

INTERDENOMINATIONAL MATTERS

Chair: Rev. Joel D. Vande Werken
Reporter: Rev. Margaret J. Jenista Kuykendall

I. Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

A. *Materials*: Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee Report (including Appendices A-F), pp. 315-63

B. *Privilege of the floor*: Rev. Anthony Elenbaas, chair; and Dr. Steven R. Timmermans

C. *Recommendations*

1. That synod express its gratitude to Rev. Anthony Elenbaas and Rev. Emmett Harrison for serving the cause of ecumenicity for the CRC, noting in particular Rev. Elenbaas's service as chair and Rev. Harrison's service as vice-chair. In addition, that synod express its gratitude to Rev. Shannon Jamal-Hollemans and Ms. Femke Visser-Elenbaas for serving the cause of interfaith interchange by their participation on the EIRC's Interfaith subcommittee.
2. That synod take note of the postponement of fulfilling instructions from Synod 2018 regarding the work of the United States Roman Catholic-Reformed Dialogue due to delay in the final release of the report *The One Body of Christ: Ministry in Service to the Church and the World*.
3. That synod propose to Synod 2020 the adoption of revisions to the Church Order as found in Appendix E (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp. 357-59).

Grounds:

- a. This is a necessary step to effect the changes proposed to the ecumenical categories of affiliation and the Ecumenical Charter.
 - b. These revisions make for substantive changes to the Church Order.
4. That synod receive the ad hoc committee's Categories of Affiliation Report as provided by the EIRC in Appendix B (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp.326-43) and adopt the following recommendations contained within the report, noting that implementation of the recommendations is subject to the adoption of the accompanying Church Order changes by Synod 2020:
 - a. That synod adopt the proposed changes to the Ecumenical Charter in Appendices C-D (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp. 343-57), including the revised, two-category bilateral system with its provisions and titles *churches in communion* and *churches in cooperation*, as explained in Appendix B (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp.326-43), including the following friendly amendments to Appendix D (*Agenda for Synod 2019*, pp. 349-57):
 - Remove *Sojourners* from the list of ecumenical organizations as it does not formally belong to the category of ecumenical organizations. (p.350)

- Change the reference to a “2018 revision of the Ecumenical Charter” to “2019 revision of the Ecumenical Charter.” (p.350)
- Update the language of “fraternal delegates” to “ecumenical delegates” to maintain linguistic conformity throughout the document (p.355)

Grounds:

- 1) This revision makes our ecumenical categorization system a more hospitable and relationally integrated avenue for affiliation with the CRCNA for churches outside of the United States and Canada.
 - 2) This revision takes into account the rich diversity of engagement with other churches and denominations already present throughout the life of the CRCNA at its various organizational levels.
 - 3) This revision simplifies and makes more usable the system of bilateral categories for all the organizational levels of our church.
 - 4) This revision recognizes and seeks to resolve the relational inconsistency of recognizing or *being* with another church without *doing* actions appropriate to the relationship, and vice-versa.
 - 5) This revision strikes a balance between organizing and regulating what *is* and giving the freedom needed for missional responsiveness.
 - 6) This revision cleans up and simplifies the language and function of the Ecumenical Charter.
 - 7) This revision is an important step toward creating a larger functional/cultural shift toward engaging in ever-healthier ways relationally with other Christian churches.
- b. That synod adopt the following operating principles for use by denominational agencies and ministries:
- CRCNA agencies and ministries should be encouraged, where possible and feasible, to give priority to CRCNA/EIRC established relationships in their collaboration efforts with partners.
 - CRCNA agencies should keep the EIRC updated annually about their current ecclesial partnerships via the executive director, Ministries Leadership Council, and annual strategic conversations directly with the EIRC. The other denominational ministries should update the EIRC via the Ministries Leadership Council and by representation of the director of ministries and administration or the Canadian ministries director.

Grounds:

- 1) CRCNA agencies and ministries already follow the Ministries Leadership Council's approved guidelines and processes for establishing collaboration with non-CRC entities.
 - 2) These principles provide another step toward effecting a functional/cultural shift that narrows the gap between our *being* and *doing* with other churches/denominations.
 - 3) These principles are in line with the corresponding changes proposed in the Ecumenical Charter revision.
5. That synod recommend the condensed version of the Ecumenical Charter as found in Appendix F to local churches and classes as a guide for their engagement with other churches and denominations, subject to the adoption of the accompanying Church Order changes by Synod 2020.

Grounds:

- a. This is a useful tool for helping congregations and classes to ground and frame their own work with other Christian denominations/churches biblically and practically.
 - b. This action is another cultural/functional step in bridging the gap between the diversity of relationships engaged at the various levels of our denominational life.
6. That synod express its gratitude to the ad hoc committee members: Gary Bekker (Christian Reformed World Missions, then Timothy Leadership Training Institute), Peter Bulthuis (World Renew), Moses Chung (Christian Reformed Home Missions, for the first half of the work), Anthony Elenbaas (Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee), Zachary King (Resonate Global Mission, for the final year of the work), Jim Payton (former Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee chair, for the final year of the work), Darren Roorda (chair, Canadian Ministries Director), and Kurt Selles (Back to God Ministries International).
 7. That synod take note that in 2019 *The Canadian Council of Churches* is celebrating its 75th anniversary and to instruct the EIRC to see that due recognition is given to this event.