

## **II. REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the past year the Committee have sought to foster and further our ecumenical relations in a manner appropriate to each circumstance and with an eye to mutual edification within the body of Christ. However in the field of inter-church relations, as in so many other areas of life, in our diligence in attending to the business in hand we can lose sight of more fundamental issues. From time to time the question is asked as to what principles should underlie our ecumenical relations and the Committee have given some initial consideration to that question in the past year. A member of the Committee prepared a paper which was a basis for some discussion. The Committee now intend to take this a stage further and expect to be considering a second discussion paper on this subject shortly.

### **ECUMENICAL BODIES**

#### **International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)**

It will be recalled that when the ICRC last met in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2009 our status as full members of the ICRC was formally recognised. The next meeting is scheduled for 28 August to 4 September of this year and on this occasion the location is to be Cardiff. The Committee are looking to appoint representatives who will be able to attend and represent our interests.

#### **European Conference of Reformed Churches (EuCRC)**

This Conference is held every two years and when it met in Kiev last year we were ably represented by Rev. W.B. Scott. We are grateful to him for undertaking this task on our behalf and for the full and thoughtful report he gave to the Committee.

#### **Affinity**

We are grateful to Rev. Timothy McGlynn who continues as the representative of our Church on the Affinity Council. Mr McGlynn remains of the opinion that we can continue to fulfil a very important role within this organisation, presenting and promoting the rich heritage of experimental Calvinism which we have received from those who went before us. As we seek, by grace, to remain faithful to our foundational principles we, in turn, would seek to be a source of encouragement for Affinity to remain faithful to the founding principles of the British Evangelical Council.

### **UNITED KINGDOM**

#### **Scotland**

**Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland.** Our mutual support of several organisations such as the Scottish Reformation Society and the Trinitarian Bible Society affords opportunity for fellowship with friends from the Free Presbyterian Church. Whilst we are glad to meet one another in this way it is no secret that the Committee would welcome opportunities for closer co-operation and are disappointed that, at present, that is not possible. Following the meeting of the FP Synod in May 2012 the Committee received a response to the letter they had sent to Synod. The Synod had highlighted some obstacles which they believed stood in the way of any discussion. Nevertheless the Committee agreed to send a further communication making clear to the Free Presbyterian Church that we remain open for discussion.

**The Associated Presbyterian Churches.** During the year the Committee received an invitation to attend a meeting which had been called on the initiative of the APC. The meeting would take the form of a forum

at which the APC, and a number of other denominations, would have an opportunity of discussing together the current state of Scottish Presbyterian church life and future inter-church relations.

The Committee believed that it was right to respond positively to this invitation and thanked the APC for including them in the list of those given an opportunity to attend. The Convener along with Rev. Allan Murray were appointed to represent the Committee. A meeting was arranged in Perth in October but in the event the Convener took unwell and he is very grateful to Rev. James I. Gracie, Moderator of the 2012 General Assembly, for attending in his place.

At its meeting in March the Committee received a report from the two delegates and they were both appointed to attend a second meeting held in Inverness in April. The Committee have not, as yet, received a report of this most recent meeting.

**The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland.** A communication was received from the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland seeking a meeting between our two bodies. The Committee agreed to appoint three representatives with a remit to discuss matters of difference and areas of common interest between the two denominations. It has not yet proved possible to arrange such a meeting but the Committee are hopeful that a date can be agreed upon in the near future.

The Committee hope that it may be possible for the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland to send an Observer to this year's General Assembly.

#### **Ireland**

**The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland** Relations with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland took a step closer in the year under review. The Committee were pleased to be informed that the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland had indicated their desire to send two Observers to this year's General Assembly.

**The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland** was represented at the 2012 General Assembly by Mr David Watson. Since their early days we have enjoyed fellowship with our friends in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and are glad to be able to maintain that warm relationship.

#### **England and Wales**

**The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales** was represented at the 2012 General Assembly by Rev. Bill Schweitzer. This was not his first such visit and we were glad to be able to renew fellowship. We continue to receive regularly various publications from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales including the minutes of their Presbytery meetings.

**The Church of England (Continuing)** were represented at the General Assembly of 2012 by Rev. Peter Ratcliff, well known to many in our midst as Editor of *The English Churchman*. We will always remember the kindness shown to us by the Church of England (Continuing) in the immediate aftermath of the division of 2000.

**Evangelical Connexion (Free Church of England)** We continue to receive the magazine of this denomination and they have been invited to send a representative to the General Assembly.

#### **EUROPE**

##### **The Netherlands**

**The Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (CGKN)** It will be recalled that at the last General Assembly we were pleased to be able to report that this Denomination had granted full sister-church relationship to the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing). We were pleased to welcome their

representative Mr Wim Wullschleger to the 2012 Assembly and look forward to further opportunities for fellowship and mutual encouragement in the Lord.

**The Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (vrijgemaakt) (GKNV)** known commonly as the Liberated Churches were also represented at the last General Assembly by Rev. Roland Schipper. It gave us great pleasure to have an opportunity for meeting together and again we look forward to such occasions in the future.

**Hersteld (Nederlandse) Hervormde Kerk** The Committee have maintained contact with our friends in this denomination. They are not yet in a position to establish formal relations with outside bodies but they do hope to give further consideration to these matters in the future.

## **NORTH AMERICA**

**Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)** Our links with this body have grown a good deal stronger over recent years and we rejoice in hearing of their work in the Gospel. Whilst distance precludes the opportunity for frequent visits with one another the Committee were grateful that Rev. Maurice Roberts was able to represent them at their Synod of 2012. We in turn were pleased to welcome Rev. Maarten Kuivenhoven to the General Assembly last year.

**The Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA)** As with other North American denominations distance meant that it was not possible to appoint a delegate in 2012 but there is no doubt that we continue to have an interest in one another's work and witness.

**Canadian Reformed Churches (CRC)** The Committee were very pleased when a formal relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches was resumed. This relationship found expression in the attendance of Mr Jake Van Laar and Mr John Vanderstoep at the General Assembly of 2012. This allowed an opportunity for discussion and a greater understanding of our respective situations. We were unable to send a representative to their 2013 Synod but were glad to have the opportunity of sending our greetings and prayerful good wishes.

**Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)** Sadly we were unable, for practical reasons, to accept an invitation to the RPCNA Synod of 2012 but we continue to be thankful for their prayerful interest in our work and witness.

**Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)** Whilst a recent exchange of delegates has not proved possible we are glad to be able to exchange letters of greeting. We recall with gratitude the assistance rendered to us by our friends in the OPC in several matters not least their gracious attempt to facilitate discussion and negotiation with our separated brethren.

**United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA)** The Committee were glad to note the progress which has been made in establishing relations between our two churches and were gratified to learn that it is hoped to have a representative of the URCNA at this year's General Assembly. The Committee are grateful to Rev. Warren Gardner for attending the URCNA Synod.

## **AUSTRALIA**

**Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia** We continue in brotherly contact with this denomination and our exchange of greetings is no mere formality but an indication of our brotherly esteem.

**Free Church of Australia** We are glad to be able to continue to exchange greetings with this Church and also such contact as is possible from time to time. We are particularly glad to note that Rev John Nelson expects to be present at the General Assembly.

**Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia** A letter of greeting was forwarded by this Church to the 2012 General Assembly and it was recently agreed that the Convener should take steps to maintain contact with the Southern Presbyterian Church.

#### **AFRICA**

**Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika (GKSA)** The Committee were gratified that the GKSA regarded their relationship with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing) as unbroken by the division of 2000. Whilst an exchange of delegates has not been possible the Committee have requested one of our ministers to maintain contact with our friends in the GKSA.

#### **GENERAL**

The Committee have received communications from a number of other bodies and in some cases are making further enquiries before taking any further steps to establish more formal contact.

MURDO A.N. MACLEOD, *Convener*  
ALLAN MURRAY, *Vice-Convener*

#### **PROPOSED DELIVERANCE**

1. The General Assembly receive the Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and thank the Committee, especially the Convener;
2. The General Assembly look forward to the forthcoming meeting of the ICRC in Cardiff;
3. The General Assembly record their thanks to Rev. William B. Scott for attending the meeting of the EuCRC in Ukraine and for his helpful report on the meeting ;
4. The General Assembly thank Rev. Timothy McGlynn for representing the Church on the Council of AFFINITY;
5. The General Assembly note with some disappointment the recent communication from the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and encourage the Ecumenical Relations Committee to maintain such contact as may be possible;
6. The General Assembly note with interest the ongoing discussions being held on the initiative of the Associated Presbyterian Churches and record their thanks to Rev. Allan Murray and Rev. James I. Gracie for attending as representatives;
7. The General Assembly are glad to note the recent contact established with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland and await with interest the forthcoming discussions between our denominations;
8. The General Assembly are glad to note our increased contact with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland and welcome their Observers to the General Assembly;
9. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland;
10. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales;
11. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Church of England (Continuing);

12. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Free Church of England (Evangelical Connexion);
13. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (CGKN);
14. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (vrijgemaakt) (GKNV);
15. The General Assembly note with approval their continued contacts with the Hersteld (Nederlandse) Hervormde Kerk (HHK) and look forward to a fuller response when the HHK have had due opportunity to consider the issues involved in establishing ongoing contact with the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing);
16. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC);
17. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA);
18. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches (CRC);
19. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA);
20. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC);
21. The General Assembly are glad to note the progress made in establishing relations with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA);
22. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia;
23. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Free Church of Australia;
24. The General Assembly note with gratitude their relationship with the Southern Presbyterian Church of Australia;
25. The General Assembly welcome the recent contact with the Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid Afrika (GKSA) and encourage the Committee as they build upon these initial contacts;
26. The General Assembly note with interest the discussions within the Ecumenical Relations Committee on the principles which should underlie our ecumenical relations and look forward to further fruit arising from this study;
27. The General Assembly commend the work of the Committee to the prayerful interest of the Church.