II.

REPORT

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Introduction

The preparation of this Report is a reminder that another year has passed. With the passing of time many things change, both in our own immediate setting and further afield, but the need for fellowship in the Gospel with those of like mind has certainly not lessened. If anything, the days in which we live, days of concerted and sustained attacks on our Christian faith and values, make that fellowship all the more important and refreshing.

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. We have continued to reach out to, and correspond with, a variety of different churches and organisations, both at home and abroad, and this is set out in the body of the Report.

It has sometimes been the case that churches engaged in ecumenical relations have failed to ensure that they have biblical unity and uniformity within their own borders. This must surely be a pre-requisite to engaging with others. Unless we are clear about our own testimony we will only succeed in giving out very mixed signals and ultimately no real benefit will accrue to either ourselves or other bodies. We should be thankful as a denomination that we do have such unity and uniformity within our borders and that we embark on all our ecumenical activity from a base of unwavering commitment to our subordinate standards. This is not with a view to a proud and superior position to all and sundry but rather to know what we believe and why we believe it. May the Lord preserve such in our midst and may we, by His grace, prove a help to others with whom we associate in an assortment of different ways.

Ecumenical Bodies

Affinity

The Church continue to have an active role in the work of Affinity with Rev. Timothy McGlynn representing the FC(C) on the Council of Affinity. He attended the Advisory Council meetings on 15 & 16 September 2025 and 16 & 17 March 2026. In addition to this he participates in the monthly online prayer meetings, as well as attending the biennial theological Conference in Northampton. The push to see Affinity change into The Gospel Coalition UK (CGC UK) has receded, with the two bodies remaining separate. While Affinity will continue to provide a place for conservative denominations to meet and discuss matters of mutual interest, TGC UK will seek to promote the vision of TGC in a UK context. While the personnel include a number of persons involved in both groups, they remain distinct.

Last year's Report noted an article by Rev. Stephen Steele of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland in the Winter 2024 issue (Issue 87) of Affinity's *Foundations* Journal. In it, Mr Steel sought to show that the Free Church Disruption Fathers 'far from viewing the Textus Receptus as sacrosanct, argued for the superiority of alternative readings of the original text'. Within the article he named a senior FC(C) minister and a Presbytery (USA) of the denomination and this caused considerable disquiet at the 2025 General Assembly. The Assembly instructed the Ecumenical Relations Committee to inform Affinity of its grave disappointment with the publication of the article, especially its divisive nature, as not being conducive to 'Spiritual Brotherhood'.

The Committee duly wrote to the Director of Affinity, Mr Graham Nicholls, pointing out that it was not theological debate or the subject matter itself which caused the disquiet, but that

> the author, in naming FCC Ministers and Presbyteries, appears to have strayed into a more polemical and unhelpful area. It should be noted that the author has made assumptions regarding the FCC individuals named which are not in accordance with reality.
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> No one in the FCC argues that the Disruption Free Church Fathers were united in their views of the *Textus Receptus* or held it sacrosanct. The same may be said of their views on the length of the days of creation or the use of Paraphrases in worship. That does not mean that the FCC is committed to their views on any of these subjects. The FCC is committed to the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession of Faith and generally takes a certain more conservative views of these issues, which it is aware was not always shared by all at the Disruption of 1843. It is difficult to understand what point Mr Steele is actually trying to make, unless he is somehow suggesting that it is un-Free Church to hold such positions, something which is not only offensive but also unhelpful in that it would prevent any criticism of bygone ages. Our commitment is to our constitutional position and principles, not their outworking through history.

It was made clear that the publication of the article with its tone and apparent insinuations or purpose had not been helpful in fostering spiritual brotherhood, or endearing Affinity to the FC(C), and that, in writing to them, the Committee hoped that lessons would be learned and more care taken with future articles. A reply has been received from Mr Graham Nicolls, Director of Affinity, expressing "our apology for any offence caused by the title and the content of this article" and indicating that the "The Free Church (Continuing) are a valued member of Affinity and I would not wish our very positive relationship to be damaged by this matter."

Rev. E. Trevor Kirkland indicated to the Committee that he intended to respond to the Article. This has taken longer than anticipated, partly due to pressure of other work, but also due to the fact that his initial submission to the *Foundations* Journal was not accepted for publication. It is hoped that a revised response will be submitted and published in due course.

At their March Committee meeting, a communication was received expressing disquiet that Affinity were sending out their email Prayer Diary on the Lord's Day whenever it was the first day of he month. The Committee corresponded with the Director of Affinity, Graham Nicholls, who confirmed that although no actual clerical work was undertaken by Affinity staff on the Lord's Day, they would in future set their systems so as to avoid emailing documents on that day. The Committee are grateful for this sympathetic response to a concern raised. In a day when many assume a low view of the Sabbath, it is all the more important to use every opportunity to remind people of the spiritual nature of this day of rest in the Lord.

International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)

The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) provides a useful forum for contacts with reformed Churches throughout the world and provides a forum for reminding the constituent members of the ongoing relevance of many of the principles which underlie the Scottish Reformation. Sadly, few Churches today are committed to that uniformity in doctrine, worship, government and discipline that characterised the Scottish Church of the first and second Reformations and was restored at the Revolution in 1688. The Conference's magazine, *Lux Mundi*, is produced electronically on a biannual basis, and the download link is circulated around the Church. This provides information on member Churches as well as information on the work of the Conference Committees. Through the Conference, its publications and its email requests for prayer and diaconal support, the ICRC helps in building relationships with other reformed Churches. Knowing what is happening elsewhere can also highlight dangers which are to be avoided.

The next quadrennial meeting of the ICRC is due to take place in Seoul, South Korea, in mid-October 2026, hosted by the Kosin Presbyterian Church. In addition to the 38 member Churches who are expected to send delegates, 13 non-member Churches who have expressed an interest in participating in the ICRC have been invited to send observers. Last year the General Assembly agreed to send one delegate to this Conference, the Clerk to the Committee.

European Conference of Reformed Churches (EuCRC)

The work in organising the next EuCRC commenced on Wednesday 8th April with a two-hour online meeting and will continue on 13th May with a proposal for the next meeting to take place in Budapest, Hungary, 5th to 8th October 2027. Rev. Timothy McGlynn is on the Organising Committee of the EuCRC. Although much work remains to be done before the meeting of the EuCRC in October 2027, the form of the conference is expected to be similar to that of the last meeting at Yarnfield Conference Centre in 2024.

United Kingdom

Associated Presbyterian Churches

Ongoing contacts with the APC continue largely at a personal level, with various ministers assisting with supply and invitations being given to attend the Free Church School in Theology. As mentioned last year, the APC no longer have an Assembly as their brethren in Canada recently joined the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Canada. Thus, they no longer have a meeting at which they receive delegates.

Church of England (Continuing)

Although from a somewhat different background to the FC(C), the Church has maintained links with the CoE(C) since 2000, when they proved to be the first Church to send support and a delegate after the division of 2000. The Committee are pleased to note that Rev. Philip Lievesley is expected to return again this year.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales

Difficulties in the EPCEW led to the continuing loss of Congregations in 2025. As noted previously, the issues are more to do with personality and Church order than theology and Church government in particular. Those who have left the EPCEW appear to embrace a form of Presbyterianism which sees the local Congregation and Session, as opposed to the Presbytery, as the radical Court of the Church. Given the weakness of Presbyterianism in England, this development is a cause of sadness to the Committee.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland

As well as contacts at the School in Theology, a delegate is expected to attend this year's Assembly.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

While links with the RPCI are maintained, these are mainly through the exchange of delegates. Contacts are also fostered through the Free Church School in Theology, preaching and personal interactions.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland

Apart from the exchange of delegates, there have been no formal or informal contacts between the Church and the RPCS in the last year.

Dutch Churches

Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland

It appears that the problems in the CGKN are coming to a head, and that rather than order being restored to the churches, there will be a division. Although the CGKN Synod in 2022 reaffirmed their rejection of women in office in the Church, the event, rather than dealing with the question, became an occasion for those in favour of women office-bearers to take matters into their own hands and ordain women as Elders. Within a short time, around 40 of the 181 Churches in the CGKN had rebelled against the Synod finding. This precipitated a crisis, as there seemed to be no clear way of dealing with the problem within the CGKN

system of government, especially when whole Classes could not be relied on to act. Even homosexuals in office have been tolerated in some Congregations.

The obvious way to deal with the problems was for Churches to return to the acceptance of Synod decisions, but this has been rejected by the rebellious, more 'liberal' Congregations. Other attempts at finding some way to resolve the crisis failed, and in June 2025 the Synod closed without appointing a Congregation to be the calling Church for a new Synod. In effect, this would mean no new Synods of the CGKN would be able to meet. Action in the Civil Courts has led to a new Calling Church being appointed, and a new Synod is due to convene, but this only happened after most of the Moderamen (who act as an executive Committee between Synods) resigned. The conservative Congregations have associated themselves as a body known as the Rijnsburg Group and they have now organised themselves into a form of Synod and a breach in the CGKN is now in the process of taking place. At present they are composed of 33 Churches, with 22 others associated and expected to join them soon. With around 55 Congregations in the more 'liberal' grouping, there are around 70 'middle congregations'. Some of them, in whole or in part, may join the Rijnsburg Group once a decision is forced on them.

While having no pleasure in division, the 2024 Assembly made it clear to the CGKN that it is those who depart from Scriptural norms who are the sources of division. The Committee have sympathy for those men in the Rijnsburg Group who have taken a stand. Things presently are in a state of flux, and in some regards the CGKN is still one, though a division is in the process of occurring. A delegate from the CGKN is expected to attend the Assembly and it will be a useful opportunity to have an update on the situation, as well as send encouragement to the faithful brethren in the CGKN.

The Committee, especially through their Clerk, maintain a watchful brief on the situation and encourage the brethren to remember the CGKN in prayer.

Gereformeerde Kerken (GK)

The Gereformeerde Kerken (Hersteld) in the Nertherlands (DGKN), or The Reformed Churches (Restored) in the Netherlands, united with the Gereformeerde Kerken Nederland (GKN) on the 4th October, 2024, to form the Gereformeerde Kerken (Reformed Churches). Both of the uniting Churches had their origin in the Liberated Churches, but separated from them due to modernising influences within it. The united body, which has a membership of around 3000, souls uses a Bible translation based on the Masoretic Text and the *Textus Receptus*, and mainly Psalms are used in sung praise. The DGKN have appreciated contact with the Committee, most recently at the EuCRC meeting in September 2024, and a proposal was expected to come before the Synod in October to maintain contact with the FC(C). It is hoped that opportunities will arise for more discussion in the future, and that this will lead to the formalising of relations between our respective Churches. The GKN were admitted to the ICRC in 2022.

Gereformeerde Gemeenten (GG)

The GG are a conservative, confessional denomination holding to the three Forms of Unity, with around 110,000 baptised and confessing members. In some of their Congregations there can be a reluctance among many of the people to partake of the Lord's Supper, and lack of assurance can also be a big problem. In many ways, parallels can be seen with the situation in parts of the Highlands of Scotland 100 years ago, but, whereas in the Highlands there was always a clear Christ-centred and gospel-offer emphasis in the preaching week by week, this does not always appear to be the case in some Congregations of the GG. They have a shortage of Ministers, with around 60 ministers in Charges. Around 60 Congregations are vacant. In public worship, they sing only Psalms and use the Dutch equivalent of the AV, the Statenvertaling. The GG Synod in September 2025 discussed the matter of a relationship with the FC(C), and their Committee are presently preparing a document which would assist them in relating to other churches. Until now the GG have been quite insular, and thus patience is required in the pursuit of relationships with them.

Hersteld Hervormde Kerk (HHK)

The HHK or Restored Reformed Church is a large Dutch Church, which has 118 Congregations and around 60,000 members. It is a conservative, confessional denomination, which emerged when the Dutch Reformed Church merged with the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The HHK was formed over issues concerning the Confession and ethics. After some difficulties in maintaining contact with the HHK, the Committee were pleased to hear of contact between representatives of the FC(C) and the HHK at the 2024 EuCRC meeting. Subsequently, the Committee were informed that the HHK are in the process of making decisions regarding international contacts, and a response to the FC(C) approach will be given in due course.

Other European Churches

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe

The Committee first wrote to the RPCCEE in 2023, after their admission to the ICRC, and informal contacts at the 2022 ICRC meeting. They were also present at the EuCRC meeting in September 2024. Although no firm progress has been made, it is expected that there will be more openings for contacts in the coming year which may lead to a close relationship. The RPCCEE is a confessional Church based in Hungary, Romania and Ukraine, who adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith and also to the Heidelberg Confession and Second Helvetic Confession, for historical reasons.

North American Churches

Canadian Reformed Churches (CRC)

The CanRef, a daughter Church of the GKN(v), was instrumental in the ICRC's attempts to call their mother Church back to a Scriptural position regarding women in office in the Church. For this they are to be commended. There has been little contact with the CRC over the last year, but this does not mean that such relationships are unimportant. A delegate was present from the CRC at the 2023 General Assembly. It is hoped to meet with them during the forthcoming ICRC meeting.

Free Reformed Churches of North America

The Assembly welcomed a delegate from the FRCNA in 2023. Most contacts with the FRCNA are maintained through the Presbytery of the USA, who occasionally have men from the FRCNA preaching within their Congregations. They are like-minded in outlook and practice to our own Church. It is hoped to send a delegate to their Synod meeting in Toronto in June.

Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC)

The HRC are very similar to the FRCNA, although they come from a different background within the Dutch Churches. There is close co-operation between them, including the holding of Synods in the same place and at the same time. In 2023 they were represented at the General Assembly. It is hoped to send a delegate to their Synod meeting in Toronto in June.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

The Committee are concerned to maintain close connections with the OPC, and look to send a delegate to their Assembly in June 2026. Like many of the American Presbyterian churches, they subscribe to the system of doctrine of the Confession as opposed to the whole doctrine of the Confession. This leads to an unhelpful theological and practical breadth amongst office-bearers. Thus, having delegates at their Assembly who can observe proceedings, as well as encourage a more consistent doctrinal and conservative position, is helpful. The Committee relies heavily on those members who are based in the USA for an understanding of the situation in North America generally and in individual denominations in particular.

Presbyterian Reformed Church (USA)

The PRC, begun as an indigenous American Church, had its roots in the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. They appear to have a similar constitutional basis to our own Church, having the same views on worship and the civil magistrate as the FC(C), both of which are uncommon in North America. Over the

last year there has been more contact, with the Principal Clerk attending the PRC Presbytery meeting in Stockton last May. In addition, a Zoom meeting between the Ecumenical Relations Committees of both Churches proved useful. It was hoped that Rev. Romesh Prakashpalan would attend this year's PRC Presbytery in Warwick, Rhode Island, USA but he is unavailable and the Committee are looking for a replacement. Such contacts help to strengthen the bonds of fellowship and may eventually lead to closer ties.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA)

The RPCNA has become two Churches, with their Canadian brethren forming the RPCC. The Committee have had no formal links with the RPCC, and over the past year have had little contact with the RPCNA, except on a personal basis. However, they look forward this year to receiving a delegate from the RPCNA.

United Reformed Churches of North America

It is expected that there will be an exchange of delegates with the URCNA this year, and this should enable the Church to have a better view of the situation in the URCNA.

Australian Churches

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

The PCEA has its roots in the response of colonial Presbyterians in Australia to the events of the Disruption of 1843. Thus, the PCEA is the only Church to have what is essentially an almost identical background and constitution to the Free Church. The General Assembly enacted the Federal Relations Act with the PCEA in 1952, and this Act *inter alia* provides mutual eligibility of Ministers and allows the Churches to send and receive corresponding Members to their respective highest Courts.

This year, Rev. S.N.V. Partheepan will represent the Church at the PCEA Synod. There is a growing interest in the PCEA in supporting the mission work in Sri Lanka and he is expected to spend around one month in Australia, visiting various Congregations.

The PCEA have been affected in recent years by an increasing number of vacancies and a lack of men training for the Ministry. At present, three of their ten Congregations are vacant. This should be a matter of concern and prayer. Thankfully, on a more positive note, it appears that with the changes in outlook and personnel within the PCEA, the divisions which had arisen amongst the more conservative Presbyterians are now beginning to heal. It is the prayer of the Committee that this would continue to the strengthening of the Church in Australia.

Australian Free Church

Rev. John Nelson of the Australian Free Church has been a frequent visitor to the Assembly over the past 25 years. The AFC is a small Church which arose following a dispute in the PCEA, and the Committee are thankful to note that there appears to be some progress in restoring fellowship between these Churches – although matters do not appear as straightforward as they once did, and thus any reunion may yet take some time.

Southern Presbyterian Church

The Southern Presbyterian Church, based in Tasmania, is very similar to the FC(C). Indeed, this small denomination currently has one former FC(C) Ministers engaged in ministry in that Church. The Committee are pleased to note that relations with the PCEA are strengthening, and they look forward to further developments. Recently, Rev. David Lachman, a former FCC minister, moved from the SPC in Tasmania to a PCEA Congregation in Melbourne. This now leaves the SPC severely depleted of ministerial manpower.

African Churches

Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Africa (GKSA)

Last year, it was noted that some problems had arisen in the GKSA over the issue of ordination of women to the office of Elder or Minister in the Church. Although some time ago their Synod resisted the temptation to follow modern culture as opposed to Scripture, it appears that the same spirit of rebellion which has been evident in the CGKN has also manifested itself in the GKSA. This led to the 2025 General Assembly writing a warning letter to the GKSA and also sending a delegate to the 2026 Synod. Rev. Andrew Allan duly attended the Synod in place of Rev. Graeme Craig, who had been originally appointed but was unable to attend due to the pressure of other commitments. Mr Allan was warmly received and was pleased to report that the GKSA had agreed to take decisive action against those rebellious congregations refusing to submit to the decisions of Synod. This is a reason for thankfulness and should, DV, prevent the problem escalating as it has done elsewhere.

Other Churches

Over the years, the Committee have maintained contact with a variety of churches, including the Maranatha Bible Presbyterian Church, Singapore, and the Pilgrim Covenant Church, Singapore. There is little to report other than that contacts continue on a personal basis.

MURDO A.N. MACLEOD, *Convener*
A. JAMES MACINNES, *Vice-convener*

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

1. The General Assembly receive and adopt the Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Relations and thank the Committee, especially the Convener and the Clerk;

2. The General Assembly thank Rev. Timothy McGlynn for his ongoing work on the Council of Affinity;

3. The General Assembly note that the next meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches is due to take place in South Korea in October 2026 and approve the sending of one delegate to the Conference, namely Rev. Graeme Craig, Clerk to the Committee;
4. The General Assembly thank Rev. Timothy McGlynn for his work on the organising Committee of the European Conference of Reformed Churches;

5. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Associated Presbyterian Churches;

6. The General Assembly, being grateful for the ongoing relationship with the Church of England (Continuing) and their support since 2000, look forward to welcoming a representative from them at the Assembly;

7. The General Assembly note concern of the recent difficulties within the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England & Wales and grieve with their brethren in the EPCEW over the weakening of the cause of confessional Presbyterianism south of the border. They encourage them to maintain a robust Presbyterianism, with the Presbytery as the radical Court of the Church, as the system which follows the outworking of the principles of Church government in Scripture, and is, therefore, best designed by the King and Head of the Church for her security and welfare. They assure the EPCEW of the Church's prayerful concern for them in their current situation;

8. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland;

9. The General Assembly note their ongoing relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland;

10. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland;

11. The General Assembly note with concern the ongoing difficulties in the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, due a significant number of their Congregations ordaining women to office contrary to Scripture and the decision of the 2022 CGKN Synod, and the failure of the recent CGKN Synod to ensure a return to Biblical orthodoxy and uniformity of practice. The General Assembly call all their brethren in the CGKN to reject the false hermeneutic which undergirds the opening of office to women and to return to Scriptural orthodoxy. They encourage all those who are seeking to maintain a testimony to Biblical principles and faithful hermeneutics within the CGKN, especially those known as the 'Rijnsburg Group', to maintain their testimony to truth, whatever the price, as that which is most glorifying to God and for the welfare of the Lord's cause in the Netherlands;

12. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts made between the Committee and the Gereformeerde Kerken and look forward to links between them and the Church being strengthened;

13. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to pursue the formalising of a relationship with the Gereformeerde Gemeenten;

14. The General Assembly note the ongoing contacts made between the Committee and the Hersteld Hervormde Kerk, and look forward to links with them being strengthened;

15. The General Assembly encourage the Committee to pursue the formalising of a relationship with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Central & Eastern Europe;

16. The General Assembly note the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches;

17. The General Assembly appreciate the ongoing contacts with the Free Reformed Churches in North America and pray that the Lord will bless their labours for Him;

18. The General Assembly are grateful for the ongoing contacts with the Heritage Reformed Congregations and pray God's blessing on their work and witness;

19. The General Assembly note the ongoing relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and commend the Committee for seeking to have a representative present at their Assembly so that the Church might be a positive influence on them;

20. The General Assembly note that there have been ongoing contacts with the Presbyterian Reformed Church (USA) and pray that these may lead to a closer bond of fellowship in the future;

21. The General Assembly note that the RPCNA expect to have a delegate present at this year's Assembly;

22. The General Assembly value the ongoing relationship with the United Reformed Churches of North America and appoint Rev. William Macleod to represent the Church at the forthcoming URCNA Synod;

23. The General Assembly are thankful for their relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and their interest in the mission work in Sri Lanka;

24. The General Assembly are encouraged to note that there has been a strengthening of bonds between the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and both the Australian Free Church and the Southern Presbyterian Church, and pray that this may continue further in coming years;

25. The General Assembly thank Rev. Andrew Allan for attending the recent Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid Afrik. They note his report that the GKSA intend to take decisive action against those who have ignored Synod decisions and ordained women to the eldership, contrary to Scripture and decisions of the Synod, and pray that, whatever difficulties may result, they will remain steadfast and know the blessing of the Lord in their adherence to Biblical principles and practices;

26. The General Assembly thank the Committee for maintaining contact with a variety of Churches and for the important work of expressing the catholicity of the visible Church and being an encourager of like-minded Churches throughout the world.