates about the teaching curriculum, the research programme, and the identity of the institution.

Networks

Deputies represent the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in networks of Reformed churches abroad. The first network that needs to be mentioned is the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). In 2009, deputies attended the ICRC conference in Christchurch, New Zealand.

A younger network that deputies participate in is the European Conference of Reformed Churches (EuCRC). This conference convened for the second time in October 2008. It was held in Soest and the theme was 'Addressing Europe'. In March 2010 the third conference was held in Edinburgh, with 'Reaching out unitedly to Europe' as its central theme. Kiev is a candidate as venue for the next conference. A third important network is the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF). Deputies are considering their position on this network. Church federations, local churches, organizations as well as individuals can participate in it.

Correspondence

During the last period, maintaining correspondence with churches abroad was one of the main activities of the Committee.

The primary correspondence is maintained by the regional subcommittees with the contacts they have overseas. Secondly, there is the correspondence of the Committee as a whole. This correspondence is maintained by the general secretary in consultation with the general board.

An example of this correspondence can be found in appendix 5a, b and c, between deputies BBK and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA) regarding the decision of Synod Legana 2009 about our churches.

Another example of correspondence of Subcommittee 1 is the review of the (so-called) Work Order, (Appendix 5d).

Policy

Deputies would like to inform Synod that during the last period they have been considering participation in global networks in addition to, or instead of, entering into bilateral relations with churches abroad. In our view, participating in global networks provides good opportunities to fulfil our ecumenical responsibility. Deputies hope to be able to write an additional report about this for Synod.

2 Recommendation for a new instruction

Decision 3:

to remove the Evangelical Reformed Churches in the Union of Russia (ERCUR) from the list of sister-church relationships (it existed since Synod Leusden 1999).

Consideration:

according to the committee report these churches have apparently ceased to exist.

Decision 4:

to end the offer of a sister-church relationship to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and, instead, place the OPC on the list of ecclesiastical contacts and express the hope that the OPC, in her turn, will take the initiative in the future to enter into a sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

Considerations:

1 the offer a sister-church relationship has been made repeatedly by our Synods. The OPC has kept it under consideration for a long time. Since the negative decision of the 77th General Assembly, which includes the consideration that the Assembly finds itself unable to affirm, without reservation, that our churches are fully Reformed, it is not correct to continue our offer of a sister-church relationship.

2 the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands have not changed in their appreciation of the OPC.

Decision 5:

to enter into a sister-church relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Austria/Switzerland, with thankfulness to God.

Considerations:

1 after the previous request was denied by Synod Zwolle Zuid 2008, the ERK-WB has again requested a sister-church relationship.

2 the ERK-WB has taken the objections of Synod Zwolle to heart, and has worked fruitfully to establish a church federation that functions well.

3 in other respects the ERK-WB meets the criteria for a sister-church relationship.

Decision 6:

to place the Reformed Churches in Indonesia-Papua on the list of sister-church relationships.

Considerations:

1 in actual fact, the sister-church relationship already existed

2 the conditions within the GGRI-P have developed in such a way that it is now possible to maintain the existing sister-church relationship by means of correspondence and personal contact.

Decision 7:

to add the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (PCB) to the list of sister-churches.

Consideration:

with thankfulness we can observe that the Presbyterian Church of Brazil (PCB) has accepted the offer of a sister-church relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

Decision 8:

to enter into a sister-church relationship with the United Reformed Church in the Congo (URCC).

Considerations:

1 the URCC shows the marks of a church of the Lord Jesus Christ and meets the criteria for a sister-church relationship.

2 the URCC can be regarded as the continuation of the ERCC, with which the RCN maintained a sister-church relationship; in all decisions that led to the secession and the institution, the (present) URCC followed the requirements of the church order.

3 the URCC has requested the RC to enter into a sister-church relationship.

Decision 9:

to end the sister-church relationship with the ERCC and place the ERCC on the list of ecclesiastical contacts.

Considerations:

1 the leadership of the ERCC have decided to reject the decisions of the extra-ordinary ERCC-Synod Mbuji-Mayi 2008. Neither have they challenged these decisions through legal or ecclesiastical means.

2 the statutes of the ERCC were such that the Congolese government decided in favour of the ERCC leaders, by considering the decisions of the extra-ordinary ERCC-Synod Mbuji-Mayi 2008 legally invalid. Thus, there was no other option than establishing a new church: the URCC.

3 the URCC can be regarded as the continuation of the original ERCC.

4 in conversations with the ERCC leaders, the ERCC have shown to appreciate further contact with the RCN. However, there is no longer a basis for a sister-church relationship with the RCN. The leaders of the ERCC do not adhere to their own church order, they refuse to accept decisions taken according to the church order and – during the last two years – they have not given evidence of willingness to change or seek reconciliation. If the ERCC continue to appreciate the contact with the RCN, we will in our turn continue to stay in rapport with the ERCC.

Decision 10:

to take note (with approval) of the letters sent by deputies to the FRCA, in reaction to the statements about our churches in the Acts of Synod Legana 2009; and to instruct deputies to stay in rapport with the FRCA in order to promote a truthful image of our churches.

Considerations:

1 the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands do not recognize themselves in the image described in the Acts of Synod Legana 2009

2 it is detrimental to the sister-church relationship, and the appeal that the FRCA and the RCN want to make to each other based on that relationship, if the starting point is a distorted image.

Decision 11:

to maintain the relations with the 32 sister churches in the list below, in accordance with the rules adopted by Synod Ommen 1993 (cf. art. 68.1-2) in order to learn from each other, support each other and praise the name of Christ together.

1 African Evangelical Presbyterian Church (in Kenya) (AEPC)

2 Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC)

3 Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPCI)

4 Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales (including the Evangelisk-Reformerta Kyrkan in Sverige (ERKS) (Sweden)) (EPCEW)

5 Presbyterian Church in Austria/Switzerland (PCA-AS)

6 Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) (FCC)

7 Free Church of Scotland (FCS)

8 Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA)

9 Calvinist Reformed Churches (CRC, Indonesia)

10 Reformed Churches in Indonesia-NTT (RCI-NTT)

11 Reformed Churches in Indonesia- Kalimantan Barat (RCI-KalBar)

12 Reformed Churches in Indonesia-Papua (RCI-Papua)

13 Pilgrim Reformed Churches (PRC)

14 Reformed Church of Venezuela (RCV)

15 Reformed Churches of Brazil (IRB)

16 Presbyterian Church of Brazil (IPB)

17 The Church of Christ in the Sudan among the Tiv (NKST)

18 Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA)

19 Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin) (PCKK)

20 Presbyterian Free Church Council (Kalimpong) (PFCC)

21 Presbyterian Free Church of India (PFCI)

22 Reformed Church in Japan (RCJ)

23 Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS)

24 Reformed Church of East Africa (in Kenya) (RCEA)

25 Reformed Churches of New Zealand (RCNZ)

26 Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland (RPCI)

- 27 Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (RPCI)
- 28 Reformed Presbyterian Church of North East India (RPCNEI)
- 29 Reformed Presbyterian Church Taiwan (RPCT)
- 30 Reformed Churches of South Africa (RCSA)
- 31 United Reformed Church in the Congo (URCC)
- 32 Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA)

Consideration:

according to the relevant documents these relations meet the criteria for entering into or maintaining sister-church relationships.

Decision 12:

to express regret with regard to the miscommunication that resulted in the Christian Reformed Churches of Sri Lanka being removed from the list of ecclesiastical contacts by Synod Zwolle-Zuid 2008;
to place the CRCSL again on this list of ecclesiastical contacts;
and, in retrospect, to approve the actions taken by deputies since 2008 to GS Zwolle aimed at restoring contacts.

Consideration:

letters from the CRCSL, which expressed great appreciation of the contacts with our churches, did not reach the committee and consequently the Synod in time, so that based on false considerations the decision was made to remove the CRSL from the list of ecclesiastical contacts.

Decision 13:

to remove the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian – Harare Synod in Zimbabwe (CCAP), the Kar El Dobarah Evangelical Church (Cairo, Egypt), the Église Réformée du Québec (ERQ) and the Reformed and Presbyterian contacts in Pakistan from the list of ecclesiastical contacts.

Consideration:

during the last period there have been no contacts; deputies do not know of any ecclesiastical contacts in Pakistan that we could have a relation with.

Decision 14:

to maintain contact with the churches and organizations below, as well as any churches that are a member of the ICRC, in order to learn from each other, support each other and praise the name of Christ together wherever we meet.

- 1 Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary and the Reformed Fellowships in the Baltic states.
- 2 The alliance for the proclamation of the gospel among the Jewish People, YACHAD
- 3 Christian Reformed Church of the Philippines (CRCP)
- 4 Christian Reformed Church of Sri Lanka (CRCSL)
- 5 Confessing Reformed Church in Benin (CRCB)
- 6 Confessing Reformed Church in the Congo (CRCC)
- 7 Independent Evangelical Reformed Churches (EREI, France)
- 8 Evangelical Reformed Churches of Russia (ERCR)
- 9 Evangelium Reformatum Eghaz (ERE)
- 10 Evangelical Reformed Churches of Singapore (ERCS: First -, and Covenant -)
- 11 Reformed Churches of Spain (RCS)
- 12 Presbyterian Christian Church of Portugal (CPCP)
- 13 Independent Reformed Church of Korea (IRCK)
- 14 Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)
- 15 Presbyterian Church in America (PCA); through Mission to the World
- 16 Presbyterian Church of Korea (Hapshin) (PCK (Hapshin))
- 17 Presbyterian Church of Uganda (PCU)
- 18 Presbyterian Theological Seminary (Dehra Dun, India) (PTS)
- 19 Reformed Free Church of the Philippines (RFCP)
- 20 Reformed Presbyterian Fellowship in Myanmar (RPCFM)
- 21 South Indian Reformed Churches (SIRC)
- 22 Churches in Belgium, through the RCN in Gent and the CRC in Antwerp-Deurne (Belgium)

23 Hungarian Reformed Churches (HGC) and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Central and Eastern Europe (RPCCEE) and other Reformed groups in the Hungarian-speaking areas.

24 Minsk Reformed Church (Belarus)

25 Ukraine Evangelical Reformed (or Presbyterian) Church (The Ukraine)

Consideration:

from the relevant documents it appears that it is useful to maintain contact with the churches and organizations listed above.