

The General Synod  
of the  
Canadian Reformed Churches  
meeting in  
Burlington, Ontario, Canada  
May, 2010

To the United Reformed Churches in North America  
and  
to the General Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America  
meeting from July 27 - 30, 2010  
in London, Ontario, Canada

Esteemed Brothers,

We greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and wish to inform you that, as your brothers in the Lord, it is our fervent prayer that the King of the church will richly bless the work of your General Synod of London.

We are taking the somewhat unusual step of writing to you about the state of our discussions in pursuit of ecclesiastical unity. In this way we hope to share our views and hopes with you.

Brothers, be assured that we do not want to come across as being overly aggressive or insensitive in these matters. We realize full well that we should not rush into a merger of our respective churches but that we need to be patient with one another in our efforts to grow closer.

In the 1990's representatives from our respective churches met over a considerable period of time to discuss a wide range of issues and came to a Statement of Agreement in 2001. This Statement served at both the General Synods of Neerlandia and Escondido as the background for entering into Phase 2 of merger discussions.

To date these discussions have borne mixed fruit. Our Songbook and Forms & Prayers subcommittees have made little or no progress. The Theological Education subcommittees have produced a report with a number of conclusions and recommendations that have met with a mixed reaction. The Church Order Committee, composed of members from both federations, has been the most successful in coming to both our Synods with an extensive report recommending, among other things, the adoption of a new Joint Church Order.

At our General Synod of Burlington, our churches have reacted to these committees and the progress of their work (or the lack of it) by sending us numerous letters expressing support, concerns, as well as objections to various points and recommendations.

At the same time it needs to be noted that not one Canadian (American) Reformed Church has urged us to cease the discussions or to put the matter of a future merger on hold. We interpret this as a sign from our churches that there continues to be broad support for this road on which we are traveling together.

Of course, we would not want to give you the impression that there are no concerns on the part of our churches. These are certainly present. And yet there lives in our churches a deep desire to be faithful to the prayer and will of our common Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Canadian Reformed Churches have always tried, with many shortcomings, to take the high priestly prayer of our Lord as recorded in John 17, with great seriousness. Our Lord prays there for Himself, for His followers and even for future believers. About the latter, He prays that "all of them may be one" (v. 21), indeed, that they may be as one as are the Father and the Son.

Some people see this as being a reference to spiritual unity with little or no implications for organizational, structural or visible unity. We respectfully disagree and are convinced that while being spiritual in character, this unity should come to concrete expression as well. Part of our Lord's prayer includes this sentence, "may they (the believers) be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (v.23)

It is thus our calling as churches of Christ not only to recognize the unity that exists, but also to express this unity in concrete and discernible ways. We should let the world know and see that we are one.

Besides the fact that this is our calling, we also believe that it is not by accident that the Lord has caused our paths to cross and to come this far on the road of church unity. Obviously He sees that we would benefit from one another.

As a relatively new federation, we can benefit from your drive, enthusiasm and boldness to take the Reformed faith into new areas and places as evidenced by your numerous church plants. We can learn from your doctrinal struggles. We can learn from your deeper understanding of our North American culture and how best to meet its challenges.

At the same time we may have a few beneficial things to offer you in the areas of federation building, church polity and foreign missions.

Hence we believe that with our respective strengths and weaknesses, we complement each other and can be of great service to one another. There is a real sense in which we need each other and can be a real blessing to one another.

There is more, for we also need to be sensitive to the fact that this is not just about us. This is also about the North American continent that we share and its headlong descent into secularism. The church scene around us is deteriorating rapidly and both American and Canadian societies are becoming more and more hostile to the gospel. In such an environment we need each other's help, support and encouragement.

Our calling also relates to the world and the cause of advancing the Reformed faith internationally. Brothers, we live in exciting and challenging times. Many new and struggling churches in other parts of the world are discovering the deep riches of the Reformed faith and they are looking to us as faithful Reformed churches in North America for help and guidance. They want to know more about our Confessions, to adopt our polity and to steep themselves in our heritage. As a result we as Canadian Reformed Churches are being inundated with cries of "come over and help us" from believers in China, Korea, Mexico, Singapore, and other countries. We believe that the same pressures are being felt and experienced in your midst.

The international opportunities are thus boundless but at the same time we also believe that they place us under an additional obligation when it comes to church unity. We can hardly teach others with credibility and be a good example to them if we can no longer muster the desire and determination to deal with our remaining differences and achieve unity.

Yes, and there are some differences between us that still need work. We, from our side, would urge you to join with us in re-appointing the Joint Church Order Committee to finalize its work. We have decided to adopt provisionally the Proposed Joint Church Order. At the same time we have passed on to it several matters that require resolution. You may well decide to do the same with some of your concerns.

We would also ask you to give serious consideration to appointing a new Theological Education Committee that would find ways to incorporate the principle our churches hold dear – that the churches are responsible for the training for the ministry – as we apply that principle in Hamilton. At the same time we see the importance of continuing to be sensitive to, and supportive of the needs and concerns of the seminaries that have served your churches so well.

With respect to the work of the Songbook and the Forms and Prayers committees, we have decided to re-appoint them in the hope that they will assist our churches as we prepare for unity.

Coming to a different but related matter, it may also be beneficial if more ways were found to build bridges between our churches, and then in particular between your churches in the United States and our churches in Canada. At present there is a great deal of interaction between the churches of both our federations in Canada. Local gatherings, ministerial meetings, youth rallies, joint evangelistic efforts and pulpit exchanges are common. The same is not happening in the United States, and it may

never happen seeing that there are very few of our churches south of the border. Still, there are ways to address the challenges of distance and geography and one of them is for classes to link up and to develop a practice of sending and receiving fraternal delegates whenever there is a classical meeting north or south of the border to bring greetings, answer questions and promote fellowship.

In conclusion, brothers, we would appeal to you not to place the unity discussions on hold or to terminate them. We fully realize that the road ahead is still filled with a number of challenges, but we would remind you that much has already been achieved. From our side we can honestly say that we have learned and gained a great deal from our joint discussions over the past number of years. If there are still specific matters that make you hesitant, we would ask you to formulate them and pass them along to us for our consideration.

Thankfully and humbly, we do not labour in our own strength nor are we pursuing our own agenda. The Head and King of the church has prayed for our unity and wants us to be one, so let us soldier on with good confidence in Him and in the power of His Spirit. May the Lord bless our joint efforts and give us the vision and boldness to work now for what will one day come to us in perfect measure, namely a church of Jesus Christ that is truly and eternally one, gathered from all the tribes, nations and peoples of the earth. To Him be the glory!

With brotherly greetings,

For the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches meeting in Burlington, Ontario, Canada, on this 20<sup>th</sup> day of the year of our Lord 2010.

(Signed by all the members of Synod)