

## **Appendix C**

### **The Belhar Confession: What the CRC Can Do with This Gift**

#### **I. Introduction**

Synod 2007 mandated the Interchurch Relations Committee (IRC) to study and assess the Belhar Confession and to present recommendations concerning it to Synod 2009. This report is in response to that mandate, and the IRC is pleased to bring these recommendations for discussion. In addition to extensive discussion within the IRC itself, this report reflects the contributions of all who were invited to participate in fourteen focus groups conducted during the first six months of 2008. The IRC has also benefited from materials provided by the Reformed Church in America and from First Seattle CRC. The level of interest in the CRC about the discussion of the Belhar Confession has been encouraging and gratifying.

A summary of the focus group responses follows:

- The participants were unanimous in the conviction that the CRC should develop a meaningful response to the Belhar Confession.
- A few of the participants suggested that it would be adequate for the CRC to receive the Belhar Confession “as information and with appreciation.”
- A number of the participants suggested that the Belhar Confession should be adopted as the “fourth confession” and become part of the confessional basis of the CRC.
- There was a broad consensus that synod will need to be very conscious of the impact of any decision made concerning the Belhar Confession—an impact both within the CRC as well as with respect to the CRC’s ecumenical partners.
- There are no overriding theological issues in the Belhar Confession that would prevent the CRC from adopting or strongly endorsing it.
- If synod judges that adopting the Belhar Confession is problematic, then it is desirable that the Belhar Confession at least be endorsed by synod as an important statement on church unity, reconciliation, and justice.

The IRC believes that it would be helpful to provide the delegates to Synod 2009 the same information on the background and questions about the Belhar Confession that the focus groups received.

#### *A. Why is the CRC considering the Belhar Confession?*

The Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) has given the Belhar Confession as a gift to the worldwide Reformed community because the use or application of this confession in the life of the church is far wider than its original context. The URCSA has asked Reformed churches around the world—by way of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Reformed Ecumenical Council (REC)—to consider adopting the Belhar Confession so as to make it a part of the global

Reformed confessional basis (*Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 197-200; *Agenda for Synod 2003*, pp. 235, 246; *Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 592).

## B. History of the Belhar Confession's development

### 1. The Development of churches in South Africa

- Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in South Africa established in 1652; three confessions: Heidelberg Catechism (HC), Belgic Confession (BC), and Canons of Dort (CD); “white” denomination associated with the system of apartheid.
- Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) established in 1881 by the exclusively white DRC for people of color.
- Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) established in 1951 for “blacks.”
- Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) established in 1994; the DRMC joined with the DRCA.

### 2. Dates leading up to the Belhar Confession

- 1652 – The Dutch formed a station at the Cape and introduced slavery.
- 1857 – The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa decided to have separate services for “colored” members (discrimination at the Lord’s Supper was already occurring well before 1857).
- 1881 – The Dutch Reformed Mission Church was established by the white Dutch Reformed Church for people of color.
- 1951 – The Dutch Reformed Church in Africa was established for “blacks.”
- 1978 – The Dutch Reformed Mission Church and Dutch Reformed Church in Africa decided to work for unity, an ideal that took sixteen years to fulfill. In the process, the Belhar Confession was formulated (1982).
- 1982 – The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), with Dr. Allan Boesak serving as president, declared a *status confessionis* concerning apartheid. *Status confessionis* is a Latin term meaning that which is foundational for belief and behavior and must be affirmed by professing members of the church. In addition to calling apartheid a heresy, WARC suspended the white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

Later that same year, the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (meeting in Belhar) also declared a *status confessionis* regarding apartheid, reasserting that it is a heresy and a misrepresentation of the gospel. In addition, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church drafted a confession dealing with three issues: (1) the unity of the church, (2) reconciliation in Christ, and (3) the justice of God. The synod adopted an official accompanying letter to explain the decision to draft the confession and to attest to the seriousness, spirit, and purpose behind it. The beginning of the accompanying letter states:

We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but

only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgment, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. . . . We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. . . . This confession is not aimed at specific people or churches. . . . This confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soul-searching together, a joint-wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent. . . . Our prayer is that this act of confession . . . will be reconciling and uniting.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting Belhar Confession was adopted by the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and Dutch Reformed Church in Africa. When these denominations united in 1994, the newly formed Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa reaffirmed the Belhar Confession as one of its four confessions. The Dutch Reformed Church synod refused to adopt it as an official confession of faith, viewing it as a product of liberation theology. After much debate, the Dutch Reformed Church synod of 2004 ruled that each congregation could make its own decision.

The question whether the Belhar Confession reflects the tenets of “liberation theology” has been frequently discussed and is addressed again in section II, B of this report.

### C. *History of the Belhar Confession and related matters in the CRC*

It is important to note that the CRC has a history of its own related to the Belhar Confession. What follows is a summary of that history (much of it taken from material prepared by Dr. David Rylaarsdam of Calvin Theological Seminary). Synod has, on several occasions, encouraged further consideration of the Belhar within the CRC.

- 1959 – “In view of the racial tensions and the flagrant violation of the scriptural principle of equality occurring in society and the church both in America and in our world, the church has a calling to register a clear and strong witness to her members and her world” (*Acts of Synod 1959*, p. 84).
- 1984 – “The IRC is giving careful consideration to the synodical decisions of the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] at its meeting in 1982, particularly the New Confession which is adopted” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 172). “It is also essential for our denomination to relate with integrity to those who long and work for racial justice in South Africa” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, p. 220). “Furthermore, the confession adopted by the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] can only be judged to be in essential accord with the declarations on race issued by the [Reformed Ecumenical Council] and by synods of the CRC. . . . In view of the relation of ecclesiastical fellowship that exists between the CRC and the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] and other Reformed churches

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<sup>1</sup> *Reformed Journal* 34.5 (1984): pp. 23-24.

- in South Africa . . . , and in view of the ecumenical relationship of the CRC with the Reformed churches of South Africa in the Reformed Ecumenical Council, it is incumbent on the CRC, out of integrity toward these relationships, to judge the rightness of the judgment of the [Dutch Reformed Mission Church] concerning apartheid (that it is a sin) and the “moral and theological justification of it” (that it is a theological heresy) and concerning the faithfulness of the Reformed confessions and Scripture of the . . . new confessional statement. As for the latter, it is our judgment that the new confessional statement is in accord with the decisions of several synods of the CRC” (*Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 602-3).
- 1985 – “Further informal discussions were held [with the Gereformeerde Kerk in South Africa] on such questions as the relations between the constituent synods of the ‘Algemene Sinode,’ reactions to the Belhar Confession, and the assessment of the recent constitutional changes in South Africa” (*Acts of Synod 1985*, p. 211).
  - 1989 – “That synod instruct the IRC to study the Belhar Confession and present recommendations to Synod 1990 in response to the REC request” (*Acts of Synod 1989*, p. 497).
  - 1990 – “That synod endorse the IRC’s evaluation (pp. 217-219) which judges that the Belhar Confession is in harmony with ‘the Reformed faith as a body of truth’ articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and is in basic agreement with REC and CRC decisions on race made over the past decades; and, therefore, that synod declare that it has no objection to its inclusion in the list of Reformed confessions in Article II of the REC constitution” (*Acts of Synod 1990*, p. 625). *Note:* At a subsequent meeting of REC the recommendation to add the Belhar Confession to Article II of the REC Constitution was vigorously debated but then not adopted. Nevertheless, it is assumed that the position of the synod of the CRC stands.
  - 1996 – Synod considered an extensive report from its Committee to Articulate Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God (*Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 510-15, 595-619). This report was published in 1996 (by Faith Alive Christian Resources) under the title *God’s Diverse and Unified Family*.
  - 1997 – “We believe . . . the ministry of racial reconciliation has to take a greater role and priority in the ministries of the Christian Reformed Church. . . . We therefore urge synod to increase its efforts and its commitment toward the advancement of racial reconciliation” (Pastoral Ministries Report, *Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 686).
  - 1999 – “The general synodical commission of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa met in Bloemfontein on October 19-22, 1998. The CRC delegation was warmly welcomed to the meeting and was permitted a presence at the discussion table for the duration of its visit. We brought greetings, and in response we received greetings to our churches in which the relationship between our churches was prized, our well-being was prayed for, and our churches were challenged to adopt the Belhar Confession as their own. . . . The URCSA’s challenge to the CRC to adopt the Belhar Confession

- needs further reflection. . . . The URCSA believes it is necessary that the Belhar Confession be accepted as part of the confessional basis of a new, unified church in South Africa. To the URCSA this is a nonnegotiable condition” (*Agenda for Synod 1999*, pp. 197-200).
- 2003 – “The general secretary of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) reiterated what he had told the IRC earlier, namely that URCSA was asking churches in ecclesiastical fellowship with it to study the Belhar Confession to determine what place that confession might take among the faith statements of the respective denominations. The IRC has received this oral invitation as an official request from the URCSA and has committed itself to review and study the Belhar with a view to making a recommendation to synod about its status sometime in the future” (*Agenda for Synod 2003*, p. 235). “The CRC did make an initial decision regarding Belhar in 1990 when it said that the Belhar Confession ‘is in harmony with “the Reformed faith as a body of truth” articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and is in basic agreement with REC and CRC decisions on race made over the past decades. . . .’ (*Acts of Synod 1990*, p.625). . . . Synod 1990, however, did not say anything about the Belhar Confession’s status within the CRC itself, and that is the kind of decision the URCSA would like the CRC to consider” (*Agenda for Synod 2003*, p. 246).
  - 2004 – “The BOT is also committed to seeing the implementation of the decisions made in 1996 when synod adopted the report *God’s Diverse and Unified Family*” (Board of Trustees Report, *Agenda for Synod 2004*, p. 68). “The Christian Reformed Church has always had a good track record on addressing hunger and poverty but has realized that more needs to be done to address the *root causes* of world hunger. Understanding that hunger is always part of a complex web of natural disasters, poverty, oppression, structural injustice, and spiritual alienation, the CRC formed the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action (OSJHA) to address these root causes. Today, the OSJHA works to develop a deeper understanding of, and response to, God’s call to let justice flow like a river in our personal and communal lives and in the structures of our societies, especially as it relates to hunger and poverty” (*Agenda for Synod 2004*, pp. 68-69).
  - 2005 – “The CRC and RCA delegations first met in December 2002. Three items were given priority for consideration: (1) the so-called orderly exchange of ministers from one denomination to the other, (2) a unified approach to dealing with the Belhar Confession as requested by the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa, and (3) a concerted effort to find new ways to cooperate in ministry and among our congregations and classes. Our discussions with representatives of the RCA have been guided by the following agreed upon items (as reported to Synod 2003): . . . Examine the Belhar Confession together because the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) has requested both the RCA and the CRC to study and adopt the Belhar. It may be possible for our two denominations to formulate a united statement of agreement on it. That would be a powerful statement to the URCSA” (*Agenda for Synod 2005*, p. 240). “The RCA has made great strides

toward a greater understanding and acceptance of the Belhar Confession. The CRC participants in the dialogue group encouraged the RCA to produce their study materials in a form that would allow for its use as a discussion guide in the CRC context” (*Agenda for Synod 2005*, p. 241).

- 2007 – “That synod encourage the ongoing work of the Interchurch Relations Committee to inform and engage the churches concerning the Belhar Confession and the issues raised by it through: (1) a greater dissemination of the Belhar Confession to the congregations in order to familiarize the denomination with it and the issues raised by it, and (2) regional level dialogues to be initiated by the Interchurch Relations Committee as part of their process of expediting a recommendation to Synod 2009” (*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 592).

The RCA synod of 2007 provisionally adopted the Belhar Confession, which means that it will be considered for final adoption by the RCA synod in 2009. The polity of the RCA requires that for the final adoption to take effect the decision of the synod must be ratified by a two-thirds majority vote of the classes of the RCA. The result of that vote will then be reported to the RCA synod of 2010.

During the time of the IRC’s consideration, and in conversation with representatives of the RCA, it was judged that a statement of introduction to the Belhar would help present the confession in the North American context. A joint statement was developed and is included in this report as Appendix C-1.

In response to the encouragement of our own Synod 2007, the IRC offered a copy of the Belhar Confession study guide, *Unity, Reconciliation, and Justice*, to every congregation in the CRC. This study guide was produced by the RCA and we were granted permission to promote its use in the CRC. Several hundred requests for copies were fulfilled. The IRC also initiated a series of focus group discussions about the Belhar Confession. The responses of these groups are in large part reflected in this report:

- Calvin Theological Seminary faculty
- Northwest Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota at Dordt College
- Great Lakes region at Trinity Christian College
- Great Lakes region at Ridgewood CRC, Jenison
- Great Lakes region at Seymour CRC, Grand Rapids
- Ontario region in Guelph
- Ontario region in Ottawa
- East Coast, United States, in North Haledon, New Jersey
- Northwest and British Columbia in Lynden, Washington
- Alberta at The King’s University College, Edmonton
- California at Rosewood CRC, Bellflower
- Black and Reformed Leadership representatives
- Board of Trustees of the CRCNA
- Interdenominational Matters Advisory Committee at Synod 2008

The summary of synodical decisions listed above concerning the history of the Belhar Confession and related matters in the CRC references the decisions of Synod 1996. At that time synod adopted a comprehensive statement titled *God's Diverse and Unified Family*. The IRC encourages all who are seriously interested in struggling with issues surrounding unity and reconciliation to read the report attached below as Appendix C-4. While synodical reports are at risk of collecting dust on bookshelves, this particular report is critical to the discussion on the Belhar Confession. There is substantial consistency in the content of synod's decisions concerning matters of racial justice and what is confessed in the language of the Belhar Confession.

That consistency is clearly demonstrated in Synod 1996's adoption of the twelve biblical and theological principles as follows:

#### **Creation**

1. The world as God created it is rich and God glorifying in its diversity.
2. The created world with all its diversity has its unity in the one God, who created it through Jesus Christ.
3. The unity and diversity of the human race and of created reality reflect the unity and diversity of the triune God (namely, his oneness and threeness).

#### **Fall**

4. A fundamental effect of sin is the breakdown of the community.

#### **New Creation**

5. The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God's eternal plan for the ages.
6. Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God's saving work.
7. Already in the old covenant the scope of God's mission is racially and ethnically inclusive.
8. In Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church, God gives new power to the church, power to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.
9. The church is God's strategic vehicle for embodying, proclaiming, and promoting the unity and diversity of the new creation.
10. God calls Christians to find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Jesus Christ.
11. Obedience in matters of racial reconciliation calls us, individually and corporately, to continually repent, to strive for justice, and to battle the powers of evil.
12. Christians live and work in the hope that one day the reconciliation of all things will be fully realized.

*(Acts of Synod 1996, pp. 512-13)*

Following the adoption of these principles, Synod 1996 also adopted the following recommendations:

That synod, on the basis of the above principles, declare that to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people, and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God's Word and the Reformed confessions.

*Grounds:*

- a. The . . . report demonstrates that the Bible declares this reconciled community to be God's will.
- b. The confessions declare that the catholicity of the church means that Christ "gathers, protects, and preserves" the church "out of the entire human race" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21 [Q. and A. 54]).

[And] that synod call the whole church—individual members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA—to respond to the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by committing themselves

- a. To pray and work for the increased enfolding of ethnic-minority persons into the CRCNA in order to reflect more fully the racial and ethnic diversity of Canada and the United States.
- b. To ensure the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence at all levels of denominational life.

*(Acts of Synod 1996, p. 513)*

While these decisions of Synod 1996 do not directly address the issues surrounding the CRC's adoption of the Belhar Confession, they do lay the biblical and theological framework for giving serious consideration to the Belhar Confession's emphasis on unity, reconciliation, and justice. The 1996 decisions of synod focus primarily on the one unified family of God while the Belhar Confession covers a broader area of biblical teaching. Nevertheless, the consistency and overlap between these two sources is striking and can be considered as complementary.

## **II. Content of the Belhar Confession**

### *A. An overview*

Like the Barmen Declaration (1934), the Belhar Confession is a declaration of faith that emerged when certain practices of the church were so clearly contrary to biblical teaching that the integrity of the proclamation of the gospel was at stake. The Belhar Confession focuses not only on the importance of believing and proclaiming biblical principles aright but also on the importance of obedient living and costly discipleship. The Belhar Confession's call for faithfulness in the areas of unity, justice, and reconciliation is similar to the Presbyterian Confession of 1967 with its four strong declarations against domination, nationalism, indifference to poverty, and lack of compassion. The five articles of the Belhar Confession (Appendix C-3) and its tone-setting Accompanying Letter (Appendix C-2) are as follows:

1. Faith in the triune God

Like the Barmen Declaration, the Belhar Confession first confesses faith in the triune God. However, it goes further in identifying the practices of such a God “who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit.” This phrase clearly echoes Heidelberg Catechism Q. and A. 54 (Lord’s Day 21).

2. Unity of the church

The structure of the Belhar Confession is similar to the Canons of Dort, a confession that also arose out of a serious controversy in the church. Articles 2-4 of the Belhar begin by affirming biblical doctrines and then reject teachings that are contrary to Scripture.

3. Reconciliation of people in Christ.

4. God’s justice and care for the suffering and the call of the church to work against injustice.

5. A call to confess and practice the teaching of the Belhar Confession.

All of the confessions adopted since the Protestant Reformation emerged within specific circumstances. Likewise, the Belhar Confession emerged out of a specific South African experience. However, the themes of the Belhar Confession are biblical and universal. Even if one assumes the Belhar Confession to be primarily a response to the practice of forced (racial) segregation in South Africa (though its themes reach far beyond the issues of racial discrimination alone), the global picture reflects that racial divisions are a cancer-like reality in many cultures. The North American experience is no exception. Forced segregation has also been practiced in both Canada and the United States, and the practice of functional racial divisions is deeply embedded in North American culture (e.g., Native-American boarding schools, reservations, the containment of Japanese during World War II, public school segregation, the Timothy Christian School episode in CRC history, etc.). In that sense the Belhar Confession speaks to the context of life in the CRC as well as the general cultural setting within which CRC members live and work.

Among the nearly 200 participants in the focus groups, not a single voice was raised claiming that the Belhar Confession lacks applicability to the North American context. How it ought to be addressed and what options synod has for dealing with it were discussed extensively. Responses ranged from the suggestion that synod gratefully note and receive the Belhar Confession as the testimony of the South African churches that have adopted it, to the suggestion that the synod of the CRC (like the synod of the RCA) adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confessional testimony alongside the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Stating the range of responses does not mean that participants

were equally divided – or even that those preferring one option were unwilling to consider an alternative. The fact is that responses favorable to considering the Belhar Confession in some substantial way were by far in the majority. There is a strong conviction among many participants that the Belhar Confession raises deep issues reflected in our biblical faith and understanding of what the core gospel is about (see section C, 2 below).

Finally, the focus group discussions also dealt with questions raised about issues that might flow from the use of the Belhar Confession. For example, the statement “that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.” Does such a declaration exclude consideration of a member’s ethical and moral life-style practices? IRC believes that such statements need not to be interpreted as excluding all other considerations. In fact, at the 2008 synod meeting of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa it was suggested that the Belhar Confession demands the inclusion of all people into the membership and offices of the church, including those committed to same-sex relationships. It is noted, however, that the synod firmly rejected this suggested interpretation as flowing from the Belhar Confession as adopted in 1984.

#### *B. Is the Belhar Confession biblical?*

In 1990 the CRC synod endorsed the IRC’s evaluation “that the Belhar Confession is in harmony with ‘the Reformed faith as a body of truth’ articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and is in basic agreement with REC and CRC decisions on race made over the past decades; and, therefore, that synod declare that it has no objection to its inclusion in the list of Reformed confessions in Article II of the REC constitution.”<sup>2</sup>

The fact that the synod of the Christian Reformed Church said what it did in 1990 does not deny that a few Reformed Christians have drawn attention to a phrase in the Belhar Confession’s Article 4 that states, “We believe . . . that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is *in a special way* the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged. . . .” What does “in a special way” mean? Does this language suggest an implied endorsement of what is known as “liberation theology”?

Liberation theology can be described in a variety of ways, but at its core it is “an interpretation of religious faith from the perspective of the poor, oppressed and victimized” (B.A. Robinson). It is true that the Belhar Confession emerged out of the crucible of suffering, and it is also true that the language of the Belhar Confession clearly calls the church to recognize “that God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry” (Art. 4). But such language is not the exclusive domain of liberation theology, and the phrase “that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” does not mean that the Belhar Confession is flawed in its biblical understanding of God’s concern.

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<sup>2</sup>Acts of Synod 1990, p. 625.

The IRC believes that the phrase “in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged” should be read in the context of the rest of the article and notes that the language of this article is remarkably close to the language of Scripture. It is possible to read into almost any phraseology some unintended meaning and it is more likely, as John de Gruchy argues, that the Belhar actually provides “a creative Reformed response to the challenge of liberation theology.”<sup>3</sup>

C. *Would the Belhar Confession enrich the CRC’s confessional basis?*

Here follows a rationale for adopting the Belhar Confession:

1. The Belhar fills a significant gap. There is little mention in our three historic Reformed confessions (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort) of the large biblical themes of unity, reconciliation, and justice. These three confessions were written within sixty years of each other and were adopted within the then context of conditions in northern Europe. Much has been learned about the fullness of the Reformed faith since that time, and the Belhar Confession supplements the confessions that have guided Reformed churches.
2. The Belhar Confession’s content is the gospel and is fundamental to our faith. The biblical themes of the Belhar Confession are larger in Scripture than some of the themes the historic confessions focus on. For example, Scripture is less explicit about total depravity than the obligation for God’s people to live in unity. Further, countless passages of Scripture indicate God’s concern about justice for the poor, widows, orphans, the suffering, and so on. This scriptural emphasis is substantially greater than the verses addressing the doctrine of reprobation.
3. The Belhar Confession addresses key issues of concern to all churches. For example, racism and other forms of exclusion are universal. The Belhar Confession is currently being studied by a number of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. A leader of the Middle Eastern Council of Churches (MECC) believes that the Belhar is highly relevant to the conflict in Palestine and Israel.
4. The time and place of the Belhar Confession’s origin expand the breadth of our confessional base, making it more representative of worldwide Reformed faith throughout history. What is particularly significant is that the Belhar Confession is the first and only confessional contribution received from the Reformed community in the Southern Hemisphere. Also, the Belhar Confession is the only confession in the global Reformed community’s history that wasn’t written during the sixty-year period from 1561 to 1619.

<sup>3</sup> John W. de Gruchy, “The Church Always Reforming,” *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, ns. 12, no. 2 (1991), p. 174. For more than 30 years, John de Gruchy was a Professor of Christian Studies at the University of Cape Town and served as an ordained minister of the United Congregational Church of South Africa. A much-published author, de Gruchy received the Karl Barth Prize in 2000 from the Evangelical Church in Germany for his work on Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

5. The Belhar Confession can enrich our Christian way of life. As the URCSA points out, the Belhar Confession functions as “an instrument for profound self-examination, to help determine whether the church really lives by the faith it proclaims.” The Belhar Confession’s theological confrontation of sin has made a contribution to the reconciliation effort among Reformed churches in Southern Africa and has aided the process of reconciliation within the nation of South Africa. It may do so elsewhere. In South Africa, the Belhar Confession has also been integrated into Christian music, worship, and personal and corporate confessions of guilt. It can be used in the same way by CRC congregations.
6. The CRC is part of the global Reformed fellowship of churches and, in the spirit of our own ecumenical charter and previous synodical decisions, we identify with the experiences of the Reformed churches worldwide. There is much to be said for embracing the confessional identity of the larger church family and standing in solidarity with them for the scriptural teaching about unity, reconciliation, and justice.

### **III. Options considered by the IRC**

There were several options (not necessarily of equal weight) considered by the IRC:

#### *A. Option 1: Propose as a fourth confession (with or without a preamble)*

That Synod 2009 propose the adoption of the Belhar Confession as its fourth confession (on par with the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort). Because such an affirmative action involves a substantial change in the CRC’s present confessional basis, as well as changes in several Church Order Articles and related Supplements, a subsequent synod (2012) would need to adopt the proposal of Synod 2009. The IRC adopted the following ground for this option:

This is consistent with the intent of Church Order Article 47 and its Supplement for a confessional matter of this magnitude.

#### *B. Option 2: Adopt as an ecumenical confession*

That Synod 2009 adopt the Belhar Confession and place it in a new category called “ecumenical confessions.” Such a category could function like Presbyterian confessions, but they would not have the same weight as the CRC’s three main confessions.

#### *C. Option 3: Approve as a statement of faith*

That Synod 2009 approve the Belhar Confession as an important statement of faith on par with the Contemporary Testimony.

After careful review of the options considered, the IRC decided unanimously to recommend Option 1 because it is the most consistent with our understanding of the core of the gospel and previous synodical declarations on racial justice, unity, and reconciliation. As indicated above under option 1, because the adoption of a confession is a significant decision in the life of the church, the IRC recommends that Synod 2009 propose to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as the fourth confession of the CRC.

#### IV. Recommendations

A. That synod propose to Synod 2012 the adoption of the Belhar Confession as part of the standards of unity of the CRC (as a fourth confession) and authorize the revision of Church Order Supplement, Articles 5, 23-a, and 32-d and the Public Declaration of Agreement to reflect that adoption.

##### *Grounds:*

1. It is important at this time for the CRC to formally state its commitment to, and to live out, the biblical principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
2. Adopting the Belhar Confession is an important testimony to the membership of the CRC that together we stand firm on matters that are rooted in scriptural teaching and flow from the heart of God.
3. It is an important testimony to Reformed churches worldwide that the CRC will stand with them in matters of confessional integrity.
4. Adopting the Belhar Confession is consistent with the decision of Synod 1996 when it adopted the recommendations concerning *God's Diverse and Unified Family*.
5. This action would mean that the CRC is taking this step in concert with the RCA, a desire that previous synods have affirmed.
6. Since previous synods have expressed no difficulty with the Belhar Confession on biblical grounds, and considering Dutch Reformed shortcomings over the past four hundred years (e.g., slave trade on the Gold Coast, numerous denominational schisms), this action would testify to our ecumenical partners and the world (as well as CRC members committed to unity, reconciliation, and social justice) that the CRC is taking a public stand to promote the principles of unity, reconciliation, and justice.
7. While there is no direct reference by name to the historic Reformed confessions in the Church Order itself, the Supplement to the Church Order, Article 5 (Form of Subscription), does list the confessions by name.
8. Allowing for a three-year period of reflection (2009-2012) is consistent with the intent of Church Order Article 47 and its Supplement for a confessional matter of this magnitude. The additional time is given to the churches to adequately study and reflect on the proposal and be better prepared for response.

B. That Synod 2009 authorize the IRC to promote the study of the Belhar Confession in the churches during this three-year period, and designate the IRC to represent Synod 2009's proposal to adopt the Belhar Confession at the meeting of Synod 2012.

C. That synod express its gratitude to the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa for enriching the heritage of Reformed churches worldwide by developing and writing the Belhar Confession.

*Grounds:*

1. The themes of unity, reconciliation, and social justice as expressed in the Belhar Confession are important dimensions of our common faith in obedience to the demands of biblical teaching.
2. The testimony of the Reformed family of churches from the Southern Hemisphere is an important contribution to the awareness and faith of churches in other parts of the world.
3. The Christian Reformed Church in North America wishes to stand in solidarity with brothers and sisters who together bear witness to all matters that reflect “the heart of the gospel.”
4. Synod 2009 affirms the decision of Synod 1990, which stated that “the Belhar Confession is in harmony with ‘the Reformed faith as a body of truth’ articulated in the historic Reformed confessions. . . .”

## **Appendix C-1**

### **The Belhar Confession: A Statement of Introduction by the CRC and the RCA**

From the very beginnings of the church, often in times of crisis or threat, Christians have sought ways to say to the world, “Because of our faith in Jesus Christ, this is who we are, what we believe, and what we intend to do.” These statements of faith, including the ecumenical creeds and the historic Reformed confessions, though centuries old and far removed from their place of origin, still guide our understanding of Scripture and of faith today, and of the life they call us to live.

In the late 20th century the leaders of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa, like Christian leaders centuries before them, stepped forward to confront yet another critical issue that threatened the very core of the gospel message. The church and the society in which it ministered were torn by internal conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and subjugation of the disenfranchised. From this crucible of suffering emerged the Belhar Confession, a biblically based doctrinal standard of justice, reconciliation, and unity. This confession is intended to guide not only the personal lives of God’s children but also the whole body of Christ as it speaks and lives out God’s will—“to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly” with God (Mic. 6:8).

Like the confessions that preceded it, the Belhar Confession becomes a gift from a particular expression of the church to Christians in other parts of the world—a testimony for all of God’s people in our time. South Africa is not alone in its journey with conflict, injustice, racism, poverty, and the subjugation of the disenfranchised. The history of oppression in our own countries, and the reality of racism and injustice in our own time call for the voice of the Christian church to be heard with unmistakable clarity—to confess that the Lord of life, who entrusted to us the “message of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19), is the Lord of our hopes and aspirations for a just and reconciled people.

Our South African brothers and sisters have asked us to join them in confession, forgiveness, and healing by formal adoption of the Belhar Confession, that we might together say it aloud and live by it. May our prayer as we respond mirror the words in the “Accompanying Letter” to be read as a preface to the confession: “Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. . . .”

**Appendix C-2**  
**Original 1986 Accompanying Letter to the Belhar Confession**  
**Issued by the Moderamen of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa**

1. We are deeply conscious that moments of such seriousness can arise in the life of the Church that it may feel the need to confess its faith anew in the light of a specific situation. We are aware that such an act of confession is not lightly undertaken, but only if it is considered that the heart of the gospel is so threatened as to be at stake. In our judgment, the present church and political situation in our country and particularly within the Dutch Reformed church family calls for such a decision. Accordingly, we make this confession not as a contribution to a theological debate, nor as a new summary of our beliefs, but as a cry from the heart, as something we are obliged to do for the sake of the gospel in view of the times in which we stand. Along with many, we confess our guilt, in that we have not always witnessed clearly enough in our situation and so are jointly responsible for the way in which those things which were experienced as sin and confessed to be sin have grown in time to seem self-evidently right and to be ideologies foreign to the Scriptures. As a result, many have been given the impression that the gospel was not really at stake. We make this confession because we are convinced that all sorts of theological arguments have contributed to so disproportionate an emphasis on some aspects of the truth that it has in effect become a lie.

2. We are aware that the only authority for such a confession and the only grounds on which it may be made are the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God. Being fully aware of the risk involved in taking this step, we are nevertheless convinced that we have no alternative. Furthermore, we are aware that no other motives or convictions, however valid they may be, would give us the right to confess in this way. An act of confession may only be made by the Church for the sake of its purity and credibility and that of its message. As solemnly as we are able, we hereby declare before men that our only motive lies in our fear that the truth and power of the gospel itself is threatened in this situation. We do not wish to serve any group interests, advance the cause of any factions, promote any theologies, or achieve any ulterior purposes. Yet, having said this, we know that our deepest intentions may only be judged at their true value by him before whom all is revealed. We do not make this confession from his throne and from on high, but before his throne and before men. We plead, therefore, that this confession would not be misused by anyone with ulterior motives and also that it should not be resisted to serve such motives. Our earnest desire is to lay no false stumbling blocks in the way, but to point to the true stumbling block, Jesus Christ the rock.

3. This confession is not aimed at specific people or groups of people or a church or churches. We proclaim it against a false doctrine, against an ideological distortion which threatens the gospel itself in our church and our country. Our heartfelt longing is that no one will identify himself with this objectionable doctrine and that all who have been wholly or partially blinded by it will turn themselves away from it. We are deeply aware of the deceiving nature of such a false doctrine and know that many who have been conditioned by it have to a greater or lesser extent learnt to take a half-truth for the whole. For this reason we do not doubt the Christian faith of many such people, their sincerity, honor, integrity, and good intentions and their in many ways estimable practice

and conduct. However, it is precisely because we know the power of deception that we know we are not liberated by the seriousness, sincerity, or intensity of our certainties, but only by the truth in the Son. Our church and our land have an intense need of such liberation. Therefore it is that we speak pleadingly rather than accusingly. We plead for reconciliation, that true reconciliation which follows on conversion and change of attitudes and structures. And while we do so we are aware that an act of confession is a two-edged sword, that none of us can throw the first stone, and none is without a beam in his own eye. We know that the attitudes and conduct which work against the gospel are present in all of us and will continue to be so. Therefore this confession must be seen as a call to a continuous process of soul-searching together, a joint wrestling with the issues, and a readiness to repent in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in a broken world. It is certainly not intended as an act of self-justification and intolerance, for that would disqualify us in the very act of preaching to others.

4. Our prayer is that this act of confession will not place false stumbling blocks in the way and thereby cause and foster false divisions, but rather that it will be reconciling and uniting. We know that such an act of confession and process of reconciliation will necessarily involve much pain and sadness. It demands the pain of repentance, remorse, and confession; the pain of individual and collective renewal and a changed way of life. It places us on a road whose end we can neither foresee nor manipulate to our own desire. On this road we shall unavoidably suffer intense growing pains while we struggle to conquer alienation, bitterness, irreconciliation, and fear. We shall have to come to know and encounter both ourselves and others in new ways. We are only too well aware that this confession calls for the dismantling of structures of thought, of church, and of society which have developed over many years. However, we confess that for the sake of the gospel, we have no other choice. We pray that our brothers and sisters throughout the Dutch Reformed church family, but also outside it, will want to make this new beginning with us, so that we can be free together and together may walk the road of reconciliation and justice. Accordingly, our prayer is that the pain and sadness we speak of will be pain and sadness that lead to salvation. We believe that this is possible in the power of our Lord and by his Spirit. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope, liberation, salvation, and true peace to our country.

**Appendix C-3**  
**Confession of Belhar**  
**September 1986**

1. **We believe** in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.
2. **We believe** in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family.

**We believe**

- that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another (Eph. 2:11-22);
- that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain (Eph. 4:1-16);
- that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted (John 17:20-23);
- that this unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope; together come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ; together are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity; together know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ that we need one another and upbuild one another, admonishing and comforting one another; that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness; pray together; together serve God in this world; and together fight against all which may threaten or hinder this unity (Phil. 2:1-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; John 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; Eph. 4:1-6; Eph. 3:14-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; Gal. 6:2; 2 Cor. 1:3-4);
- that this unity can be established only in freedom and not under constraint; that the variety of spiritual gifts, opportunities, backgrounds, convictions, as well as the various languages and cultures, are by virtue of the reconciliation in Christ, opportunities for mutual service and enrichment within the one visible people of God (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:7-13; Gal. 3:27-28; James 2:1-13);

- that true faith in Jesus Christ is the only condition for membership of this church.

### **Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which absolutizes either natural diversity or the sinful separation of people in such a way that this absolutization hinders or breaks the visible and active unity of the church, or even leads to the establishment of a separate church formation;
- which professes that this spiritual unity is truly being maintained in the bond of peace while believers of the same confession are in effect alienated from one another for the sake of diversity and in despair of reconciliation;
- which denies that a refusal earnestly to pursue this visible unity as a priceless gift is sin;
- which explicitly or implicitly maintains that descent or any other human or social factor should be a consideration in determining membership of the church.

### **3. We believe**

- that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells (2 Cor. 5:17-21; Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:9; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21-22).
- that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world (Eph. 4:17-6:23; Rom. 6; Col. 1:9-14; Col. 2:13-19; Col. 3:1-4:6);
- that the credibility of this message is seriously affected and its beneficial work obstructed when it is proclaimed in a land which professes to be Christian, but in which the enforced separation of people on a racial basis promotes and perpetuates alienation, hatred and enmity;
- that any teaching which attempts to legitimate such forced separation by appeal to the gospel, and is not prepared to venture on the road of obedience and reconciliation, but rather, out of prejudice, fear, selfishness and unbelief, denies in advance the reconciling power of the gospel, must be considered ideology and false doctrine.

### **Therefore, we reject any doctrine**

- which, in such a situation, sanctions in the name of the gospel or of the will of God the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color and

thereby in advance obstructs and weakens the ministry and experience of reconciliation in Christ.

#### **4. We believe**

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- that God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right (Deut. 32:4; Luke 2:14; John 14:27; Eph. 2:14; Isa. 1:16-17; James 1:27; James 5:1-6; Luke 1:46-55; Luke 6:20-26; Luke 7:22; Luke 16:19-31; Ps. 146; Luke 4:16-19; Rom. 6:13-18; Amos 5);
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

#### **Therefore, we reject any ideology**

- which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

**5. We believe** that, in obedience to Jesus Christ, its only head, the church is called to confess and to do all these things, even though the authorities and human laws might forbid them and punishment and suffering be the consequence (Eph. 4:15-16; Acts 5:29-33; 1 Peter 2:18-25; 1 Peter 3:15-18).

Jesus is Lord.

To the one and only God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be the honor and the glory forever and ever.

*Note:* This is a translation of the original Afrikaans text of the confession as it was adopted by the synod of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in South Africa in 1986. In

1994 the Dutch Reformed Mission Church and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa united to form the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). This inclusive language text was prepared by the Office of Theology and Worship, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

## Appendix C-4 Committee to Articulate Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse Family of God

### I. Mandate

At the request of participants in the Multiethnic Conference of 1992, Synod 1992 adopted the following recommendation:

That Synod 1992 appoint a study committee to engage in a comprehensive review and articulation of the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God.

The study is to include, but not be limited to, the following:

- a. The biblical basis for the development and use of multiethnic leadership.
- b. An assessment of the present criteria for leadership in the life of the CRCNA.
- c. Biblical guidelines for church-planting principles to be used in the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God.

*Grounds:*

- a. The CRC does not have at the present time a clear biblical and theological basis for its multicultural vision.
- b. The CRC's past and present responses to multiculturalism have been based on sociological factors more than on a well-developed biblical articulation.
- c. Racism negates the redemptive intent of the cross, and the presently growing racial tension must be addressed through Jesus Christ and his Word.
- d. The Multiethnic Conference requests this action.

*(Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 720-21)*

### II. Background

#### A. *Brief overview of past synodical declarations on race*

1. Synod 1959, in response to declarations of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1958 (Potchefstroom, South Africa), adopted as its own the declarations of that synod (*Acts of Synod 1959*, pp. 82-84).
2. Synod 1968, in the context of unprecedented racial strife in America's cities, called for a day of prayer for racial reconciliation and adopted a declaration affirming the call of the gospel to racial reconciliation (*Acts of Synod 1968*, pp. 18-20).
3. Synods 1969 and 1977 affirmed Resolutions on Race Relations, which were originally adopted by the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of 1968 (Amsterdam) and were subsequently revised at the Reformed Ecumenical Synods of 1972 (Australia) and 1976 (Cape Town, South Africa) (*Acts of Synod 1969*, pp. 50-52; *Acts of Synod 1977*, p. 34).

## *B. Brief overview of racial and ethnic diversity in the CRCNA*

From the time of its birth in western Michigan in 1857 and for nearly one hundred years to follow, the congregations and members of the Christian Reformed Church in North America remained almost exclusively ethnic Dutch American—except for the few German-American congregations. Although the CRC sent its sons and daughters as missionaries to people of other races and cultures in other lands, for the most part, the task of its “home missionaries” was to gather the sheep of Dutch descent who had scattered beyond the reach of already-established congregations in Canada and the United States.

The earliest notable exception was the denomination’s mission efforts to Native Americans, especially the CRC’s sustained outreach to the Navajo and Zuni nations in Arizona and New Mexico, which began with two missionary couples in 1896. Efforts at urban outreach to non-Dutch neighbors in Grand Rapids and Chicago were initiated as early as the 1920s, although the “converted” generally were kept at a distance—worshiping in chapels, often pastored by unordained men and women, sometimes even steered toward membership in English-speaking congregations from other denominations.

It took an entire century for the church to grant equal status to non-Dutch groups of believers. Prompted by the organization of the believers’ group in Gallup, New Mexico, in late 1956, Synod 1958 advised the classis that this all-Navajo congregation be upgraded from associate-church to full-church status. The 1950s also saw increasing debate over the separate, lesser status of the neighborhood chapels. At this same time, however, the CRC was crossing several other racial and ethnic boundaries as well. Jewish and Chinese ministries were started in Chicago and New York, and African-American pastors were credentialed in Grand Rapids and New York. In the 1960s and following, Hispanic ministry was launched in New Jersey and Florida, Korean churches affiliated in Chicago and Los Angeles, ministries were started among Southeast Asian immigrant groups, and breakthroughs were seen in the forming of multiethnic congregations.

Synod 1959 adopted the Reformed Ecumenical Synod’s twelve-point Declarations on Race, which initially seemed to have little bearing on the life of the denomination. By the mid-1960s, however, as cities burned and national leaders were assassinated, the CRC was forced to deal with race relations head-on. When a group of Black children from Lawndale CRC were denied admission to Timothy Christian School on Chicago’s west side, the matter was brought to synod. The result was the formation of the Race Commission under the auspices of Christian Reformed Home Missions.

Synod 1971 replaced the Race Commission with the Synodical Committee on Race Relations (SCORR). SCORR was provided full-time staff and was mandated to work toward the eradication of racism in the church and in society. Synod also affirmed equality of opportunity for persons from ethnic-minority groups (see note below) and urged the agencies and institutions of the denomination to promote social justice in their

policies and practices. Through broad-based partnership with the churches and agencies, SCORR has consistently supported the development of ethnic-minority leadership in the CRCNA. SCORR also has been unequivocal in its advocacy of racial and ethnic diversity and equality within the CRCNA as a denomination and in relationship to its neighbors—whether in South Africa, south Chicago, or south Grand Rapids.

*Note:* Though it is recognized that all persons are ethnic, i.e., of a national origin and may be in minority in certain contexts or environments, in this report the term *ethnic minority* refers to non-Anglo or non-Caucasian persons and groups.

How racially and ethnically diverse is the Christian Reformed Church? At the writing of this report, the total number of ethnic-minority members is estimated at 15,000 persons, or 5 percent of the denomination's 300,000 members (compared to national averages between 20 percent and 25 percent) in approximately 150 ethnic-minority or multiethnic congregations. This 5 percent includes 7,000 members in the fifty or more Korean congregations and an estimated 8,000 members in predominantly African-American, Chinese, Hispanic, Native American, Southeast Asian, and multiethnic congregations.

Much of this growing diversity has been facilitated by Christian Reformed Home Missions—in partnership with growth-oriented churches, classes, and other agencies. By means of locally based *leadership training programs* and *apprenticeship positions* (formerly called Multiethnic Recruitment), scores of ethnic-minority persons are being further trained for ministry leadership in the CRC. Of all the 150 new and emerging churches receiving CRHM funding annually, more than half are predominantly ethnic-minority or multiethnic, most of which also are led by ethnic-minority pastors. Home Missions' *ethnic-ministry directors* are key resource persons for their respective churches, leaders, and planning groups as well as for their dominant-culture partners. The ethnic-ministry directors oversee the development of contextualized resource and training materials, have a voice in shaping church-development policy, and support the development of ethnic-minority leadership on the CRHM board and in other strategic positions.

The CRC's commitment to multiethnic leadership is reflected in other denominational contexts as well. The commitment of the CRCNA Board of Trustees to racial inclusiveness is demonstrated, among other ways, by its appointment of an African-American director of personnel. The Council of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada has committed itself to addressing the needs and concerns of Indians and Metis in Canada and in recent years also has explored and worked toward ameliorating the causes and impact of racism in Canada with the assistance of a nationwide conference. CRWRC has shown special concern for issues of race and ethnicity, as illustrated by its hiring of ethnic-minority persons on central and regional staff and by its community-development programming. CRC Publications [now Faith Alive Christian Resources] has worked intentionally to recruit and retain ethnic-minority

employees and board members, to improve curriculum sensitivity to multicultural readers, and to obtain ethnic-minority vendors and writers.

Among the denomination's educational institutions, Calvin College employs numerous strategies to encourage multicultural leadership development, including a Minority Concerns Task Force, the president's Multicultural Advisory Council, Minority Fellowship programs for potential new faculty, filling various specialized staff positions with ethnic-minority persons, mentoring services for ethnic-minority students, and a MOSAIC 2000 endowment to provide special scholarship assistance to ten ethnic-minority students annually. Calvin Theological Seminary regrets that it has yet to recruit its first non-Caucasian faculty appointee. At the same time, it has instituted a number of ethnic-minority training programs, conducts an orientation program for ethnic-minority leaders, has a non-Caucasian student population of about 30 percent, and employs ethnic-minority support staff and special lecturers.

Notwithstanding laudatory goals and the long road the CRC has already traveled in race relations, the process and progress have been slow—and there still are many miles to go, on various fronts. For example:

- Ethnic-minority persons working within the agencies, although growing in number, serve primarily in support roles. The ethnic-minority community also remains underrepresented in executive and faculty positions, on denominational boards and committees, and as delegates to synod.
- A disproportionate number of the ethnic-minority pastors receive their training in nontraditional ways, such as through Bible colleges, local training programs, and other seminaries. Credentialing also tends to follow nontraditional paths—admission to ministry on the basis of special need and gifts, or by way of doctrinal conversations, or by ordination as evangelists. (The point is not that nontraditional routes should be discouraged but rather that traditional routes should be reexamined in light of the changing needs of a changing church.)
- Generally speaking, ethnic-minority pastors are compensated at lower levels than Anglo pastors are. This fact can be explained in part by the smaller size of their congregations (100 members on average, compared to 315 denomination-wide), the comparatively high number of evangelists and bivocational leaders among them, and the economic realities of the communities they serve. At the same time, it is necessary to review extant CRC policies and practices regarding personnel benefits and related matters.
- At all levels of denominational life persons of color struggle with a sense of belonging. Ethnic-minority members from multiethnic or predominantly Anglo congregations often are expected to stretch their comfort zones far more than their ethnic-majority brothers and sisters are expected to do so. Leaders of ethnic-minority congregations wonder who made the rules, and they tend to occupy the back seats in many denominational settings. Too many persons from ethnic-minority groups have left the CRC—not because of its Reformed

world and life view but because of the lack of full acceptance at the family table.

As the CRC nears the threshold of the third millennium, it is important for us to be increasingly aware of the rapid demographic shifts in North America and of the dramatic reality that in little more than one generation the present majority culture of Canada and the United States will cease to be the majority. This change in the ethnic balance will give us the wonderful opportunity to experience profound new understandings of becoming the new people of God—of becoming a more inclusive church that more faithfully reflects the racial and cultural diversity of the nations among which God has planted us. This is a truly exciting challenge for the CRCNA, which in God’s sovereign grace already is becoming a diverse, multiracial, and multiethnic family of God. It is our prayer that what we slowly and painfully learned in our not-so-distant past will instruct us to go far beyond ourselves and that our struggle to be a sign of the city that is to come will bring much glory to our diversity-loving God.

### **III. Biblical and theological principles**

#### *A. Introduction*

Inasmuch as our mandate calls for “a comprehensive review and articulation of the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God,” we set forth twelve principles below.

Three introductory comments:

1. We have chosen the framework of creation, fall, and new creation within which to articulate these biblical principles. *New creation* is an inclusive term referring to the one re-creating, reconciling work of Christ, beginning with his earthly ministry, death, and resurrection and fully realized in the new heavens and the new earth.
2. A common thread in many of the principles articulated below is the reality of “the one and the many.” There is “oneness,” and there is “manyness” in God’s world, or unity and diversity. We see this reality in God himself in his triunity. We see unity and diversity functioning in perfect harmony in the world as God created it. We see how Christ in his saving work creates a single new body, united in him but diverse and inclusive beyond our imagination. The two verses below capture both notes of this song that permeates the Scriptures:

. . . for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. (1 Cor. 8:6)

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. (Rev. 7:9)

Having studied Scripture and sought to hear its message anew, the committee judges the following to be a simple but foundational statement of the biblical message with respect to racial and ethnic diversity, a statement that rests centrally upon the unity/diversity theme in Scripture:

***To be in Christ is to be reconciled with one another as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people of God.***

We see this statement as both declaration and judgment, indicative and imperative. It is a statement of the way things are in God's program; it is also a prophetic call to "become who we already are" in Christ.

3. Below are working definitions of terms that arise in the subsequent discussion of these matters.

**Race** – a term used to describe men and women who share biologically transmitted traits that are defined as socially significant.

**Ethnicity** – a term used to describe men and women who usually share a common place of ancestral origin, a traditional language, and a historical religion, which together confer a distinctive social identity. Including a reference to "a historical religion" in this definition of ethnicity does not mean that we celebrate or affirm any non-Christian religions as elements in our oneness in Christ.

**Culture** – the values and beliefs that are institutionalized in a people's collective life; the outward discipline in which inherited meanings and morality, beliefs, and ways of behaving are preserved.

**Prejudice** – a negative attitude or assumption about others on the basis of their identification with a certain group of people.

**Racism** – a prejudicial attitude and/or behavior directed against persons on the basis of their race. Racism may manifest itself interpersonally as well as institutionally.

**Ethnocentrism** – the tendency to assume that one's own ethnic and cultural values and preferences are everyone's or to believe that they should be.

**Stereotype** – an oversimplified opinion or uncritical judgment which unfairly categorizes persons or groups.

*B. Biblical and theological principles for a racially and ethnically diverse family of God*

**CREATION**

**1. The world as God created it is rich and God glorifying in its diversity.**

The creation account (Gen. 1) explodes with myriads of divisions—light from darkness, water below from the vapors above, land from water. The world God creates is marvelously varied, with thousands of different flowers and leaves, stars and planets, mountains and meadows, fish and fowl. God loves diversity. Variety and differences are not bad things but are enriching things in the world as God created it.

The crown of this varied creation is the human person, God's imagebearer. As God's imagebearers all human beings without exception are endowed with royal dignity and share in dominion over all creation. As God blesses them with fruitfulness, all their descendants without any exception also share equally in this royal dignity. Human beings also image God in their capacity for loving relationships with God and with each other in righteousness and holiness.

Human beings are diverse in that each human person is unique—no two people are alike. More profoundly, human beings exhibit this deep principle of unity and diversity in their maleness and femaleness. Human beings, in their maleness and femaleness, are a kind of model of the way diversity functions in the good creation. The differences between male and female are a cause for celebration and joy (Gen. 2:23). The differences between male and female make for attraction, complementarity, and deep communion. Diversity is enriching; it releases creative energies that in turn increase diversity. Again, variety and differences within the human family are not bad; they enrich the world as God created it.

**2. The created world, with all its diversity, has its unity in the one God, who created it through Jesus Christ.**

The fact that God created the world is clearly attested throughout Scripture. The New Testament elaborates upon the presence and role of Jesus Christ in the creation of the world. Three specific passages deserve mention in this regard:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. (John 1:1-3)

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col. 1:15-17)

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Heb. 1:1-2)

From these three passages, which set forth foundational truths, we learn that

- a. Jesus Christ was present with God the Father already at creation.
- b. Jesus Christ's role at creation involved "all things." The Greek word for "all things" (*panta*) is used in all the passages to define the scope of Christ's involvement in creation, a scope that is all-inclusive. John further underscores this by stating that without Christ "nothing was made that has been made."
- c. The Greek prepositions used in these passages underscore the rich, even mysterious, involvement of Christ in all things as they were created. All things were created *in* (*en*) him (translated "by" in the NIV), *through* (*dia*) him, and *for* (*eis*) him. Somehow Christ himself is the source (*en*) of creation, the mediator (*dia*) of creation, and the purpose (*eis*) of creation.
- d. Christ the creator holds all things together. Paul says that "in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:17). There is a coherence, a unity, in all things as they were created by Christ.

This teaching of Scripture is significant for the purposes of our study for at least three reasons.

First, when we seek unity among different peoples and different things, we are not seeking something alien to the nature of things, just as, when people put a puzzle together, they assume that all the pieces were cut in such a way that they do fit together. The puzzle was designed that way. Conversely, a puzzle that consists of pieces thrown together from ten different puzzles will never fit together. The former, not the latter, is the picture of our world as God created it. When we seek the unity of diverse peoples and things, we are not seeking something alien to the nature of things and to the goal of God for creation.

Second, applied more narrowly to the human race, this truth of the unity of all things in Christ implies a radical unity and equality of all people. In the biblical picture, all humanity has been created in God's image and has its source not only in Christ but in Adam and Eve, our first parents. Referring to Adam, Paul says, "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth" (Acts 17:26, NRSV). And, according to Genesis 3, Eve is "the mother of all living" (v. 20). All human beings of all races are related to one another through their common origins in our first parents. The Christian faith allows no room for holding that other human beings are fundamentally different from "us" or somehow less truly made in God's image than "we" are.

Third, the unity that Jesus Christ died and rose again to bring into being is not a new unity created for the first time, unknown and untested; it is a primal unity restored, a unity re-created. When the world is reconciled through Jesus Christ, it is going back to being a world that has already been and to the one by whom and in whom and through whom all things were created and existed in unity. This gives Christians hope and direction in their work.

**3. The unity and diversity of the human race and of created reality reflect the unity and diversity of the triune God (namely, his oneness and threeness).**

In the classical formulation of the Trinity of God, the church has spoken of God as *one in being* and *three in person*. Students of the Trinity have developed this basic Trinity doctrine as a model for human society. “Social Trinity” is a particular emphasis in trinitarian theology that asserts that the unity and community of the human family are rooted in the very nature of God.

God reveals himself in a community of triunity already in Genesis 1:26: “Then God said, ‘let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’” In John’s Gospel, the Father is in the Son, and the Son is in the Father (John 10:38; 14:11). The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does (John 5:20). The Father knows the Son, and the Son knows the Father (John 10:15). When the Son returns to the Father, the Father will send another Counselor, the Spirit of truth (John 14:16-18). The Son prays that his followers will be one just “as we [the Father and the Son] are one” (John 17:11).

The triune God, in the mutual giving and receiving of intratrinitarian fellowship, is the first model for human society. In God’s oneness God calls us to unity. In God’s threeness God affirms our diversity. The communion in which God created us and to which God calls us is already displayed in the triune God.

## FALL

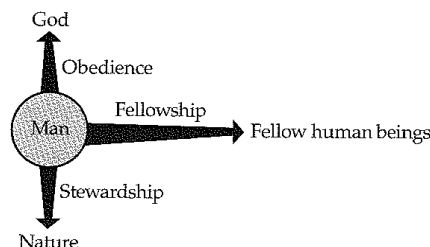
**4. A fundamental effect of sin is the breakdown of community.**

a. The image of God and relationships

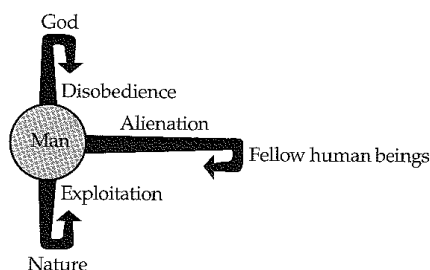
Human beings were created in the image of God. To be an imagebearer of God means many things, but central to *any* description of what it means to be an imagebearer of God is *the capacity for relationship* with which God has endowed human beings. We are relational beings. Giving and receiving, loving and being loved, working with others in creative and upbuilding ways, building community—these are activities at the heart of being human and of human community.

The late Dr. Anthony Hoekema, professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, often spoke of the threefold relationship into which human

beings were created—in relationship to God, to one another, and to nature. Before sin entered the world, these were relationships of obedience, fellowship, and stewardship.



Sin perverts these relationships. In our relationship with God we are now disobedient, in our relationships with one another we are now alienated, and in our relationships with nature we now tend to exploit nature instead of acting as its steward.



Although the effect of sin upon any one of these relationships cannot be separated from its effect upon all of them, our primary interest in this report is sin's effect upon our relationships with one another.

#### b. What sin does to human relationships

In our biblical study of the effect of sin upon human relationships, we discern the following biblical principle: *sin tends to be most insidious and destructive of human community at those precise points that God intended human community to be most enriching and expressive of his image in us.*

##### 1) The principle applied to the male-female relationship

Genesis 3 is a kind of foundational case study for understanding what sin does to our relationships with one another. After Adam and Eve fell into sin, the Lord cursed the serpent and then announced the effects of Adam and Eve's sin upon their lives. Of particular interest to us here is the effect of sin upon their relationship with each other. Genesis 3:16 summarizes the effect of sin upon the relationship of Adam and Eve when God says to Eve, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). The

exact meaning of this verse is a matter of debate among students of the Bible. Whatever one's interpretation, this much is clear: sin takes a healthy relationship between male and female, husband and wife, and distorts it, resulting in alienation and harm to fellowship and community. Sin takes a relationship that was intended to be most expressive of the image of God in us and significantly damages and distorts it.

## 2) The principle applied to other relationships

Again, the principle under discussion is this: *sin tends to be most insidious and destructive of human community at those precise points that God intended human community to be most enriching and expressive of his image in us.* Marriage is that relationship within which we develop and express much of our "God-likeness": giving and receiving, making and keeping commitments, procreation, enjoyment. We have seen how deeply our fall into sin harms marriage.

This principle is illustrated further in the Cain and Abel story (Gen. 4). Brotherly love has much richness and beauty (David loved Jonathan like a brother [2 Sam. 1:26]). But this very relationship becomes the setting within which the worst imaginable envy, hatred, and violence take place.

To illustrate this principle further, it can be argued that the tongue and our human sexuality are two aspects of humanity that give expression to the image of God in us. The tongue is a marvelous means for language, communication, the expression of ideas, and the articulation of truth—all activities at the heart of how we image God. But in the fall, the tongue became a key weapon of destruction of human community (James 3:1-12). Human sexuality is that marvelous means by which husband and wife give to and receive from one another and express God-giving and God-imaging love. But in the fall, human sexuality became perverted in a host of ways (Lev. 18).

Extending this more general principle to the subject of this report, we observe that racial and ethnic diversity also can be the occasion for mutual appreciation, greater self-understanding through seeing how other people live and think and relate, and the glorification of God for the rich variety in human communities and cultures. All of these activities are centrally expressive of the image of God in us. But in the fall, sin turns the very diversity that God intended to be deeply humanizing and enriching into lines along which deep alienation takes form. The alienation of Jew and Gentile in the Bible is indicative of broader alienation along racial and ethnic lines. Regrettably, the primary story line of recorded human history is the alienation of peoples along racial and ethnic lines.

c. Two misunderstood texts

Two biblical texts deserve mention in this discussion of the effects of sin upon the racial and ethnic diversity of the human community. The point here is to indicate what they do *not* have to say about racial and ethnic diversity.

1) The curse of Ham

Genesis 9-10 gives us the account of Noah's sons in which Canaan is cursed because of the sin of his father, Ham, whereas Shem and Japheth are given blessings and promises of prosperity. Canaan will be the lowest of slaves to his brothers (Gen. 9:25). This verse has sometimes been used to justify the enslavement of Blacks, since the descendants of Ham eventually did settle, among other places, in northeast Africa. However, this argument fails to take into account the simple historical fact that those cursed here were Canaanites, who were Caucasian, and the important exegetical fact that the purpose of the Genesis 9-10 narrative (Gen. 10 goes on to list "The Table of Nations") is not to justify human oppression, but to set up the redemptive line from the post-flood peoples to Abraham, a line established in Shem. Our primary reason for including these clarifications on this somewhat obscure passage in Genesis is not that the interpretation refuted above is so strong and plausible that it requires extensive refutation. Rather, we include it to observe how the Bible can be misused by one group seeking to justify the exploitation of another group and to observe that, regrettably, even erroneous biblical interpretations such as this one have a way of persisting in the minds of some Christians long after their exegetical basis has been refuted.

2) The Tower of Babel

Another biblical narrative that has often been misunderstood is the Tower of Babel narrative in Genesis 11. The purpose of the Tower of Babel narrative is to demonstrate the futility of human attempts to build community without God. God's confusion of language at Babel was a tool of God's judgment against human pride and not a sign that there is any inherent sinfulness in diverse languages. Human beings cannot build community without God. It doesn't work. The positive significance of Babel for our subject will be further elucidated below when we look at the Pentecost event.

d. The root of alienation: fear

Behind alienation, whatever the lines along which that alienation takes place, lie fear, insecurity, and a loss of identity that are a result of our separation from God.

Instructive here (again) is the story of humanity's fall into sin as recorded in Genesis 3. When Adam and Even disobey God, they are immediately afraid. They sew fig leaves to hide from each other (Gen. 3:7), and they hide from God among the trees of the garden (Gen. 3:8). In our alienation from God, we lose our proper self-understanding. As John Calvin points out at the beginning of the *Institutes*, our knowledge of God and knowledge of self are interrelated. If we don't know God, we don't know ourselves. We lose our bearings as to who we are.

This loss of proper self-understanding creates fear and anxiety. In this crisis of self-understanding, we often turn to racial, ethnic, or cultural forms of self-confirmation and self-understanding. At the very least, these forms of self-confirmation are incomplete and distorting. They quickly become idolatrous. We re-create God in our own image. These forms of self-confirmation often become the means by which we harm others who are different from ourselves. As differences between individuals or groups increase, so does fear, and the cycle of fear and differentiation spirals in intensity. The effect upon the community is pain, misery, and brokenness.

John says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . ." (1 John 4:18). This statement follows John's declaration that "God is love" and "whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16). Only love, the perfect love of God, can give people a renewed identity that casts out fear and anxiety and gives them the courage to relinquish these incomplete and harmful ways of identifying themselves. Only love, the perfect love of God, can create new hearts in people which cause them to see the world and others in new ways. To that redemptive love of God we now turn.

## **NEW CREATION**

Paul says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). In Christ, God comes to create a new world. In the reflections below, we will see that reconciliation across racial and ethnic lines is not just some tangential goal that gets tacked onto the saving work of Christ; rather, it is at the heart of God's plan to create a new heaven and a new earth.

### **5. The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God's eternal plan for the ages.**

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul seeks to place the work of Christ into the broader perspective of God's plan for the ages. One important Greek word that recurs in those chapters is *oikonomia*, variously translated "management, administration, or plan."

- a. In Ephesians 1:9-10, in the middle of Paul's opening doxology of praise to God for his great work of salvation, a work that is the unfolding of his eternal will, Paul says that

he [God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph. 1:9-10, RSV)

What is the plan of God set forth already in Christ? To unite all things in Christ. Notice how Paul grasps for the most inclusive language he can ("all things . . . , things in heaven and things on earth") when he describes the scope of God's plan. And the purpose of God in his saving work is to unite all things in Christ, indeed, to bring all things back to that unity they had in Christ from the beginning.

- b. In Ephesians 3:2 Paul again refers to the *oikonomia* of God when he says, "Surely you have heard about the *administration* of God's grace that was given to me for you, that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation. . . ." In verse 6 Paul spells out the mystery:

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

The grand plan of God brings together Jew and Gentile. The Greek prefix *sun* ("with") occurs three times in verse 6 (literally "heirs with," "body with," and "sharers with"), underscoring the unifying thrust of God's work.

- c. Finally in Ephesians 3:8-10, Paul says,

. . . this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make plain to everyone the *administration* of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Again, the plan of God is to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ to *everyone*—Jew and Gentile. And this has been God's plan from the beginning.

## 6. Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God's saving work.

Although the New Testament term *reconciliation* (*katallassoo*) is not a frequently used term, it occurs at very strategic points in Paul's writings and is integral to the biblical vision of a racially and ethnically diverse family of God. For our purposes in this report, we look at four important passages.

a. Romans 5:10-11

For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

It's important to notice, first, that reconciliation is God's program, not ours. In non-Christian religions, people attempt to be reconciled to God through their own actions. In the Christian religion, God is the initiator of reconciliation. Second, sin in this passage, as in all the reconciliation passages, is specifically described not so much as "guilt," though that may be involved, nor "pollution," but as our alienation from God. Sin manifests itself in the breakdown of relationship and community. Third, here in Romans 5, in distinction from the passages to be considered next, "believers" are the "object" of God's reconciliation.

b. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 (NIV, with modification in v. 19)

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, by not counting men's sins against them, and by having given to us the ministry of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

First, notice that in this passage the "object" of God's reconciliation program is "the world." The world is obviously thought of primarily as the world of human beings in contrast to the whole of God's created world (visible and invisible). The world here is not limited to those who have already believed but includes also those who must yet respond in faith to the message of reconciliation, thus giving God's program of reconciliation a strong missiological character—which leads to the second observation: Notice the strategic role God gives the church in this work of reconciliation. Two different times in this passage (vv. 18 and 19) Paul says that God has given us (the church) this ministry of reconciliation. Paul places his own ministry of reconciliation alongside God's work of reconciliation. The church's ministry of reconciliation is not just some human idea or political agenda but an integral part of God's program of reconciliation.

c. Colossians 1:19-22

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight. . . .

Interpretation of these verses is made difficult by the fact that the biblical genre changed within these verses: Verses 15-20 are almost certainly an early Christian hymn; they are followed by Paul's application of the truth in that hymn to the Colossian situation (v. 21 ff.).

Nevertheless, it is clear that in this passage the "object" of God's reconciliation program is not "believers," as in Romans 5, but "all things" (*ta panta*), explicitly including "the things on earth" and "the things in heaven." God's program of reconciliation is thus as broad as creation. Just as the creation of the world was "in," "through," and "unto" Christ (*en, dia, eis*), so the work of reconciliation is "in" him, where all the fullness was pleased to dwell, and "through" him, and "unto" him.

(*Note:* That verses 15-20 may be a hymn is probably important in understanding the universalistic statements in verse 20. The statements of the hymn should not be made to provide grist for theological analysis. [It is believed by some that the universalism of church father Origen may be grounded in this verse.] It is probably better to see that the hymn is *not* trying to specify the extent of salvation but to acclaim who is the "mediator of creation and redemption." Thus the "reconciling to himself all things" in verse 20 is best understood to mean that "Christ is the Redeemer/Reconciler of everything in heaven and on earth that is to be reconciled." The point is that the Colossian Christians do not need to seek any means of reconciliation outside of Christ.)

d. Ephesians 2:14-16

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two [Gentile and Jew] one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

In this passage the single biggest new factor, not explicitly present in the other passages, is that God's program of reconciliation is not simply vertical (reconciling believers/the world/all things to himself) but also horizontal (reconciling Jew and Gentile, "uncircumcised" and "circumcised," v. 11). What has separated them is the dividing wall, identified as "the enmity," and thus, correctly, the NIV translation "the dividing wall of hostility." Christ "destroyed" that dividing wall of hostility by in his flesh "abolishing" (rendering ineffective) "the law with its commandments and regulations."

Paul does not say how Christ rendered ineffective (abolished) the law with its commandments and regulations. From what Paul says in other places, we may suggest that Christ did so by fulfilling the law, both by his active and passive obedience. That is, he fulfilled the law by actively obeying it and by passively taking on himself its curse against mankind's sins. Since the law has

thus been completely fulfilled, it can never become a source of “enmity” between Jew and Gentile—especially in regard to what the Jews had quite specifically identified as their “identity markers,” especially circumcision, clean and unclean foods, and feast days (preeminently the sabbath). God thus created in Christ out of the two, the “circumcised” and the “uncircumcised,” “one new man.” Here the “one new man” must be understood in its corporate sense and almost identified with the church. Thus Christ “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14), “thus making peace” (Eph. 2:15), and he “preached peace to you who were far away [Gentiles] and to those who were near [Jews]” (Eph. 2:17).

Whereas humans often divide people according to race or nationality God ever made only one division among human beings, namely Israel and the nations, or Jew and Gentile. The breathtaking news of this passage is that God has now removed the only division he ever made in the human family. The point for us is clear: If God himself took away the only division that he had ever made within the human family, how much more have all other “man-made” divisions within the human family been taken away.

## **7. Already in the old covenant the scope of God’s mission is racially and ethnically inclusive.**

A common misunderstanding of the mission of God is the belief that in the Old Testament, before Christ, the scope of God’s mission is only ethnic Israel and that only in the New Testament, with the coming of Christ, does that scope extend to all nations. In the old covenant, Israel is the redemptive focus of God’s mission. The movement is always toward Jerusalem and toward the king. In the new covenant, Pentecost turns the movement of God’s mission outward. Instead of people having to come to Jerusalem, the Spirit goes out to people everywhere. The “energy flow” of God’s mission changes from centripetal to centrifugal. However, it is important not to confuse these dramatic *developments within* the mission of God and the universal *scope* of God’s mission. The scope of God’s mission always was and remains racially and ethnically inclusive.

All nations are in view from the beginning of God’s saving work. Already with Abraham God promised, “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation and all nations on earth will be blessed through him” (Gen. 18:18), and with Israel, “I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed” (Gen. 26:4). Isaiah sees the day coming when all nations “will stream” to the temple of the Lord (Isa. 2:2), “for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7). And when he cries, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you” (Isa. 60:1), the vision that follows is a chapter-long vision of all peoples coming to the throne of God: “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isa. 60:3).

The Old Testament prophets made it clear that ethnic identity was subordinate to spiritual identity. Ethnicity is always penultimate to the kingship of Yahweh. Jerusalem is significant because Yahweh is there. Physical circumcision is never enough for a person to be a part of God's people. Moses and Jeremiah call the people to circumcise their hearts (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4). Israel does not result from Israel's own biological ability (Sarah is sterile). God even inverts the normal inheritance protocol (Esau, the older, will serve Jacob, the younger). The book of Jonah is a judgment against ethnocentrism and the mistaken identification of God's mission with ethnic Israel alone. The psalms are filled with references to all people and all nations praising the name of the Lord. The family tree of Jesus (Matt. 1:1-17), with its mention of the likes of Rahab and Ruth, reveals the way the scope of God's mission reaches beyond ethnic Israel already in the old covenant.

Again, the purpose in stating this principle is not to downplay the dramatic developments within the mission of God. It is rather to head off mistaken notions regarding changes in the scope of God's mission which can lead to mistaken notions regarding the unchanging purposes of God and the role of ethnicity in the mission of God.

**8. In Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church, God gives new power to the church, power to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.**

Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). This prediction of a worldwide mission follows Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19-20 to "go and make disciples of all nations." When God's Spirit is poured out upon the church on the day of Pentecost, people from every nation under heaven (Acts 2:5) hear the apostles (who were Galileans) speaking in their native language. This is the day of the Lord foretold by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:17-21). Now "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21).

In the biblical drama, the blessing of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost stands in bold contrast to the curse of Babel. In the confusion of language at Babel, God declares that his people cannot build human community without him. At Pentecost God creates a new community where, in the Spirit, people have a unity that transcends their own particular language. The significance of Pentecost is not that everyone who believes in Christ now speaks one language. People still speak in a multitude of languages. But in the Spirit, God creates a unity that transcends the barriers of language. Racial, ethnic, and cultural differences are not erased; they are subordinated to the new unity believers have in the Spirit.

In Acts 10, God shows Peter what the church looks like in this age of the Spirit. Through a vision, God reveals to Peter that the old divisions of clean and unclean, Jew and Gentile, have been demolished (Acts 10:15). Then Peter goes to the

house of Cornelius to tell the people there of God's new ways. He announces that God no longer calls anyone impure or unclean (Acts 10:28). "God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Acts 10:34-35).

Paul sees this new unity as transcending every human division, even the division between Abraham's seed and the rest of humanity: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:28-29).

**9. The church, in its unity and diversity, is God's strategic vehicle for bringing into being his new creation.**

The church is strategic in God's plan to effect this new oneness. In Ephesians 3 Paul discloses God's plan to unite all things in Christ. In verses 10-11 he explains the role of the church in that plan:

His [God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The church, Christ's gathered body in the world, is the means by which God intends to reveal himself, to proclaim the good news, and to unite all things in Christ.

In John 17, Jesus is more precise as to how the church reveals God. Jesus prays that all the people who believe in him "may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21). Why does he want them to be one? "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . . May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:21, 23). When the church is one, people see God. The power of the church's witness lies precisely in her new oneness in Christ, a oneness of believers that transcends external differences.

The church will be effective in the mission God has given her only when she understands and lives out of a vision of the church that appreciates both its unity and diversity in Christ. The church is one in Christ (1 Cor. 1:10-17; 12:12-13). Christ is the one foundation of the church (1 Cor. 3:11) and the one head of the body (Eph. 1:22-23). "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:4-6). But the church is also marvelously diverse. Just as the body has feet and hands and eyes and ears and is incomplete without all those parts, so the body of Christ is made up of many parts. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul teaches that each part of the body is necessary to make the body function with complete effectiveness, and all parts have equal dignity

regardless of size or function. The gifts of the Spirit to the church are marvelously diverse (1 Cor. 12:27-31; Eph. 4:11-13; Rom. 12:3-8).

This teaching on the unity and diversity of the church is extremely important as we think about matters of racial and ethnic diversity in the church. On the one hand, Scripture calls us to be one in Christ. This is not just some theoretical oneness. It is a visible, actual unity of people with one another because they share in the common source of life—Jesus Christ. This unity is so real that the world comes to know God through it (John 17:23). This scriptural call to unity judges the church in her lack of unity.

But unity does not obliterate differences. To be whole, the body needs each part. In terms of racial and ethnic differences, the goal in the church is not to rub out those differences and try to make everyone the same. Each of us has a particular race, ethnicity, and culture. We do not cease to be Korean or Kenyan or American when we become part of the body. Rather, each particular person (and community) plays a part in making the body whole. Each person and community brings unique gifts and makes unique contributions. In the Spirit, diversity is no longer threatening, but enriching. And unity and diversity together confirm that indeed the church is the Lord's work, not our own.

In our work as a committee we have encountered the confusion that comes when the unity and diversity of the church are not clearly distinguished. On the one hand, we sometimes speak of leaving our culture behind when we come to Christ. On the other hand, we speak of affirming and respecting each person's culture. Often we say these two things in the same breath. The fact is, we don't simply leave our culture behind when we become Christian. Such a statement betrays a superficial understanding of the profound senses in which we are cultural beings. The person who was Italian before she became a Christian is still Italian. When the Chinese brother becomes a Christian, his tastes in food do not suddenly get transformed into some universal diet. When the Native American becomes a Christian, her tastes in music do not suddenly get transformed into some universal musical style. Race, ethnicity, and culture are profoundly important for personal and communal self-identification. They are important before and after someone becomes a Christian.

But when we become Christian, our identity in Christ judges and transforms those old and incomplete ways of knowing ourselves. The Cuban who becomes a Christian is still Cuban. But now her being a Christian shapes her being a Cuban. We never cease to be of a certain race, ethnic group, and culture. But in Christ, those ways of identifying ourselves are no longer definitive of who we are. Christ is definitive for personal and communal self-understanding. Christ is ultimate; race, ethnicity, and culture are penultimate for self-identification and self-understanding.

Having said all of that, we still must acknowledge difficulties in this area. When we become Christians, God requires that we leave behind those aspects of our

culture that are incompatible with his kingdom. The difficulty comes in that the new Christian invariably adopts new cultural patterns, and these are often not specifically Christian but simply patterns formed by other cultural groups.

The point here is that, as Christians of different backgrounds work through these complex issues, it is crucial that, among other things, they keep the unity and diversity of the church in proper balance. Stressing the unity of the church at the expense of its diversity can lead to excesses in which we imagine that becoming a Christian erases all cultural differences among Christians. Stressing the diversity of the church at the expense of its unity can lead to excesses in which we give an importance, even an idolatrous autonomy, to race, ethnicity, and culture—an importance that Christ eliminated on the cross.

Our confessions articulate the unity and diversity of the church. Belgic Confession Article 27 speaks of “one single catholic or universal church,” which, though it is “spread and dispersed throughout the entire world,” is “still joined and united in heart and will, in one and the same Spirit, by the power of faith.” Concerning “the holy catholic church,” Lord’s Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism states,

I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member.

The church is as diverse as the human race and as singular as Christ.

#### **10. God calls Christians to find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Christ.**

Unfortunately, it is possible to seize upon this acknowledgment of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences in the church (set forth in Principle 6) and seek to justify attitudes, practices, and behaviors that, in fact, are sinful in that they unnecessarily create barriers and walls between people and add to the separation that Christ came to remove. Put another way, there is often a fine line between healthy ethnic and cultural self-identification, which enriches community, and ethnocentrism, which fractures community.

The call of the gospel is radical and clear: Love God above all, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 22:37-40). Jesus says that anyone who loves his father or mother or son or daughter more than him is not worthy of him (Matt. 10:37). We finally find our life when we lose it (Matt. 10:39). Jesus calls us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44). It’s no remarkable achievement to love people who love you, Jesus says. (We could paraphrase that as “It’s no big deal to love people who are like us.”) Even pagans do that. The call of the gospel is to love those who do not love you. Paul says that we should look out not just for our own interests but also for the interests of others (Phil. 2:4) and that we should

develop attitudes toward ourselves and others that model Christ's self-effacing, self-denying life (Phil. 2:6-11).

Jesus certainly modeled this kind of behavior in his commitment to minister to all types of people. Jesus actually enjoyed being with people the religious establishment considered "sinners" (Luke 15:2; Luke 7:36-50). He had good news for, of all people, a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26). He responded to the Roman centurion's faith and healed this Gentile's son (Luke 7:1-10). In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus told of the love of Christ at work in a person (the Samaritan) whom others, through ethnocentric eyes, saw as inferior and unworthy of grace. Jesus' social world and world of ministry were not defined along lines of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, or social standing. He looked past those external characteristics of people and saw instead people as imagebearers of God.

As significant as race, ethnicity, and culture are for self-identification, Christians find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Christ. The rhythm of the gospel is not one of self-justification and self-preservation. It is certainly not one that seeks to build up self by defining ourselves favorably over against others who are different from us. There is no room in the kingdom for attitudes that foster pride toward self or resentment toward others. Rather, in the security we have because we know ourselves to be children of our Father in heaven and to be loved by Christ, Christians become "self-forgetful." The love of Christ casts out our fear. In Christ we have the courage and commitment voluntarily to step across and seek to break down those barriers that have been erected by race, ethnicity, and culture and to repudiate the ways of self-identification and self-confirmation that have become unhealthy or even idolatrous.

**11. Obedience in matters of racial reconciliation calls us individually and corporately to continually repent, to strive for justice, and to battle the powers of evil.**

We must be forthright in acknowledging that racism is sin. Racism is more than just bad manners; indeed, any attitudes, words, or deeds of omission or commission that inflict harm upon others and break down community constitute sin against God and sin against God's children. Racism is a disgrace to a civil society. But it is a much greater disgrace in the church, for racism sends exactly the opposite message from the message Christ sends in his reconciling work on the cross.

In its penetrating analysis of the sixth and ninth commandments, the Heidelberg Catechism shows how racism is diametrically opposed to the will of God. In its teaching on the sixth commandment, the catechism says that

I am not to belittle, insult, hate, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds—and I am not to be party to this in others. . . .

(Q. and A. 105)

And in its teaching on the ninth commandment, the catechism says,

God's will is that I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone without a hearing or without a just cause. Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are devices the devil himself uses, and they would call down on me God's intense anger. I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name.

(Q. and A. 112)

When Paul analyzes our fallen nature, he sees "envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice" at the heart of our brokenness. People alienated from God are "gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless" (Rom. 1:29-31).

Indeed, racism is a glaring manifestation of our sinful condition, which Christ died to eradicate and which, when it is not eradicated, opposes Christ's reconciling work on the cross.

Furthermore, repentance from this sin, as from all sin, must be radical. It begins at the foot of the cross in confession and self-denial. Indeed, to repent of sin, according to the catechism, is "to be genuinely sorry for sin, to hate it more and more, and to run away from it" (Q. and A. 89).

Such repentance calls for fervent prayer on the part of the Christian community. In as much as our prayers reveal our deepest concerns, the Christian community must engage in regular prayers of confession for sins of racism and regular intercessory prayer for racial reconciliation and healing.

Further still, those who have found their identity in Christ not only should have no part of behavior that causes alienation along racial and ethnic lines; they should be on the front lines of working for racial reconciliation. The deafening silence of the church in matters of racial reconciliation must be broken. A legitimate test of discipleship in this racially polarized world is whether our life and witness for Christ are building racial reconciliation and understanding and breaking down walls of alienation.

Ephesians 3:10 says that "through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places" (NRSV). In Ephesians 6:12 Paul reminds us that these same rulers and authorities are also pitted against us in a cosmic spiritual battle. The church needs to be deeply aware that racial and ethnic division is so deep, demonic, and pervasive that opposition to it will involve us in all-out spiritual warfare. In the church's struggle to realize God's will for reconciliation, the powers of evil will seek to divide us anew and destroy our every effort toward unity. Only in the might of God's Spirit, the truth of God's Word, and persistent prayer will we prevail.

## 12. Christians live and work in the hope that one day the reconciliation of all things will be fully realized.

In the beginning of this biblical study we explained that in its major divisions of creation, fall, and new creation, *new creation* refers to the one re-creating, reconciling work of Christ as that begins with his earthly ministry, death, and resurrection and is completed in the new heaven and the new earth.

There is certainly a difference between the present world and the new heaven and new earth Christ will usher in upon his return. But from the biblical perspective, the work of Christ at his first coming is the decisive moment in history. According to the writer of Hebrews (1:2), the “last days,” of which the prophets spoke, are here. The promise of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28) has been fulfilled in the outpouring of Pentecost. “If anyone is in Christ,” says Paul, “he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor. 5:17). The decisive turning point of history is the death and resurrection of Christ. All that lies ahead is simply the realization of what Christ has already accomplished.

Yet there is a tension in the New Testament between the “already” and the “not yet” of the kingdom. Christ’s new creation is already being made manifest to us, but it is also not yet fully realized. Christians long for the full realization of Christ’s rule. We know there is a difference between the brokenness of our world and the day when there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21:4). “We live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). We eagerly await the Savior (Phil. 3:20).

Central to the biblical vision of the new heaven and the new earth is the perfect unity in Christ of all the peoples of the earth. As John gazes at the people of God, he sees “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9). The angels sing a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10). The reconciliation of all nations and all things in Christ is our fervent hope.

This vision gives Christians encouragement, especially those who suffer because of the racial and ethnic divisions in our world. “Lord, come quickly” is the cry of those who see little of this new unity of all things and who suffer because of walls of separation Christ came to abolish. The fact that one day God will set things right is the deepest hope for many who have tasted little of the shalom and righteousness of the kingdom.

This vision also gives Christians confidence. It is possible to look around us and be dismayed. But we know that Christ rules. We know where things are going. We know and live with full confidence that one day

every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. (Isa. 40:4-5)

## **IX. Recommendations**

The following recommendations were adopted by Synod 1996 regarding the above report:

- A. That synod recommend the revised report to the churches for study.
- B. That synod adopt the following biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and unified family of God:

### ***Biblical and Theological Principles for the Development of a Racially and Ethnically Diverse and Unified Family of God***

#### ***Creation***

- 1. *The world as God created it is rich and God glorifying in its diversity.*
- 2. *The created world with all its diversity has its unity in the one God, who created it through Jesus Christ.*
- 3. *The unity and diversity of the human race and of created reality reflect the unity and diversity of the triune God (namely, his oneness and threeness).*

#### ***Fall***

- 4. *A fundamental act of sin is the breakdown of community.*

#### ***New Creation***

- 5. *The uniting of all things in Jesus Christ is at the heart of God's eternal plan for the ages.*
- 6. *Reconciliation with God and reconciliation with one another are inseparable in God's saving work.*
- 7. *Already in the old covenant the scope of God's mission is racially and ethnically inclusive.*

8. *In Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church, God gives new power to the church, power to break down walls of separation and create a community that transcends divisions of race, ethnicity, and culture.*
9. *The church is God's strategic vehicle for embodying, proclaiming, and promoting the unity and diversity of the new creation.*
10. *God calls Christians to find their deepest identity in union with and in the service of Jesus Christ.*
11. *Obedience in matters of racial reconciliation calls us, individually and corporately, to continually repent, to strive for justice, and to battle the forces of evil.*
12. *Christians live and work in the hope that one day the reconciliation of all things will be fully realized.*

C. That synod, on the basis of the above principles, declare that to be in Christ is in principle to be reconciled as a community of racially and ethnically diverse people and that to ignore his calling to turn this principle into experienced reality is sinful according to God's Word and the Reformed confessions.

*Grounds:*

1. The above report demonstrates that the Bible declares this reconciled community to be God's will.
2. The confessions declare that the catholicity of the church means that Christ "gathers, protects, and preserves" the church "out of the entire human race" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21).

D. That synod call the **whole church**—individual members, congregations, assemblies, agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA—to respond to the biblical and theological principles regarding the development of a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by committing themselves

1. To pray and work for the increased enfolding of ethnic-minority persons into the CRCNA in order to reflect more fully the racial and ethnic diversity of Canada and the United States.
2. To ensure the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence at all levels of denominational life.

*Note:* The total estimated ethnic-minority membership of 5 percent in the CRCNA compares to an ethnic-minority population of approximately 20 percent in Canada and the United States.

E. That synod call the **churches**

1. To articulate the biblical vision for a racially and ethnically diverse and united family of God by means of the preaching, teaching, and study of the above biblical and theological principles.
2. To evaluate their life and ministry with regard to their racial and ethnic composition, the social factors contributing to their composition, the selecting and training of their leaders, their worship style, and their ministry to congregational members and to their community in light of their sense of God's vision and call for them as congregations.
3. To develop racially and ethnically diverse congregations by all appropriate models and strategies, such as
  - a. Established churches becoming more inclusive ethnically and culturally.
  - b. Planting and developing multiethnic congregations.
  - c. Sponsoring new congregations that are ethnically and culturally different from the parent congregation, in the same or separate facilities.
  - d. Developing relationships (e.g., joint worship, workshops, and work projects) with congregations from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
  - e. Supporting persons and programs at home or abroad that are committed to racial reconciliation.
4. To witness publicly *against* racism, prejudice, and related unemployment, poverty, and injustices and *in defense of* all people as imagebearers of God.
5. To call individual members to promote and establish interracial and cross-cultural relationships in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities.

F. That synod request the **classes**, with the assistance of the CRCNA offices and agencies,

1. To arrange during the next twelve months for the careful classis-wide study of this report and its implications for the churches and their ministries.
2. To provide to the churches and ministries of classis guidance in support of racial and ethnic diversity (and unity) by means of public forums and learning events, multicongregational worship celebrations, and joint cross-cultural ministry ventures.
3. To assist the churches in developing and supporting new churches and other outreach ministries that are committed to ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation.
4. To recruit and assist persons from ethnic-minority groups to participate in the ministries of classis, including representation to synod, agency boards, and other ministries of the CRCNA.

G. That synod mandate the **Board of Trustees**, under the leadership of its CRCNA staff and with the assistance of the Race Relations division of Pastoral Ministries and other CRCNA agencies,

1. To coordinate and monitor the role and response of the agencies in providing guidance and assistance to the churches and classes in support of ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation as outlined above.
2. To serve Synod 1998 with advice and recommendations for ensuring the equitable representation and meaningful participation of ethnic-minority persons in leadership and other roles of influence with the classes and synod, the Board of Trustees, denominational agencies, and other ministries of the CRCNA. The recommendations should include transitional and long-term strategies, training and support needs, financial implications, and periodic reporting to synod on efforts and progress.
3. To continue to explore ways whereby the biennial Multiethnic Conference can assist the churches, classes, and synod to respond more completely to God's call for ethnic diversity and racial reconciliation in the CRCNA.
4. To review CRCNA policies and practices in relation to the training, credentialing, and compensating of ethnic-minority pastors and to give recommendations and advice as indicated.

H. That synod respectfully urge **future synods**

1. To include in their worship times the articulation and celebration of the biblical vision for a racially and ethnically diverse and unified family of God.
2. To encourage the development of specific recommendations and specific practical guidelines for supporting ethnic diversity in all aspects of denominational life, including interchurch relations in general and ministries of the Reformed Ecumenical Council in particular.
3. That denominational response to the above decisions be reviewed by Synod 1998 on the basis of an interim progress report by the Board of Trustees.

I. That denominational response to the above decisions be reviewed by Synod 2000 in the light of another progress report with advice and recommendations by the Board of Trustees to Synod 2000.

J. That synod recommend that the Board of Trustees ask representatives of various language groups in the denomination to translate the document into the languages of their groups.

K. That synod ask Calvin Theological Seminary's Morren Conference Committee to consider organizing a conference on "racial and ethnic reconciliation with repentance and justice" to explore the theological meaning of racial reconciliation and the implications for ministry, pastoral care, ecclesiology, and social justice.

*Grounds:*

1. Racial reconciliation with repentance is urgent in the light of the above report.
2. Reformed theologians are well positioned historically and theologically to address this issue.
3. The Reformed churches of South Africa are presently experiencing such a process.