

Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

May 3, 2012

General Synod Armadale 2012
The Free Reformed Churches of Australia
C/O Free Reformed Church of Armadale
P.O. Box 213
Armadale 6992, Western Australia
Australia

Esteemed brothers:

We write to you as consistory of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford, B.C., Canada, which was instituted on December 9, 2007. We are comprised of members who have seceded from the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, B.C., Canada at the conclusion of a process of appeal under the provisions of Article 31 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

In accordance with the Acts of Synod Legana 2009, Article 40, your synod decided to mandate deputies to "*Monitor developments within the CanRC for mutual benefit according to the established rules and keep the churches informed.*"

Our purpose in writing to you is to solicit your assistance in restoring the broken unity which has resulted from the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford's acceptance of unscriptural general synod decisions establishing ecclesiastical fellowship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and others.

Admissibility

Although appeals of general synod decisions regarding the relationship with the OPC have been dealt with by every general synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches since 1977, the following process of appeal was followed by the brothers who now constitute the consistory of the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford:

- 1) General Synod 2001 extended a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC (see Acts of General Synod Neerlandia 2001, Article 45).
- 2) In 2002 we presented an appeal of this General Synod decision to the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford "*on the basis that it failed to consider decisions of previous General Synods and it conflicts with the Word of God and the Church Order.*"

- 3) In 2003 the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford took over this appeal and sent it to General Synod 2004. A copy of the text of this appeal is attached as Appendix A.
- 4) If the consistory had not accepted our appeal, we would indeed have been obligated to address classis, and, in the event of a rejection at classis, the regional synod as well. However, because the consistory has the right to appeal general synod decisions directly to the next general synod, its taking over of our appeal and sending it to the next general synod had exempted us from these obligations.
- 5) General Synod 2004 denied the appeal but failed to do justice to the material that was presented to it (see *Acts of General Synod Chatham 2004*, Article 86).
- 6) In October 2005 we presented an appeal of this General Synod decision to the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford. In our appeal we requested that the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford liberate itself from the decisions contained in Article 45 of General Synod 2001 and Article 86 of General Synod 2004 and forward our appeal to General Synod 2007. A copy of the covering letter and the text of this appeal are attached as Appendix B and C.
- 7) In February 2006 the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford replied that it accepts the above General Synod decisions. However consistory does not point to any fault in the appeal it had previously taken over and sent to Synod 2004 and neither does it point to any fault in the material we have sent to it. A copy of the consistory's response is attached as Appendix D.
- 8) According to Article 33 of the CanRC Church Order "*Matters once decided upon may not be proposed again unless they are substantiated by new grounds.*" The consistory's unwillingness to continue in the position it had taken prior to General Synod 2004, without pointing out how this position is in error, is a serious breach of its pastoral duty (cf. Articles 22 and 27 C.O. (CanRC)).
- 9) In October 2006, similar to what Br. J. DeHaas did in 1950 when he brought forward the 1944 Liberation to the ecclesiastical authorities in the Christian Reformed Church, we addressed the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford regarding a secession that had occurred in Lynden, WA, in 2006. But instead of honestly dealing with the material presented to it, the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, immediately after having celebrated the Lord's Supper, and without there being any exhortations consistent with Article 66 C.O. (CanRC), publicly called upon us to "*repent of [our] divisive ways and to return to full*

communion with the Abbotsford Canadian Reformed Church ..." Br. John van Laar's appointment to the office of elder was rescinded and Br. Richard van Laar was put under discipline for maintaining the very same position.

- 10) Even so we did not give up. We attempted further dialogue by interacting on a point by point basis with the consistory's letter of February 2006. Therefore we also enclose for your information a copy of our letter to the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford dated December 11, 2006 and the related response of this same church dated January 22, 2007. Based on this response one of us sent an additional letter dated March 5, 2007, to which the consistory sent its response dated May 31, 2007 (Appendix D).
- 11) The local issues that we refer to in the paragraph above were the logical consequence of the relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship that had previously been extended. The issues involved in these relationships did not, for the first time, come under appeal in 2004, but had already been appealed to every general synod since the OPC was declared a true church in 1977. We had only to deal with the highest authority in the church - the consistory – which we continued to do until they finally said to one of us, in their letter of May 31, 2007, that it considers the matter "*finished.*"

If you believe that after examination of the above documents, together with the relevant general synod decisions, that we are deficient in our confessional or church orderly position, please point that out to us. Then we request that you explain to us on the basis of the reformed confessions or the Church Order how we are deficient and what further steps we are required to do.

Secession and Return

You will note that Article 31 of the CanRC Church Order states that "*whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.*" At the very beginning of the appeal process (see point #2 above) it was indicated that the matter under appeal was indeed "*in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.*"

The refusal of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford to deal any further with the issues and concerns that were brought forward and its subsequent implementation of and participation in these unscriptural decisions, necessitated further steps. As indicated in their book Decently and in Good Order (see page 63), Prof. K. Deddens and Rev. G. VanRongen state that "*After one has gone the full 'ecclesiastical way' ... one has either to except the latest decision as yet - which does not create any insurmountable difficulties **whenever it is not a matter of conscience** - or he has to 'liberate' himself from the binding decision.*"

Upon completion of the appeal process under Article 31 C.O. the following steps were taken.

- 1) On July 17, 2007 concerned members of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford addressed all communicant members of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, calling on them to liberate themselves from the unscriptural decisions and to join with us in restoring the Church of Christ in Abbotsford. A copy of this letter is attached as Appendix E.
- 2) On September 3, 2007 the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford issued a letter to those who had seceded requesting reconsideration of the matters that lead to the letter of secession dated July 17, 2007. An annotated version of the consistory's letter is attached as Appendix F.
- 3) On September 28, 2007 those who seceded sent a response to the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford. A copy of this response is attached as Appendix G.
- 4) On October 15, 2007 the above response was officially received by the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford but declared inadmissible, despite the fact that the consistory specifically requested a response.
- 5) On December 9, 2007 the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford was officially instituted with the ordination of three elders.
- 6) On February 28, 2008 an Act of Secession and Return was finalized and sent to the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford. A copy of this document is attached as Appendix H.

For further information regarding this secession see the website www.calltoreform.com. Copies of the relevant letters to the congregation and the supporting correspondence with consistories and general synod are accessible through the "Librum," - "Correspondence with the consistory of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford" page on this website. We also refer you to a copy of an editorial (included at the end of Appendix G) dated July 28, 2007 entitled "Maintaining the Reformed Confessions," which provides a summary of the situation in Abbotsford.

Australian history with the ICRC revisited

We note that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia had to bear witness in a similar issue at the International Conference of Reformed Churches in Zwolle, The Netherlands, held September 1 to 9, 1993. A review of the Conference proceedings of the ICRC uncovered that on the question of admission of the OPC, which took place at this particular ICRC, the following was noted

concerning the position of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (see Article 11 of the Conference minutes):

"Mr. Kleijn (FRCA) read a prepared statement indicating why the FRCA delegates would abstain from voting on the matter of new memberships. They gave as reason that their churches are still studying the point of what "unity of faith" implies (cf. Constitution, Art. III. 1). Their concerns related to whether it is ethically correct to say that there is unity of faith in the ICRC while at home member churches have not been able to recognize each other as true churches."

We also note that this issue resurfaced at the next Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia in 1994 where the Synod decided to:

"propose to the next ICRC to adopt the following amendment of the first Purpose of the ICRC as stated in its Constitution so that it will read: "1. to express and promote unity in the reformed faith which the member churches confess." One of the grounds for this amendment is that the present reading, "the unity of faith that the member churches HAVE in Christ" implies to many that unity already exists, while full ecclesiastical fellowship has not yet been realized." (quoted from Appendix VI of the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995).

The subsequent termination of the membership of your churches in the ICRC, by Synod Kelmscott 1996, is consistent with this position. The history of your decisions in the 1990's indicates that the churches in Australia had considerable concern over the question of unity in the reformed faith.

However now the recent decisions extending relationships of ecclesiastical fellowship by the CanRC Synods 2001 (OPC, URCNA and RCUS), 2004 (in its denial of appeals), 2007 (RCNZ and ERQ) and 2010 (in its denial of appeals) effectively adopt the OPC position. The effective position now adopted by the CanRCs is that unity in the reformed faith (confessional membership) is no longer required before expressing unity at the Lord's Supper, entering into pulpit exchanges and accepting attestations.

The Netherlands

As you may be aware, CanRC Synods 2007 (Acts, Article 143) and 2010 (Acts, Articles 107 and 108) have rejected as an "*unlawful separation*" the liberation from unscriptural decisions in the GKV. This liberation resulted in the formation of a new federation of churches in The Netherlands in 2003 known as De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld). The CanRC Synods came to these decisions without interacting with the Acts of Synod of these new churches, even though they had received them and declared them to be admissible.

We would like to know your attitude to these churches, since you “*acknowledge their desire to remain Reformed*” (Acts, Article 75 of your General Synod 2009) but as yet do not consider them to be your sister churches in Christ. We ask that you reconsider this decision, since if they are indeed Reformed should they not also be acknowledged as sister churches in Christ? At their General Synod Emmen 2009-10 De Gereformeerde Kerken (hersteld) recognized the Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford as a sister church.

Requests

In accordance with our objective to restore the true unity that has been broken as a result of the acceptance of unscriptural general synod decisions, we beseech you to do the following:

- 1) Carefully consider the material we have sent to you to determine whether or not we have acted in faithfulness to the reformed confessions and to the accepted Church Order, as we have agreed to do. If you have any questions concerning the course of action we have taken, please direct them to us.
- 2) If you believe that the secession that has occurred in Abbotsford has not been accomplished in faithfulness to the reformed confessions or the Church Order, to clearly explain to us wherein we erred.
- 3) If you believe that the secession that has occurred in Abbotsford has been accomplished in faithfulness to the reformed confessions and the Church Order, to indicate this to us by recognizing us as the legitimate continuation of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford. We also ask you to use your relationship to call the Canadian Reformed Churches to return to their confessional and church orderly foundation.
- 4) To respond to us regarding the above issues in writing.

We wish you strength and wisdom from the Holy Spirit as you study this matter and we pray that together we may work for the restoration of the true unity of His Church in Canada, the United States, and throughout the world.

Yours in His service,



J. van Laar,
Chairman

Email: vanlaarfarms@gmail.com



J. Vantil,
Clerk

Email: jvantil@telus.net